



Keepers of Arden: The Brothers, Volume 1

L.K. Evans

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Over a thousand years have passed since the Long Wars ended and the higher gods abandoned the lands of Arden. Divided and fearful, Arden has managed to secure a restless peace.

But peace never lasts. Darkness creeps through the lands once more.

Salvarias, a man born of shadow and fire, will become hunted for his magic and a power that can grant a vile god instant victory. Only his brother, Wilhelm, can save him from not only the evil stalking him, but also the darkness that grows within.

Keepers of Arden: The Brothers, Volume 1 Details

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From Reader Review Keepers of Arden: The Brothers, Volume 1 for online ebook

Clare Diston says

Read an interview with the author on my blog: <http://www.50ayear.com/2013/09/18/int...>

Amber says

I recieved a free copy in exchange for an honest review.

When I was approached by author Lk evans to read and review her young adult fantasy novel Keepers of Arden, I got interested. I decided to check it out. You will not be disappointed in this book! There's ton of action, characters that you will like and hate, and some romance thrown in. I enjoyed reading about brothers Wilhelm and Salavarias's adventures in Arden. It was a pretty good read! Definitely check it out. The perfect book for fantasy and young adult book fans!

Moryah says

I received this book in a goodreads giveaway.

This book caused me to do something that I have never done before, by an eBook. I just had to have the sequel to know what happened next in the brothers' story. The book is well written and the follows multiple characters point of view in an easy to follow way. The story focuses on the war between good in evil, both in the characters and in their world. One of the things that I liked best was that none of the characters were fully good or evil. Evans created a rich fantasy world full of even more vibrant characters.

Kyra Halland says

I really enjoyed this fantasy tale of two brothers - Wilhelm, big, handsome, good-natured, popular with the ladies, and Salvarias, dark and strange, gifted with magical powers beyond his years and terrified of the evil within him. We follow the two from the terrible conception and birth of Salvarias, Wilhelm's much-longed-for baby brother, through their childhood and teenage years and into early adulthood, as the two become part of a battle between forces of light and darkness to conquer Arden.

I enjoyed the relationship between the two brothers, Wilhelm's unconditional love for his strange and sometimes frightening younger brother and Salvarias's utter and complete trust in Wilhelm. Salvarias's character growth is especially engrossing, as through hardships he begins to come into his full powers and personality. I also enjoyed the touch of romance between the brothers and two sisters, brought together by the younger sister's mysterious bond with Salvarias. I was especially cheering for Salvarias to find and accept the love he longs for and deserves; this is book one of a series and I look forward to seeing where that relationship goes in the next book!

Two things kept this from being a 5-star read: first of all, when a stranger comes to a character and says

"Trust me and no one else, not the people you've known and loved your whole life, just me," alarm bells should be going off in the character's head. This happens a few times in *Keepers of Arden*, and either the alarm bells don't go off, or the character ignores them. I found myself kind of frustrated with this blindness to danger.

Also, while the prose is very smooth and polished, it's a little too smooth and polished for my taste, to the point that action and description and more contemplative passages would all blur together and I would catch myself skimming. This is often a symptom of over-editing, and can be remedied as the author becomes more confident of their own natural voice.

Aside from these two things, which are probably more personal quirks on my part than actual flaws in the book, I thoroughly enjoyed *Keepers of Arden* Volume 1, and highly recommend it to readers who like epic high fantasy told from a very personal viewpoint.

Jo Michaels says

I grabbed a sample of *Keepers of Arden* during a December contest I ran on my blog. I have to say, the sample took hold of my mind and I bought the book. I wasn't able to stop thinking about it and was happy when it was next on my TBR list. L. K. Evans created a magical world that captivated me and kept me glued to the pages. Enough about all that, let's get to the good stuff.

From a Reader's Perspective:

In the beginning of the book, we're introduced to a place named Arden. I could see the city clearly in my mind from the descriptions on the pages. Not long after the story began, I was dragged into a melee of emotional turmoil as fierce, dark creatures were described and the mother in the story showed her evil. There were times the descriptions brought tears to my eyes. As the tale moved along, it began to slow down. I kept waiting for something big to happen. As it was, this book has everything a first novel in a series should have and I'm anxious to read the second installment. But that big thing never happened. I felt the story dragged on a little, but I was so vested in the outcome, I kept reading. I love the brothers and how close they are. From chapter one, we're shown how they share a piece of one another and it's reinforced throughout the story.

