



## The Witchwood Crown

*Tad Williams*

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**New York Times**-bestselling Tad Williams' ground-breaking epic fantasy saga of Osten Ard begins an exciting new cycle! • Volume One of *The Last King of Osten Ard*

The Dragonbone Chair, the first volume of Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn, was published in hardcover in October, 1988, launching the series that was to become one of the seminal works of modern epic fantasy. Many of today's top-selling fantasy authors, from Patrick Rothfuss to George R. R. Martin to Christopher Paolini credit Tad with being the inspiration for their own series.

Now, twenty-four years after the conclusion of Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn, Tad returns to his beloved universe and characters with The Witchwood Crown, the first novel in the long-awaited sequel trilogy, *The Last King of Osten Ard*.

Thirty years have passed since the events of the earlier novels, and the world has reached a critical turning point once again. The realm is threatened by divisive forces, even as old allies are lost, and others are lured down darker paths. Perhaps most terrifying of all, the Norns—the long-vanquished elvish foe—are stirring once again, preparing to reclaim the mortal-ruled lands that once were theirs....

## The Witchwood Crown Details

Date : Published June 27th 2017 by DAW (first published June 2017)

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Author : Tad Williams

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## From Reader Review The Witchwood Crown for online ebook

### Dawn (????)?\*:?:?♦ says

\*casually scrolling through Goodreads\*

\*comes across The Witchwood Crown\*

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### Mogsy (MMOGC) says

3.5 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum [https://bibliosanctum.com/2017/07/27/...](https://bibliosanctum.com/2017/07/27/)

This was a very long, very dense read, but I really don't mean that in a negative way. Quite the contrary, in fact; it's been a while since I've sunk my teeth into an epic fantasy so rich and layered, and it felt incredibly refreshing to fall into a meaty novel like this and just let it consume me completely.

The Witchwood Crown is the start of a new series set in the universe of Tad Williams' Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn trilogy, though I believe it would serve as a decent jumping on point for readers new to the author and his books. This was my first experience with his work and I found I was able to follow the story quite easily, excepting some initial confusion over the lore of Osten Ard and the different inhabitants that make the continent their home. Thankfully, in a lengthy novel like this, there's plenty of world-building and no shortage of opportunities to catch up on all this information so it wasn't long before I felt totally at ease in this new setting.

The story continues the story of King Simon and Queen Miriamele from the previous series, having been married for the last thirty years since the conclusion of Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn. Their grandson Morgan is now the heir apparent, after the death of Simon and Miriamele's son Prince Josua. With their grief still all too fresh, this causes the aging royal couple to become both overprotective and excessively tough on Morgan, who both yearns for and chafes at the growing responsibilities placed upon his shoulders. Like any young person growing up, he's trying to find himself but always seems to be getting mixed up into trouble with his rowdy, tavern-hopping friends.

Meanwhile, the realm is in danger once again from a threat long since thought vanquished. The Norns, an immortal elf-like race, are rallying together and preparing for an invasion to reclaim the mortal lands for themselves. After falling into disfavor and becoming a sacrifice, a young half-Norn woman named Nezeru is taken along on a journey to fulfill a mission for their queen, and along the way the group encounters a mysterious warrior named Jarnulf who appears to be much more than he claims to be.

There are a lot of characters involved but I liked how the narrative introduced them all gradually, making it easier to identify the multiple plot threads and determine which perspectives are the important ones. While Simon and Miriamele are characters that I'm only meeting now for the first time, evidently there's still plenty of growth and development to be had even though they're both now into their golden years. The two of them are more in love than ever, but the years have also brought certain new life changes and challenges as their priorities have shifted, and most of their disagreements now have to do with their grandson. Speaking

of Prince Morgan, he was another important POV character, not to mention one of the more complex and well-written ones. Unlike Simon, who started from humble beginnings as a kitchen scullion, Morgan was born into a royal life and grew up wanting for nothing. In spite of this, he is something of a shiftless and troubled young man who couldn't be more different than his driven grandfather. And yet there's something about him that reminds me of a lost and scared little boy, and reading about his self-doubt just makes me want to wrap him up in a big hug.

