



## The Charnel Prince

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When the legendary Briar King awoke from his slumber, a season of darkness and horror fell upon the Kingdom of Crotheny. Now countless breeds of unspeakable monsters roam the countryside. An epidemic of madness has transformed peaceful villagers from the wildlands into savage, flesh-eating fiends. In Eslen, King William has been murdered, Queen Muriele is stalked by treachery on every side, and their last surviving daughter, Anne, has fled the assassins bent on destroying her family.

Close on the heels of the runaway princess, young knight Neil MeqVren, the queen's one trusted ally, is sworn to rescue Anne from her murderous pursuers. Anne herself undertakes a perilous journey toward the sanctuary of her distant paramour's arms, but along the way lie the sinister agents and hidden snares of a sprawling conspiracy that few might hope to evade.

At the same time, spies in the service of Praifec Hespero, the powerful Churchman, embark upon a mission to destroy the Briar King in the heart of his domain. And the power-hungry Church, spurred on by the mystical events, has launched an inquisition whose repercussions threaten even the queen. As the noose of intrigue tightens across the land, personal fates and a kingdom's destiny alike will be decided in a conflict between virtue and malevolence, might and magic.

Here then is Book II of The Kingdoms of Thorn and Bone: intoxicating and harrowing, passionate and grand—it is Greg Keyes's most ambitiously imagined and vividly rendered work of epic fantasy.

## **The Charnel Prince Details**

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# From Reader Review The Charnel Prince for online ebook

## Dirk Grobbelaar says

I believe that *The Kingdoms Of Thorn and Bone* is one of the most criminally underrated works of fantasy around.

As far as I can discern, Greg Keyes hasn't exactly been a prolific writer, apart from some tie-in, or shared media, works for the likes of Star Wars and Babylon 5.

This series stands as his Magnum Opus.

*Kingdoms* is a seamless and close to perfect blend of old school charm and modern fantasy sensibilities. It is epic and grandiose, but it is also intimate and personal.

It is a fresh look on the genre, and Keyes introduces some great elements into his story, with some sequences even bordering on the horror fiction of, say, H.P. Lovecraft.

The courtly intrigue is probably not *quite* as convoluted as people have come to expect from the likes of George R.R. Martin's Song of Ice And Fire, but that is *not necessarily* a bad thing.

It all depends on personal preference. Personally, too much courtly intrigue, incest, conniving and hoo-hah-ing can put me off. And that isn't the case here.

When I first read *The Briar King* I was really impressed by the prose. If ever there was any doubt about Keyes' writing skills, this series should put that to rest.

*The Charnel Prince* takes off right where *The Briar King* closed, and if anything, is written even better.

The novel positively oozes atmosphere and class. The fighting scenes are depicted masterfully and probably rate as some of the best I've read.

I think where Keyes really succeeds is in the sense of urgency and menace he generates. There are multiple threads and plotlines interwoven, and if one should fail disaster will surely follow. Impending doom and all that, but Keyes makes the reader *believe*.

It's just so much fun to read books like these.

I have a fondness for music, and there is a central theme of music throughout the novel. In fact, it forms a core part of the plot, with one of the new characters introduced being a composer.

The setting, though easily reconcileable with the likes of Tolkien's Middle Earth or Historical Europe, certainly contains some aspects that I haven't encountered in works of fantasy before.

The creatures, beings and characters conjured up by Keyes are fascinating in the extreme, and *most decidedly not* run of the mill.

I really, *really* love what Keyes has created here.

I am well aware that I'm not the most eloquent reviewer of books, but I really feel a pressing need to convey just how highly I regard this series thus far. There is precious little wrong here.

The writing is awesome. The characters are awesome. The plot is awesome. The world Keyes has created is living, and breathing, and really awesome. If only all fantasy were like this.

Now that I've humiliated myself by carrying on like a schoolgirl with a *Twilight* novel under each arm, I hope I have at least convinced you to give this a try.

Start with *The Briar King*.

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## Jonathan says

**Recommended for: See my review of *The Briar King*.**

Now I am remembering even more why I liked this series when I first read it. Keyes is damned consistent. He doesn't have weaknesses so much as content choices that some readers might not like. I can see readers who want genre-defying writing, or gender neutral writing, or generally edgy writing, being disappointed. But the writing itself can't really be faulted.