From an Editor's Perspective:

I'm a stickler for errors and highlight any I come across. Misplaced pronouns weren't bad. What I did find was that the text could use a good proofreader to pick up on little errors like: dropped punctuation, homophones, and incorrect tenses of words. None of it was enough to throw me out of the story, but there were over 20 errors in the book.

Rating:

- +1 Star for phenomenal world building
- +1 Star for keeping me engaged
- +1 Star for description of creatures that really kept my toes curled
- +5 Stars for making me have an emotional reaction to the mother and son
- .5 Stars for the never making anything big happen
- +5 Stars for a couple of highlighted sentences I loved
- .5 Stars for need for a proofreader

Overall, 4 out of 5 stars! Recommended for anyone who loves magic, mages, and dark forces.

I never do this, so you know these passages moved me. My favorite two lines: *"Until you place yourself in another man's shoes, do not pass judgment."* and *"Every man has a weakness, and one must never judge a man for succumbing to that weakness because at one point you might succumb as well. And wouldn't it be nice to have another man understand your pain and mistake?"*

I mean, wow. Love it.

Grace says

Received a copy of this book free through Goodreads first reads.

I feel like this book had more ambitions than it could pull off. As the author's first book, I guess this can be expected, and perhaps forgiven, but I think they have a way to go before writing at a professional level. I suppose the only way to learn is through practice.

My first complaint would probably be that the 'evil' was just so... generically evil it was hard to take seriously. Especially when they get called 'dark lord' and so forth... call me crazy, but I find the best villains in all stories to be a bit more... three dimensional.

In fact, quite a lot of characters failed in the whole 'three dimensional' regard. Tobin, for example, who is so inexplicably good for no reason, and has no faults at all (other than perhaps a mild naivety, which is never played upon). His entire purpose in the story was quite obvious (to me at least), and it was a little hard to feel sorry for him when all we know about him is that he's an incredibly nice guy (and maybe that he has an adopted brother who is a knight).

Now, their mother had the potential to be more interesting, but she never had the opportunity. And Will and Salv's relationship always felt a little too... forced to me. I found it hard to believe real, and not just because Salv kept calling him 'my dear brother' rather than just using his name. Heck, I loved Fullmetal Alchemist, but this brotherly relationship didn't seem real, perhaps because it was too good to be true, and they never seemed to have a true connection other than the fact that they care about one another, as we are repeatedly told.

The pacing throughout the book was a bit off too. I think starting with your protagonists as children is often a mistake, and although information from their childhood was relevant, I don't think it was the best place to start, except maybe as a prologue. Then you could skip ahead to when they are older, and fill in the details through offhand comments, anecdotes and so forth. In this case, we get chapters about their childhood, which skips a few years every now and again so they can grow up a bit. It didn't help that they rarely had a clear goal, other than surviving, escaping or rescuing one another. Stuff just happened to them, which is difficult to work with in a story - driven characters tend to prosper a lot better.

The scenes with the villains hanging out and being evil, and talking about their evil plots could have been cut, there are better ways to introduce antagonists and their motives. And when they get taken to the cave, and then five years just skip? That could have been done better too. And the sex scenes. I felt they were just a way to prove that this was an adult book. If it's not relevant, I don't care, don't put it in there just because you think it's cool. I'd rather carry on with the story rather than be side tracked for three pages about some random encounter.

Now, let's move on to the plot holes. The one that's been bothering me most is when Tobin and Will left Salv

every week, he would always have taken a beating when they came back. Every week. For seven years. And never once did they actually do anything about it. They just accepted Salv's explanation, and said 'well don't run off again next time'. Nobody is that thick. Nobody who actually cared about someone would let that happen, week after week. It just doesn't fit, especially when Tobin is always 'such a great guy'. If it makes no logical sense, you can't just leave it in a story like that.

And I suppose I should mention the mythology. I found that rather dull, and the gods to be far less interesting than gods should be. I was interested with the idea of mages only being able to use fourteen spells, but other than that the magic was pretty bland.

So, I'm afraid this has just been a large rant about my problems with the book, which I apologise for. I am becoming decidedly more picky with what I read, and have less tolerance for what I don't consider quality. This book is at least not total drivel, the author shows potential, but it something they need to work at. They need to address the problems with their writing and progress, which I hope they do. As a first book, this will never be their greatest masterpiece. I really hope they don't hate me for this review, I'm just trying to give my honest opinion.

