



A Young Man Without Magic

Lawrence Watt-Evans

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Lawrence Watt-Evans, author of the acclaimed *Legends of Ethshar* and *Worlds of Shadows* novels invites readers to embark on a rollicking journey in a brand-new fantasy series.

Anrel Murau is a scholar, a young man with no magical ability even though he is the son of two powerful sorcerers. Anrel's lack of talent bars him from the ruling classes, but he is content to be a simple clerk.

Upon returning to his childhood home after years of study in the capital, Anrel finds his friends and family held under the thumb of the corrupt local lord. When this lord murders a dear friend, Anrel finds that although he's not a sorcerer, he is not without other means to demand justice.

If he can survive life on the run, that is.

Carrying only his sword, a few coins, and his wit, Anrel must leave behind everything he has ever known, trust himself to unexpected allies, and outmaneuver leagues of enemies who will stop at nothing to keep his dangerous ideas from ever being heard. Magic and intrigue collide in a swashbuckling tale of daring escapes, beautiful witches, and one quiet young man's rise to hero—or traitor. Nothing will ever be simple for Anrel again, as his personal quest may provide more peril for those he holds dear.

A Young Man Without Magic Details

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From Reader Review A Young Man Without Magic for online ebook

Dustin Puryear says

The concept is fine and the plot alright. However, the dialog kills the book. It's almost Elizabethan and gets very annoying. I was able to power through the book, but I won't read a sequel.

Craig says

Eh. The stilted prose almost works in this given the setting, the plot keeps the pages turning at a reasonable rate, and I liked the main character's logical thinking, even if he uses it only sporadically, but the whole just doesn't amount to much. Readable, but disappointing.

Cindy says

When I first started this book I was joking that it was a Young Man without much action. I'm really glad that the book changed because I don't like thinking bad about books :(

The book starts off slow, almost boringly slow. Watt-Evans seems to ramble and go off topic a lot.

About halfway into the book, things picked up. Although there isn't a major event things build up slowly and then just stops. I have a confession about the main character, I thought he was a bit of a know it all and stuck up. If his nose could go any further in the air I think he'd be flying by it. He just seemed to think he knew EVERYTHING. And he'd be a person in real life I'd avoid like the plague.

It's a middle of the road book that I enjoyed reading and I'd look in others in the series. However I think Evans other series were better :)

Penguin says

Enjoyed Anrel and the setting. It is very slow, but this is the first of two books that tell Anrel's story. I wanted something like Pride and Prejudice but with magic and this just about scratched that itch. A VERY SLOW BURN.

Mf says

A poor book. I like Watt-Evans. A lot. This book however, is far from his norm. The storyline is more a treatise about politics than a story. The character never once demonstrates a real emotion. 'Best friend ever. Loves a girl. Eh, time to move on.' The ending did not resolve anything and really by the end of the book the

story was no further than the introductory chapters. I presume it's the start of a new series.

If you want a fantasy series about politics, read Robin Hobb's Soldier Son Trilogy.

Mike says

Believe it or not this is my first experience with veteran fantasy author Lawrence Watt-Evans. While certainly not a bad read by any means it is one rife with problems and one that feels more or less incomplete. In *A Young Man Without Magic* our titular young man is the recently-educated and well-to-do Anrel. His parents were killed in a arcane experiment when he was a child and he was taken in by his uncle, also a Mage. Anrel, unfortunately, is indeed without magic which in a society ruled by mages means that, despite his birth, Anrel is nothing more than a mere commoner. A commoner yes but one educated with the finest instruction money can buy. Returning home from school Anrel finds his boyhood friend Valin, a mage raised from common blood, now something a radical; preaching the importance and power of common man in the governance of society. When Valin runs afoul of a local lord and winds up dead Anrel's brash attempt to honor his friend's memory provokes an avalanche of consequence that sends him on the run.