That said, as a newcomer to this world, I confess it was an interesting experience to be reading the first book of a sequel series, one that I could tell has deep ties to the previous trilogy. While it did not affect my enjoyment overly much, it was at times distracting to be catching little snippets of references to past events and wondering at the full details behind them. The main crux of the story also took a long time to build (for a novel that's more than 700 pages long, that's really saying something) and there were rambling sections which I felt could have been trimmed without making too much of an impact on the overall story. Again, this is only my personal opinion as a brand new reader to this world. It's more than likely that I'm just missing a lot of the nuances, being completely unfamiliar with the events of the previous trilogy, and if you're an old fan I imagine your experiences will be very different.

At the end of the day though, I think it's safe to say that no matter who you are, as long as you have a love for rich, multilayered epic fantasy then you will certainly develop a deep appreciation for *The Witchwood Crown*. It's a heavy novel, both literally and figuratively, containing robust world-building and character development. Exploring complex themes and conflicts, Tad Williams takes a big-picture look at how several generations deal with problems threatening their kingdom, and while the sheer scope of it can feel a little overwhelming at first, a willingness to invest some time and patience in the story will eventually pay off. I feel like I have a stronger, more confident grasp of the world now, and I look forward to continuing with the next book of the series.

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### **Johan says**

Re-read: Still love it, so much going on, so much mystery, so many questions...!

Original review below.

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The high King and Queen of Osten Ard are on a tour of their country, visiting their friends and allies in Hernystir and Rimmersgard. But not all who welcome them are friends... Suspect activities, dark rumours, and eventually an encounter with the deadly and secretive Norms call the royal entourage home early. Meanwhile, their allies the Sithi are mysteriously silent. And that's just the beginning of the story. A story that draws on all the wonders, and all the terror, of this magical world.

*The Witchwood Crown* is the continuation of the trilogy *Memory, Sorrow & Thorn* + the short novel published earlier this year: *The Heart of What Was Lost*. But it isn't necessary to have read those to read this book. Whereas the old trilogy is a *buildungsroman*, and much of the early story is told through the eyes of the hero, this time there are multiple, equally important, storylines from the beginning. This makes sense, since many of the mysteries of the world were revealed in the original trilogy, and the author can't pretend that old readers haven't already lived through those discoveries. New readers are introduced to Osten Ard gently, and in a way that isn't tiresome to old fans.

Naturally, old characters are reintroduced in this book, though they have aged more than three decades. But

there is at least an equal part of new important characters. We get to see the Norns up close and personal, and we also get more insight into the Thrithing clans.

The theme of the story has changed from the original trilogy of the kitchen boy thrown into adventure to discover his own self, into a more familial and pensive approach to the goings on. The King and Queen keep a close eye on their offspring and subjects, though admittedly the King has to be reigned in a bit by his spouse.

The secrets and mysteries that drive the plot are uncovered slowly and carefully. Not many realisations are acquired without much resistance. After all, why should we believe the world is different than what we have always known?

I love this book (and the previous ones) for the care and nourishment poured into them by the author. A well-developed world allows for a convincing story, however magical it might be. The characters are also supremely real and easy to like.

The publication of the next book, Empire of Grass, cannot come soon enough!

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### **Andreas says**

Some 30 years ago, Tad Williams started his Osten Ard series with The Dragonbone Chair, Stone of Farewell, and concluded it in 1993 with To Green Angel Tower. I never expected him to return to this wonderful world and characters. Now, we have a long novella The Heart of what was Lost, which picked up some threads directly after the first trilogy, and this new doorstopper of a novel. So, yes dear newcomer, you have to read all the books before this one.

Those 30 years gone are also reflected in the setting - the main characters got old, perhaps wiser. Imagine a Mooncalf Simon Snowlock established as a renown king of some 50 years old, shouting around at his drunkard grandson! The Duke of Rimmersgard, Isgrimnur, kind of old back then, is now about to die of age. After some 100 pages, the old gang has gathered: Simon, Miriamelle, Binabik, Isgrimnur, Tiamak, and Eolair travel around in a state visit in their dominion, which sounds as boring as it reads. Heavily missing are the Sithi Jiriki and Aditu, but that has its reasons.

On the antagonist side of the Norn, that mischievous folks are gathering their strength again. We get good insights into the culture, heroic characters, and traditions resembling a template for every roleplaying dark elf.