I would only recommend to people who aren't fussy with what they read, and don't mind cliches.

P.S. Hanging people is designed to break their neck, so it is not a slow death unless it is done wrong. But maybe it just works differently in the world of this story.

Steffi says

I received this book as a first-read and i've got to tell, it's been a long time since i read a book i got difficulty with to put down. From the first page you get pulled into action, no boring prologue as they sometimes do. I loved that you can read about the brothers growing up as to fully understand who they are and the people around them, see them grow over time. I'm also a sucker for romance so I loved to read that in this book. It is not an action packed book, I found it had just the right amount of it. I find the characters easy to love, or some easy to hate. Overall I found it a wonderfull book and would recommend to definitely read it.

Fiery Fantasy says

The lands of Arden are being plagued by horrors from a vile darkness. One terrifying night, shadow and fire come together to spawn a child, granting Wilhelm's wish for a sibling. His brother, Salvarias, is born with gifts of magic and a soul that can grant instant victory to the evil. But Wilhelm's immunity to the darkness gives him the ability to thwart the evil's scheme to poison Salvarias to its purpose. Will courage and the brothers' bond keep Arden from falling into eternal darkness?

I really enjoyed this book as it was the first real adult fantasy book I had read for a while that wasn't in the YA genre.

Written from the third person perspective, we are introduced to young Wilhelm and the attack on his town by the shadow entities.

Clinging onto his mother as they tried to get back home, we see how innocent he is and how close he is to his mother as he witnesses these misty beasts killing individuals around him.

With very good descriptive skills, L.K. Evans was able to build an unique fantasy world, complete with strongly developed characters and good twists and turns to keep the reader interested until the end.

Although, heavily descriptive in the beginning as it set the scene about the 'Shadowfire's' killing people in the town and suspicions of witches conjuring them up, it did not distract me from the nicely described relationship between the brothers and sisters as the style of the writing makes you feel a number of emotions as she are taken on this magical ride with them.

I did feel that maybe if it was written from a first person point of view (in particular, Wilhelm) I might have felt like I was deeper in this fantasy world as at some points I did feel I was being told too much and not being able to let my imagination flow.

With all of these points, I give this book 4 stars out of 5 as I would recommend this book to ALL fantasy fans and look forward to more of L.K. Evan's books.

Disclaimer: This book was given to **Fiery Fantasy Book Reviews Site** as a review copy and was provided to us in exchange for a fair and honest review. There was no monetary exchange for this review. The free book held no determination on our personal review.

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Lenny says

I got this book through Goodreads giveaways in exchange for an honest review.

I started this book a while ago, but it took me a long time to finish it. I didn't have a lot of free time, true, but this book didn't grip me, and I think that is the main reason. I liked the concept, I really did, but a lot of things were quite illogical. The evil in this book is too evil. It is as black as black can be. I like the grey villains much more, such as the characters in Game of Thrones for example. You hate some characters, but however much you hate what they do, you understand their actions and their motives, even if you disagree. The evil in this story doesn't have that. We know close to nothing about their motives.

On the other side I can say the same. Wilhelm, Humar and Lunara have no flaws whatsoever. Okulu had one negative side, the fact that he is a drunk, but we never even notice that he is indeed drunk. He never does things drunk people would do and, in hindsight, regret. I would like the characters to do things that would make us doubt if they are indeed the good guys. The only character who made me doubt was Mafarias, but he didn't play as big a role as I would have liked him to. Salvarias was also a grey character, but his logic was a bit strange. If you know the voice speaking to you is evil, and you don't want to be evil, then you don't listen to that voice, and resist it with everything you've got.

The relationships between people were also a little too good to be true. No siblings get along as well as Wilhelm and Salvarias or Varila and Lunara. They never had a fight. Yes, sometimes they did not agree with each other, but one or the other gave in immediately.

The story was nice, it had a lot of different parts, but it wasn't cohesive, and I guess that was the reason why the book didn't grip me. Every time it did, the tension was over at the end of the chapter, and I didn't feel the urge to read on at all. Towards the end I liked the story much more. I read the last few chapters without putting it down. I think that if a second book is released, it will be much better. The world is already built, the characters are introduced, so the second book could just start with action and adventures, without having to explain everything that makes the characters what they are now.