A Young Man Without Magic is a novel in which a lot and almost nothing happens. A bit of a contradiction I know. Events and action certainly occur and while consequences ensue they are never really examined in detail and the end result ends up feeling a bit shallow. While the jacket flap and cover art would have you believe this is a novel of swashbuckling action and daring-do those moments are, in truth, few and far between. Instead *A Young Man Without Magic* is more prone to political meditation and lengthy speeches than action set-pieces.

That isn't necessarily a bad thing and there is an attractive flair to the lengthy political conversations that occur periodically throughout the novel but I a long cry from man-with-sword and wits adventure the jacket copy would have you belie. In truth I wouldn't have a problem with all that but, and perhaps this is a spoiler, all these conversations occur with a hero who doesn't really stand behind his beliefs. Oh sure Anrel argues his points with cogent and educated grace but his speeches, while they have the outward appearance of passion, are in truth coldly calculated intellectual constructs that bear no relation, or at least little relation, to our hero's actual opinion. This is, of course, all information we are privy to as readers, the perspective remains firmly affixed in Anrel's head, but it doesn't cast Anrel in any kind of heroic light.

In fact despite the social ramifications of Anrel's actions his motives remain selfish: avenge his friend's death, save his beloved's sister from death since if he doesn't she won't marry him. Even at the novel's end I never really felt Anrel progressed as a character and while the novel's final page sums up the damage that the corrupt system of government has done to Anrel's personal life leaves uncertain whether or not Anrel's personal beliefs now mirror his speeches. Indeed the social change that Anrel's actions seem to precipitate never comes to any kind of conclusion leaving *A Young Man Without Magic* to feel like something an introduction rather than a complete story.

Problems with plot and character to aside I really did enjoy reading *A Young Man Without Magic*. The action, when it does occur, is exciting and the dialogue is always fresh and engaging. The world that Watt-Evan's has crafted is interesting and there are fascinating hints at greater depths to it beyond the limited selection we see over the course of the novel. The quality of the prose is almost enough to overlook the novel's larger problems but the abrupt conclusion left me feeling cheated. I found the prose and world engaging enough that I'd be willing to give another story a second-chance but as a stand-alone novel I found *A Young*

Man Without Magic something of a disappointment.

Jeffrey says

Lawrence Watt Evans latest book suffers from a little bit of predictability. Everything that happens to Anrel Murau, the title character of the novel is too predictable. Anrel, the son of two sorcerers killed when a spell went awry, is returning to the estate of his Uncle, a burgrave, which is a lord. In this land, the Sorcerors are the nobles, and the burgrave would be the ruler of a town and the landgrave would be the ruler of a land. Anrel is met on his return by his friend Valim, a young sorceror, the child of commoners who spouts a lot of opinions about the current ruling elite.

Anrel, who failed the test for sorcerors at 12, is now seeking a position of work, when her returns to live with his Uncle and his cousin Lady Saria, another sorceror, who is actually courting the landgrave. Valim, through stupidity and his own mouth ends up in a duel with the Landgrave, and is killed. Anrel, who feels that the landgrave slaughtered Valim, solely to stop him from mouthing off, gives a forceful oration in a nearby town, leading to political discontent in the land, and then runs off. The novel then follows his journey in the countryside where he meets a family of witches, or unrecognized magicians, who are not sorcerors.

Later there is another confrontation between Anrel and the landgrave, when one of the witches seeks to set a love spell on him.

The book ends with Anrel free yet again.

The book is written well, but I never felt any suspense and the supposed surprise in the novel was clear fairly early to any reader of fantasy.

Wm says

I really like the premise and the stripped down, anti-heroic approach as well as the emphasis on discussion and rhetoric. But it still doesn't quite get there -- I didn't find the main character as unlikeable as some other readers, but he is maddeningly hapless. I do think, though, that with some more development of a couple of the female characters and a bit of pruning and rethinking, it could have been much better.