Williams takes his good time to elaborate a tension arc, lets the book start easy, happy, nice, and only Simon's grandson Morgan seems to be a problem child with his drunkard friends - one of them old Sir Porto from the prequel novella - dangling around. But immortal Norn queen Utuk'ku has awakened and prepares for war against the mortals of the realm. She sent out elite warriors to get her the eponymous Witchwood Crown. Also, political unrest drives the southern part of the realm.

Only the last third of the book takes up urgency again and develops speed. Take your time and enjoy the slow cruising before taking the roller coaster ride! Because that is, what the last 100 pages will bring you.

I feared that I wouldn't be able to return to this beloved epic fantasy world, because I changed myself in the

last couple of years. But Tad Williams has outdone himself to picked up the character, changed them in time without loosing the atmosphere of the first books. He transported me back again to Osten Ard without headaches. Oh joy!

I recommend this to readers who need a different taste in their diet of dark, gritty, near pornish Fantasy worlds of GRRM, Lawrence, or Abercrombie, who want to go for a lighter reading without loosing complex settings, characters, and plots.

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## Andrew says

**The Witchwood Crown** continues Tad Williams' seminal fantasy trilogy **Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn** while standing equally tall on its own in a more crowded book market, starting a new trilogy called **The Last King of Osten Ard**. 1988 was a different time for those massive tomes, and this first volume of the new trilogy *knows* that.

Instead of blindly repeating the threat of the original trilogy or copy-pasting in a new one, *The Witchwood Crown* takes the much more interesting route of being a sequel about how history can repeat if we aren't careful to learn from our past. Think World War I only leading to World War II, with a small peace between.

The original trilogy dealt with the elf-like Norns and their Big Bad type Storm King, victims in the past of genocide at the hands of human invaders, threatening to do the same by exterminating the human race. The new trilogy manages to reintroduce the Norns as antagonists with a well-developed characterization and society of their own while upping the scale of the threat considerably. No spoilers on that front here, but readers of the original trilogy may have a good idea of what that threat could be.

Instead of shoving the old characters out of the limelight to hand over the reigns to a young and sexy cast (like so many TV and film reboots), or shock killing them off early on to score some *Game of Thrones* imitator gravitas, *The Witchwood Crown* makes them central players alongside a new cast. The book itself is a blending of the old and new styles of popular fantasy: there are adventures in astonishingly described locales, comedy that had me chuckling, and youthful innocence; there is also a harder tone to the violence, there are backstabbing political machinations, and scenes of melancholy.

There are about sixteen point of views throughout the book located in a handful of diverse locations across the land of Osten Ard, so Williams can switch effortlessly between story types, tones, and styles. Riots, potential civil war, old allies turning their coats, the Norns preparing for war again, trade battles, cults...the book has a little of *everything*.

More importantly, this new book not only manages to carry on the tradition of older fantasy while blending it with the new, it manages to have something human to say. A grand emotion or a theme. Most of Williams' work does. That might not seem like much, but when too many writers are intent on throwing out RPG spreadsheets or, on the other hand, grimdark violence, it's rare to read something with big ideas to match its big locations and creatures that can still be entertaining.

Just because a bunch of armies came together and fought a big battle together doesn't mean the animosity between the factions vanishes for good. Just because one battle ends and peace is declared doesn't mean that peace is forever. Again: think World War I to World War II. And just as in that real world history, by the end of *The Witchwood Crown* the entire land of Osten Ard seems primed to explode at each other based on fear,

lies, and greed rooted in past hurts.

At the opening of the first part (a nice touch—each of the three sections of the book is named after the debris of *Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn*'s war: Widows, Orphans, and Exiles), the backbone of the book (and presumably the trilogy) is summed up with a poem by Hsu Chao:

*Locusts laid their eggs in the corpse  
Of a soldier. When the worms were  
Mature, they took wing. Their drone  
Was ominous, their shells hard.  
Anyone could tell they had hatched  
From an unsatisfied anger.*

With all of this to praise, *The Witchwood Crown* is an easy recommend to both new readers and fans of Williams: a great start to what could be a new classic trilogy.