The world was really well build. The world had a history and religion that were connected. I liked the fact that the whole world was explored. They went from one corner of the map to the other.

Another positive point about this book is its cover. It's really nice and I liked it a lot. It didn't show a lot, nor does it cover events of the story, but I don't think that is necessary. I'm a supporter of the "less is more" principle, and this is a good example.

Overall, I think this has potential. I didn't think this book was terrific, but it wasn't really bad either. It's a little in between. If a second book is published, I would really like to read it, because I do think this can be a good story, but too much time was taken to tell who the characters are, while it could have been done by just talking about it and not by describing every detail of the past. I hope a second book will come out, and I would like to read it and give this another chance to do better, which I am sure it will.

Brian says

Wow. L.K. Evans's *Keepers of Arden* is an amazing debut novel that stole me away into its world from the very beginning and refused to let me leave. The world of Arden is one well worth visiting, and Evans has populated it with interesting characters, many whom break free of the traditional swords and sorcery fantasy tropes.

The majority of the story revolves around Wilhelm and his brother, Salvarias, a mage whose conception early in the story bears the touch of an evil, malicious force. Salvarias, already reviled by many for being a mage, bears the horrible burden of feeling this evil force within him, and Wilhelm's pure nature and unconditional love for him could possibly be the only thing that can save him from being consumed by it. On top of that, an ancient evil is once again vying to gain power over Arden and has its eyes set on Salvarias to help achieve its goals.

Much of *Keepers* follows Wilhelm and Salvarias through their youth, showcasing their growth into adulthood. In my opinion, this is expertly done, and serves to make these characters so much more endearing. Following Salvarias's journey to adulthood is a heart-wrenching experience, and watching the misery of his youth compared to Wilhelm's more pleasant upbringing makes it even more so. Constantly you want Wilhelm to discover the truth about what Salvarias is forced to go through and to make everything better. The fact that I found myself caring so deeply about Salvarias and his brother, while hating those responsible for Salvarias's troubled youth is testament to L.K. Evan's amazing ability to craft interesting and believable characters.

There are villains, monsters, and heroes in spades throughout *Keepers*, and Evan's strong imagination shines

through each of them. The story has plenty of twists and turns, answering many questions that arise, while leaving many for future volumes. The reader should be aware that this is very much an adult fantasy, and there is some very dark moments throughout.

There were only a couple of issues I had with *Keepers of Arden*. One was the pacing for the latter portion. I do understand that the beginning spans nearly two decades, but once the brothers are adults, I felt the transition into something of a "this happened, then this happened, and then this happened" was a bit abrupt. Also, I was a little let down by the climax of the book. Being the first book of a series, I didn't expect much closure, but I just didn't feel the protagonists had much at stake. Yes, there was a city faced with a potential massacre, but there wasn't really a sense of the true consequences for the characters or the story if the good guys, so to speak, lost to the bad guys.

Those are really small gripes, however, in that I was captivated throughout. There are rarely any slow sections, and even those few were kept interesting with Evan's brilliant characters. Truthfully, this is one of the best fantasy books I've had the pleasure of reading this year, and I can't wait to see what Evans has in store for Wilhelm, Salvarias, and the world of Arden in the next volume.

Thaddeus White says

The *Keepers of Arden* tells the tale of two brothers, Wilhelm (the elder) and Salvarias. Wilhelm's a good egg through and through, whereas his brother is a much more mixed bag (were it not for his elder brother's unconditional love one suspects Salvarias would be rather evil). Evil seeks to claim Salvarias, and sometimes uses his affection for Wilhelm against him.

The first half of the book focuses almost entirely on the two brothers, and adopts an episodic approach to their early lives. It works very well, helping to establish the relationship they have between themselves and with others. I shan't spoil it, but the way the story goes you can see why Salvarias in particular relies upon his elder brother, and how the return of that esteem affects him.

In the second half more secondary characters are introduced and the stage starts to shift from their home city to various locations. I feel a few more shades of grey or weak spots would have helped to flesh out the new characters (reminds me a bit of how I felt about the first *Mistborn* book's secondary cast, actually). There's some nice character progression for Salvarias, who becomes more independent.

There's an old school feel to the story. I'm not sure why, but it slightly reminds me of things like *Outlaws of the Marsh*, or even the more recent *The Master of Izindi*. Anyway, old school is a good thing, in my (well LK Evan's) book.