Denise says

Okay, so. You know those books about the reluctant hero that's super good at violence, or the guy who doesn't want to be a thief that is forced to? You can picture, in your head, a person with a bloody sword who is regretful that they've been forced to just murder everyone, yeah? It's a thing.

This is that kind of book, except our reluctant hero Anrel is.. an orator. A logician. He's really great at creating convincing, stirring arguments, but.. he doesn't want to. He wants to go back, maybe work under his foster brother, live a quiet life in the country away from politics and magic and all of that crap.

But then the local langrave, a villain so obvious he should be twirling his mustache, kills Anrel's foster

brother and is apparently courting Anrel's cousin. Anrel decides to make a stirring speech espousing his brother's beliefs that were the probable cause of his death and things go horribly, horribly wrong.

If you are: looking for lots of action, lots of direct political intrigue or an eager hero - this is not the book for you.

If the idea of the reluctant orator / political agitator is interesting to you and you're happy to take this story basically through the lens of Anrel within various family contexts - this book is going to be great. Characterization (aside from the villain) is subtle, in part because Anrel is so inside of his own head.

Now, the issues - I don't feel like all of the world building was believable, especially the stuff that happens off the main stage. In large part I wished we had gotten more detail about magical training, as it's both one of my favorite things and also may have given more believability to that part of the world building. The ending is definitely an 'end of book 1' - things come to a gentle stop with very little successfully resolved and many unknowns looming safely in the distance, which is a little disappointing. Also, if Anrel had quoted the title of the book one more time I would have screamed.

But I loved the concept of the book, I loved the focus on oration and of small family groups, what political intrigue looks like from the country/poor side of things. I'll definitely be tracking down the second book.

Tim Hicks says

Only just scrapes into that third star.

Our hero is the inevitable misfit, and his struggles are mostly of the "that's so unFAIR!" variety. He can talk, but he's otherwise a dimwit and everything he touches turns to, er, that which is good for the garden. And he's not very interesting.

The nasty landgrave is sometimes a complex and interesting character, but LWE seems to flip back and forth about whether he is truly nasty at heart, or just a man who looks after #1 and is comfortable in an inequitable society.

I can make some allowances in a YA book, but surely a slow place and limited action are not going to help a YA audience. The dialogue is perhaps a gentle introduction to the polite, flowery style of Dumas' Three Musketeers, or Brust's tribute The Phoenix Guards (which are both vastly better books than this one).

Now, maybe this is personal, but I prefer not to look up books in advance on Goodreads for fear that I'll find out too much. But this, grrr, this is the first of a series, and the book does not indicate in any way that this is the case. When I realized that I had maybe 20 pages left, and we were nowhere near a resolution, I had that sinking feeling that I had once more been trapped in a book that DOESN'T HAVE AN ENDING, not even a lame, temporary one, a pause, a plateau.

Spoiler if you care: our hero ends the book blithely strolling down the road, not caring much about the trail of bodies he's left behind because of his clumsy attempts to do the right thing.

This could have been a dark comedy. Or maybe he was; my notes from an earlier LWE book say "apprentice must catch runaway furniture to unfreeze master."

I don't see anything here that makes me want to read the second in the set.

Donna says

I just started reading Scaramouche, and was devastated to find that plots from this book were lifted from that story. So now not only is this a bad book, it's a bad book that's partially spoiled a better one for me.

my original review:

The story begins when our protagonist, Anrel Murau, returns home after completing his education. He's surprised to find that the political discontent building in his nation has affected even the small towns near his home. His best friend from childhood, a sorcerer named Valin, has become a reactionary whose vocal disapproval is stirring up local unrest against the very system that Valin has greatly benefited by. And when Valin's ideals lead him to challenge a powerful ruler, Anrel's life takes a surprising turn.

The book is a politically-tinged fantasy about a man with no political beliefs, and a story about a society's morals from the perspective of someone who doesn't care about injustice until it touches him. And I kind of feel like I'm imitating its style by using a lot of words to say that I didn't like it.