*This review is made possible via digital ARC provided by Penguin's First to Read program.*

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### **Linda says**

Once again such an awesome story! The bad guys are never just bad, and really believe they are doing the right thing. The good guys are never just good, but can be a true pain in the ass.

I love how this book tells both the story of Morgan, son of King Simon, and that of several of the Norns.

I'm really sad the release date of this book has been postponed for a year.

[reread]

As it has been a long while since I read that first draft, I had forgotten most of the story (as is my wont). It's still an awesome book! And it will be out very soon now, so go and put in a pre-order!

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### **GrilledCheeseSamurai says**

Well...shit. I finished. What a ride. I mean, I first re-read the entirety of the original trilogy, *Memory Sorrow & Thorn*, then whipped through the novel that bridges the old trilogy with this new one, *The Heart Of What Was Lost*, and now I have just finished this book, *The Witchwood Crown*, which is the first book of the new trilogy, *The Last King Of Osten Ard*.

Seriously, I have spent so much time reading Tad Williams words lately that I feel like he and I are best friends now. Like, maybe I should at least buy the guy a beer or something for all his hard work.

Wait. Fuck that! It should be that he owes **ME** a beer because I'm the one that just read a gazillion and one page's of his words and I'll tell ya one thing for free and certain...dude is a wordy son of a bitch and those books be looooooong!

Who am I kidding though. I loved every single sentence.

The Witchwood Crown was everything that I wanted it to be! It had that classic fantasy feeling that the original series had but yet felt new and important and stands shoulder to shoulder with all the more modern works of speculative fiction coming out these days.

I've said it before and I'll say it again, Tad Williams is a Word Wizard! The guy can tell a story like nobody's business and although his books are long and descriptive they never once feel slow or bogged down to me. Through his narrative, Tad has created a world that feels more alive than any other world I have spent time in whilst reading a book. The Witchwood Crown, obviously, only helps to increase the depth and richness of Osten Ard in ways that...well...to be frank...completely blew my mind.

MS&T was really a coming of age story, as a lot of classic fantasy is. The Witchwood Crown still explores those themes, but now because of the length of time that has passed in Osten Ard, we are now exploring the idea of growing older and looking back on our lives as well. I love how Tad didn't just take the heroes from his first series and use them as bookends in this new tale. They are still relevant, they are still vital and they are still just as important as the new cast of characters that we are introduced to. Lot's of times (think the new Star Wars movies) it feels like classic characters are just thrown in there as a gimmick or as an homage to what they have previously accomplished. While I suppose I am okay with this, that isn't the case with this story. The old still have much to do, are still integral to the plot and their stories are far from finished. This does not, however, overshadow the importance of the new cast of (younger) characters that we are introduced to. They all most certainly have their place as well, and this story is as much theirs as it is the seasoned veterans.

I also love how Tad has blurred the lines between good and evil. What we thought of as right and wrong in the original trilogy is tipped ass over teakettle in this new book. I found myself rooting for people(s) that I wouldn't have thought possible when I read the original trilogy and now some of the folk that I really liked in the earlier books I find a bit more sinister (or at least bull-headed) in this new one. It's all really confusing (in a good way) for me in who I should actually be rooting for! I mean, I want the good guys to win of course, but fuck me if I can be absolutely certain on who the good guys actually are!

Book of the year?

Yeah. Probably. I mean...it's Tad Williams. I'm a fanboy. Always have been always will be. And I'll tell ya what - those last 150 pages or so...fuck me! I need that next book NOW!!

Bravo, Tad! You have done it again! Thanks for the story, I was most certainly entertained from the very beginning to the very end!

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### **Bradley says**

I'm almost speechless.

I mean, reading this long, long book takes me back to all the long, long books of Tad Williams and especially his most well known and beloved original fantasy. (Of which this picks up many years down the line, with Simon the Scullion a grandfather and King of the kingdom.)

What this does extremely well: worldbuilding and characters. He takes his time. And I mean, he lets all the characterizations come out gloriously slowly, with rich detail and living in such a world that runs so deep as to reclassify the term "escapist fiction".

We live there. We become one with the world of Osten Ard. Whether we're a Norn, one of the elfish immortals, or of men, we dive really deep into the world. I can't find real good or evil anywhere. Just people of all kinds, be they giants, shapeshifters, any kind of immortal, half-immortal, or of the race of men. It's easy to just "say" this, as well, but Tad Williams shows us in all the glory just how true it is.