There are no elves or dwarves, but instead a range of different, original creatures, and a mythology based around long-dead gods. The lore isn't thrust under your nose and slapped in your face, and is gradually revealed in a way that feels natural.

I felt that greater moral ambiguity would have helped things. Salvarias has a good dose and Wilhelm none (which is fine, that's Wilhelm's way), but more elsewhere would have been an improvement (this was a conscious choice by the author, I think, rather than cocking up an effort at more moral greyness).

Salvarias was clearly the best character. He got more little eccentricities (counting to himself, the puzzle box,

lavender etc) and the most moral ambiguity of anyone. There's also an air that he might turn into a complete psychopath if Wilhelm got killed, or that he could drift inexorably towards evil-doing. It's a good element of uncertainty.

Overall, I enjoyed *The Keepers of Arden*, and those who enjoy old school fantasy should give it a look.

Thaddeus

Pauline Ross says

This is one of those books with loads of interesting ideas where the execution falls a little flat. The concept of the human mother being forced to bear the child of a demon is not at all an original one (*Rosemary's Baby*, for instance), but there's always room for a novel twist on the idea. In this case, the demon is prevented from taking the child, and the child himself is prevented from total evil, by the unconditional love of his older brother. The mother, on the other hand, sees the child as nothing but a monstrosity and treats him very badly. We're so used to the idea of mothers loving their children no matter what that this is quite a difficult idea to read about, and made me wonder: just how would a mother react to such a child? I'm not convinced that Ashra would be quite so proud of her eldest son and loving towards him, while hating her youngest quite so strongly. And why doesn't Wilhelm, the eldest, notice the difference and lose respect for his mother?

The author has created a wonderfully detailed world as background for this story of two very different brothers. There is a mythology involving a god-love-triangle, and there are throwaway lines about drunken gods and the like which I found very intriguing. Then the Big Bad is referred to as 'God' by his head minion, which is interesting too. However, despite some nice little snippets of history, I never quite got a clear picture of how these gods fitted into the current picture, whether they were real or even whether they were good or evil. The rest of the world is obviously just as carefully thought out, but without a map or a little more detail it was hard to see quite what was what. Sometimes as our heroes travelled around the scenery, a character would say: 'Well, I'll just pop back to Falar for...', which always took me by surprise. It's that close and I never knew? The various towns are nicely differentiated from one another, it's just me that needs some kind of a visual aid to help me understand the setting. Like a map. [Edit: there's actually rather a nice map provided, which I stupidly missed. Doh!]

There's magic in this world, but it's fairly limited in scope. There are just fourteen spells available to mages, they're difficult to learn and to perform and they bite back if you get them wrong, killing the mage. Even if you get them right, you have to rest for a long time before you can perform them again. The mages actually forget each spell after it's been used, and have to have a spell-book to remind themselves, which is a cool idea. As if that wasn't tricky enough, mages are bound by restrictive laws and almost universally despised, so they can be attacked and even killed for no reason other than being mages.

The story follows the lives of two brothers, Wilhelm and Salvarias, the sons of a female mage struggling to make a living. Wilhelm's father is a mystery, having disappeared shortly after getting Ashra pregnant. Nice guy (not), but he's supposedly doing something important in the world, and I have no doubt he'll turn up in a future book. I'm actually quite interested to meet dad, because Wilhelm has inherited some interesting genes. Enormous height and strength, for instance, as well as charm and (it seems) supernatural skills with the ladies (well, I've never heard of a fifteen year old who can perform such prodigious feats).

Salvarias is the demon-child, who inherits his mother's mage abilities at an unusually early age. This book takes the story from Salvarias's conception through to his late teens, and there are necessarily big gaps where several years pass between action episodes. The plot is very uneven, depending to a large extent on coincidence and, frankly, *deus ex machina* at times. The brothers find themselves out on the streets trying to survive, and almost the first person they meet is a friend not seen for many years who turns up out of the blue and looks after them. Other characters who might be expected to help are unaccountably missing when needed. A mage turns up in the nick of time to heal Salvarias, and then vanishes. All of this is very convenient. If there are plot-related reasons for these fortuitous events, they aren't made clear.