If you hadn't guessed, Anrel is the young man without magic mentioned in the title. And in case you may forget, he is referred to by exactly that phrase over and over again. In addition to magic, Anrel is lacking several other things.

It's surprising to say that he lacks depth, because Anrel is one of the only characters we get to know much about. But after finishing the book (which was a surprisingly slow read for something so short), I felt as if I understood the novel's villain better than its hero. This is possibly because I felt that the antagonist was far more consistent and intellectually honest.

Anrel is a strange mix of pragmatic and naive. He's managed to become highly educated without forming any real beliefs, which is probably the most remarkable thing that he's managed to accomplish so far. His lack of conviction makes him difficult to care about. He stirs up a bunch of drama for a stupid, improbable reason, and he's much too matter-of-fact about the consequences of his actions.

When he meets a girl, we're told that they're drawn to each other, but the relationship is barely developed. More attention is given to philosophical debate than to the characterization or even plot. Things happen from time to time, and some of them are even interesting. But they all seem secondary to the abstract discussions that the book's events provoke. This includes the development that will be predictable to every person who has ever read a fantasy novel in their life.

Anrel fails at almost all of his goals, and very little is resolved by the ending. I assume this means that anyone who enjoyed this one can expect a sequel. But I won't be reading more about Anrel, because he's a young man without any chance of holding my interest.

Jeffrey says

The premise here was interesting enough that I picked it up from the new books section of the library, but it failed me in the end. The idea is you've got a society ruled by magic users and, as the title implies, the protagonist cannot use magic. I thought it would be a great exploration of people using soft-power, which it is at times, but two big things ruin it:

- 1) *MAIN SPOILER* The main character actually can use magic. This completely ruins it for me, because there are a few "I am about to die/fail" moments where, instead of using wits, willpower, etc. the protagonist taps this magic that he wasn't supposed to have. Or, rather, he has had it all along, but been denying it to everyone.
- 2) About 2/3 of the way through, it is obvious that this book will not conclude, it will simply end when you get to the last page. Why can't anyone write a decent, self-contained, fantasy-genre novel any more? Is it really too much to ask? Why must everything be a trilogy?

Robert says

This was a nice comfortable read. I like Lawrence Watt-Evans pacing of stories and his believable characters. The antagonist in this story while evil and key hindrance to the protagonist is very believable and you can respect his beliefs without agreeing with him.

The tale of a young man finding his way in the world through a series of events is told in a clear fashion. The reader does not need to think or dwell on too many things in this book - but that is a good thing. There are no plot holes or sloppy writing just a simple fantasy book to breeze through. The phrasing in the book will not win awards but it does make for a comfortable read.

I think that the story line ends far too abruptly and there are many many loose ends left undone. I guess that is what sequels are for.

Clay Kallam says

The paperback version of "A Young Man Without Magic" just came out, and if you missed the hardcover, this is an excellent bargain. There is some predictability in the pre-industrial world with magic, but Lawrence Watt-Evans, a veteran and talented writer, works against type in crafting his young hero. Instead of Anrel Murau being a headstrong young man with more passion than brains, he is reasonable, cool and calculating -- for the most part. He's also resourceful and entertaining, and is a fine companion for a book about a society on the brink of revolution.

There's a second novel in the series as well ("Above His Station") that I haven't read yet, but if it's anything like the first, I'm definitely on board.

Wes Jahn says

This book is lucky it even get's 1 star. The book is complete dialogue, and anytime anything interesting is going to happen, the book finds a way to cop out of it!

The main character is discovered, and is surrounded by 4 burly boatmen, armed with blunt objects, ready to fight! But no! He talks them out of it! They even give him a ride! BS! The main character is discovered by the bad guy, sneaking around his mansion, does he get thrown in the dungeon or get into a fight? No! He's invited in for tea and is then released! Horrible book!