And then we have the echoes of the undead king, the darkness of magics to come, all the reasons why all these kingdoms are on the path to being laid very, very low, and it all boils down to PEOPLE (of any flavor) doing what they think is right, and still they bring about the greatest evils.

Did I mention how much glorious, deep, well-thought-out, detailed worldbuilding is going on here?

A taste: Prester John, Herne, echoes of catholicism twisted into undead rituals, elves coming across the sea from far away to live here (rather than the reverse), and a whole immortal ppl lied to and left in poverty... for what? It reminds me of Dragon Age, but let's get real here. Tad Williams' epic came out over twenty years ago and this only continues (gloriously so) the long, long tale. :)

I can't say that this fantasy has anywhere near the epic bloodshed and magics that anyone might expect out of today's epic fantasy genre, but when it comes to depth of character, the main story, and worldbuilding... few and perhaps none can compare.

Frankly, I'm lost in admiration.

It's far from a hard read (aside from the length) and it's easy to fall deep into the good writing. I'm remembering my original response to his first fantasies in just the same way.

Truly Excellent!

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### **Bookdragon Sean says**

This comes out not long after I finish my final year at university, so I think I'll be treating myself to an all day book binge on release day!

The Witchwood Crown can't come soon enough.

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### **Len Evans Jr says**

I loved this book... even at almost 700 pages the author kept me turning page after page long after I should have gone to bed on multiple nights. The characters though many are all so skillfully drawn that you quickly come to know and care about what happens to them. The pace of the plot is measured; yet not too slow...

always keeping you hooked. I need to now go back and read the original trilogy to tide me over till the next book in this one is released. A definite must read... check it out when it is released in mid-June.

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## **Bob Milne says**

Sometimes you really can't go home again.

I read "Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn" back in high school, which was 20+ years ago, for those of you trying to do the math. While I don't have strong memories of it, I think I enjoyed it. Otherland didn't work for me at all, but I chalked that up to my not being a fan of the whole virtual reality/gaming/scifi genre. The War of the Flowers was an OK read, but I figured my lack of enthusiasm was due to my preference for epic, multi-volume sagas. In that case, Shadowmarch should have been a near-perfect fit, yet I've been stuck on book 3 for years now. I abandoned it, and return to it, and abandoned it more times than I can count.

Anyway, that brings us back to The Witchwood Crown. I was looking forward to this, but when the read itself seemed to fall flat, I blamed it on the ugly PDF, wrestled onto an e-reader, format. Call me old-fashioned, but when it comes to epic fantasy I like to hold a big, thick book in my hands, flipping back and forth between maps, glossaries, *dramatis personæ*, and the story. So, I went out and bought the hardcover for myself . . . and have realized now that maybe it's time to stop looking for excuses.

To put it bluntly - and I realize I'm in the minority here - I didn't like it. Honestly. I found this new book to be very slow-moving, with only fleeting moments of excitement. Whether it's something new, or something I blocked from my memory of the original books, the emphasis on the 'new' pseudo-Christian mythology was beyond tedious to the point that it really started to eject me from the narrative. Worst of all, however, I didn't really like any of the characters. As interesting as it was to see Simon and Miriam grow older, all they've seemed to do is suffer and linger on as royal figureheads. Whatever spark they had in the original saga is sadly absent here. It is Miriam who bothered me the most, having gone from one the strongest women I can remember in epic fantasy to a sad Shakespearean figure, terrified by dreams, and wallowing in self-pity. Don't even get me started on Prince Morgan, perhaps the most distasteful, most tiresome character Williams has ever crafted.

Actually, when it comes down to it, I found the non-human characters far more interesting than any of the humans. I liked the scenes with the Norns quite a bit, and Binabik and his family provided the only real joy of the read - but that fact itself is problematic. Given a choice between old gods and new, occult power struggles and weak political maneuvering, and . . . well, just about any monster and Prince Morgan, I'm kind of hoping humanity falls, because they just don't seem to be worth saving.

Anyway, I slogged through several aborted attempts to read The Witchwood Crown, ultimately skimmed ahead, and forced myself to finish it, but I really do wonder why I bothered.