The other characters, who pop up as needed and vanish the rest of the time, are not terribly realistic. They all tend to the handsome/beautiful end of the spectrum, and fall neatly into good or evil categories, without much blurring of the lines. Despite a running theme of who could be trusted, which had me on the watch for a traitor in their midst, there were no dramatic reveals (at least not in this book). The female characters (with the notable exception of Ashra, the mother) are frequently madonna types, sweet and maternal and in need of protection, with the occasional warrior-babe or raunchy type for variety. There's a very odd attitude to the romance element of the book. Wilhelm is much in demand with the ladies (with unlimited stamina, it appears), but as soon as love looms on the horizon, somehow sex is off the agenda. The old madonna/whore dichotomy.

The writing style is oddly awkward at times, with a few characteristic quirks. For instance, characters routinely 'accept' food or hugs, which sounds odd to my ears. Then there's the cloying closeness of the two brothers, where sometimes it seems as if every scene ends with them saying how much they love each other and hugging. There was way too much repetition of phrases, like Wilhelm's tree-like stature. There are numerous small typos scattered throughout, but nothing so egregious as to interfere with readability for me.

I've listed a lot of grumbles with this book, yet I was never tempted to give up on it, and the reason for that was very simple: the deeply compelling character of Salvarias. It's not easy to draw a character which is inherently evil, yet who struggles to overcome that evil every day. His dreams, his internal conversations with his (almost paternal-sounding!) father, his unique approach to life, and even his magic (anthropomorphised here, so that he has long conversations with it), make for a fascinating portrayal. I liked the way that different characters saw him in different ways, so as we moved from one point of view to another, we saw him as essentially evil or deeply charismatic. I was intrigued, too, with the mother, who could be so normally maternal with one son, while hating the other relentlessly. This is an uneven book, which would have benefited from tighter editing and (perhaps) losing some of its bulk. I found it frustratingly flawed, yet still a rewarding read. Three stars.

Nathan Curtis says

I was given a free copy of this book in exchange for a fair review.

This was a very good book. *Keepers of Arden* is first and foremost the story of Wilhelm, son of a mage, and his brother Salvarias, born of dark magic. It is the interaction between them, as well as between them and their allies, that is the nexus of the book. Wilhelm grows to be a great warrior, the Protector of his brother, and epitomizes all that is good. Salvarias grows to be a powerful mage who is told he is evil, no matter how hard he tries to be good. The interactions between the characters are fantastic. People clearly treat the brothers very differently, which does not mean they care about Salvarias any less.

I must admit there are certain scenes between Salvarias and other characters that I found to be somewhat

shocking, but I believe they were necessary to get the character to where he needed to be.
I look forward to reading the next adventure of the brothers (and the sisters now accompanying them).

Zichao Deng says

Took me a few chapters to get into this, but this is more down to my long standing issues with the implications of good and evil in epic fantasy generally than for any literary reasons.

Actually, it didn't take that long for me to start enjoying it enormously, and the book ends up confronting the fact that traditional fantasy/SF ideas of good and evil are bullshit far better than most. (Yes, I rooted for Sauron all through LOTR. Show those poncy, stuck-up elves who's boss... And while I'm at it, "evil races"? What the actual ****, J.R.R.? Why not just straight-up have Aragorn declare that Gondor needs more lebensraum? *Ahem*)

Anyhow, in this case, the forces of good - represented by bigots, murderers and child-abusers and led by squabbling adolescent gods - are ranged against the forces of evil - represented by one nerdy, asthmatic, vegetarian kid who suffers from nightmares and gets the crap kicked out of him with some regularity.

See what I mean?

Ok, in theory he was cursed with an evil destiny at birth, which is fair enough, but what's everyone else's excuse?

Anyhow, fortunately for me and my rooted dislike of all that is good and virtuous, the aforementioned asthmatic vegetarian kid grows more awesome with every page ("Hell yeah! Born that way! Fight the power!"), becoming a rounded, complex and oddly loveable character. Rather than just going with the standard "he's evil because the player handbook *says* he's evil" explanation, Evans uses him as a means to play around with the concepts of good and evil themselves, which is far more entertaining. Moreover, his brother (the other main character) manages to be good and noble and heroic and everything else without making me hate him, which is quite a feat. He's actually kind of cool.

The story is pacey and entertaining, and I fell in love with the gloomy, gothic world of Arden from the start. I will definitely be buying book two. (And starting an Evil Liberation Front for oppressed Orcs and Necromancers everywhere.)