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*Originally reviewed at Beauty in Ruins*

## **Nadine says**

Maybe a 4.5?

I don't know why Williams' books take so long for me to finish! I loved being back in this world from the Memory, Sorrow and Thorn series and seeing all the characters dear to me again. You can really see how the writing and the overall story telling improved from the original series to this book and I can't wait to get more! Full review up soon

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## **Angela says**

So incredible to have new Osten Ard stories to read! From the very first chapter, this return to the much-loved world of *Memory, Sorrow and Thorn* is just as enthralling and magical as it was 25 years ago. Reading about the beloved old characters is exactly like meeting dear friends you've been apart from for far too long: instantly comfortable, heartwarming, and exciting as you learn what they've been up to and how things have changed. Equally wonderful is the introduction of brand-new characters, who are clearly destined to be future favorites. Fans of the original *MS&T* trilogy will be in heaven here! And newcomers will be thrilled by this new classic series from a ground-breaking author of intelligent, entertaining high fantasy.

Tad's world-building is second to none. From the beginning, you are stepping into a living and breathing world with a multi-layered, dark history that's evident in every twist of the plot. He's also a master of writing complex, sympathetic characters who seem to live beyond the page, drawing you into their thoughts, feelings, motivations, and plans—regardless of whether those plans are "good" or "evil." One of my favorite things about this new series (and also the novella that preceded it, *The Heart of What Was Lost*) is getting a closer, more personal look at the characters who were on the "dark side" in the original trilogy, the Norns. Here Tad uses his talents to show us how the world appears from their point of view, adding many facets and a fascinating depth to history, events, and motivations.

The story moves along at addicting pace, spanning far-flung reaches of Osten Ard and encompassing a host of entertaining and intriguing characters of various races and backgrounds. Suffice it to say that although it's a very long book (because it's a Tad book, of course!), I found myself at the end far too soon, already impatient to find out *what happens next*. It's really wonderful to have the rest of this series to look forward to!

In fact, I received this book as an ARC from the publishers (probably because they could feel my anticipatory fidgets shaking the foundation of the earth from afar), and still I'm counting down to the release date so I can read it again, in its final and most glorious form. I really can't wait.

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## **Amber says**

OMG, I can't wait for another Tad Williams trilogy!

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## **Librad says**

I was one of the lucky people that got to read an ARC of the Witchwood Crown - and yes, it was very very lucky. And don't worry... I'll not put any spoilers in the below!!

Having read - and loved - the MST books (the earlier series set in the same world of Osten Ard), I was so happy to be able to go back into this world, as well as slightly nervous - you know the feeling of returning to a place where you have such good memories and how often it disappoints -

I was, however, not disappointed at all, the only disappointment I had was that this book wasn't twice as thick.... Within a couple of pages I was immersed in my favourite world of Osten Ard... Yes the same world, but somehow grown up, my favourite characters from the previous series were there as well, all grown up. It is funny how much it felt like a parallel; the first time I read MST I was 16, not that much older than Simon and Miramele... now at age 40 I'm reading about them slightly older than me...

Of course we're introduced to a whole list of new characters, as well as meeting back up with old and known characters. However, what I loved most about this book is how the feeling is the same... yes the well known characters are older and some are gone or going, yes there are a lot of new characters to get to know, yes we see much more of the Norns and their world (slight spoiler there for you), but the pure feeling of the book is the same as the first series.

The story drags you in and doesn't let go, the flow is superb even though you're following several main characters' stories, and as with all of Tad's characters, you either loved them right from the start, or you slowly learn to.

I know I'm referring back to the previous series quite a lot, but (even though I would tell you to go and read those books as well) I can definitely see how this book could be read without having any previous knowledge of Osten Ard and the well-known characters. It would only be the difference between knowing another family from your birth, or getting to know them at a later age. Both will give you just as much joy.

I'm, very near spoilers now, because I only just finished this book minutes ago, so I'll leave you with the below.... but once it's all sunk in, I might come back for some more!

Finally, I would definitely recommend this book to anyone...

... whether you've been an Osten Ard lover from the first books - this book will not disappoint you, it will immerse you back into that world in a beautiful way....

... whether you are an Osten Ard newbie - read your way into a beautiful world with characters that you'll love...

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