Personally, I find the trope-heaviness of this series less infuriating than the verbose, plot-dragging expansiveness of other fantasy series.

Keyes is keeping his shit tight. I like that.

4/5 stars for keeping shit tight.

(Also, writing 'keeping shit tight' three times in a review is fun.)

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## Andi says

These are deep waters...

I stayed up until three in the morning to finish this, and had to talk myself out of going on to *Blood Knight*. Keyes delivers in this one. Although much of it is classic fantasy the writing is great, practical yet lyrical. His characters are fabulous, layered, flawed, and interesting.

The thing that keeps me so engaged is the political intrigue, mixed with the background of fantastical monsters and our motley group of heroes. When a composer is the one that delivers the most ringing blow at the end, you know you have a fantasy novel that is a cut above all of the rest.

I very much look forward to the next installment, where the waters are sure to get murkier and more dangerous.

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## YouKneeK says

This is the second book in the *Kingdoms of Thorn and Bone* series, and I enjoyed it even more than I had enjoyed the first. The first book, while very good, took time to completely grab my interest. I think that was primarily because there were a lot of characters to get to know, and there were a lot of different plot threads that needed time to develop. It took time for all of these things to be introduced and built up to the point where I was really invested. With this book, I started out fully invested in the story and the characters.

In addition to continuing the story of several of the characters from the first book, this book also introduced a handful of new characters. Leoff, the composer, was the only new character who became a frequent point-of-

view character and I thought he was a great addition. We also learned more about characters who were only briefly seen in the first book. A couple of them turned out to be far more than they had originally appeared to be. One of them I had suspected, but the other was a pleasant surprise. The characters in this series are very interesting and fun to read about. The over-all story is interesting enough but, at least for me, this series is more about the characters. Finding out what would happen to them next, and learning more about the ones I didn't know well yet, was what kept me turning the pages even when I had other things to do.

I thought the ending was a little more open-ended than that of the first book. When the final chapter ended, I felt like the characters were on the brink of accomplishing the goals they'd been working toward, but the brief epilogue made it clear that there's more trouble to come first. (Well, there's also the fact that the series has two more books in it!) The epilogue also left one of our main characters in a pretty bad position so, at least for that character, there was a bit of a cliff hanger. I look forward to starting the third book to learn what happens next.

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### ♥ Unaeve ♥ says

What? This is the end already? How did i come to the end so fast?

Lol!

"Benefits" of reading books on Kindle..you can get surprised when you come to the last page if yow wasn't monitoring the page numbers(or percent) -and I definitely wasn't because the last 30% of the book was a hell of a raid!

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### Kristen says

Just as with *The Briar King*, Keyes charges straight into the action and keeps it at full throttle throughout the entire book. Some scenes literally had me holding my breath in suspense, and others left me near tears. The characters we met before return and become even more developed, and those that are new seem like familiar friends.

It's been a while since I've been this fully engaged in a fantasy story. It's about damn time.

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### Neil McGarry says

Like its predecessor in the series, *The Charnel Prince* is quite the puzzle. Author Gregory Keyes is a solid writer, but here he's working against an awful lots of "cons."

First, *Prince* is rife with fantasy names that have to be auto-translated into English--"werlic" instead of "certainly" may give the story a otherworldly feel, but it's a speedbump to effortless reading. Fantasy-speak is not limited to grammar, either; there are some sections in which the etymological history of various words is discussed at length, and I found myself lost in descriptions of Vitellian and Crothenic and the gods only knew what else. Another barrier to effortless reading.

Second, this book is *long*. Really long. Keyes isn't a very economical storyteller, and since each chapter serves only a single purpose, there have to be dozens of them to get you through the tale. That may look good on a store shelf--you're getting so much book for your money!--but I don't think it enhances the reader experience.

Third, the women in this story really need something to do. Anne Dare is finally making meaningful choices, although they don't seem very meaningful. The biggest decision she makes is immediately undermined by fate, which makes me wonder why the readers have to experience her making it. The other females are either captive or just tag along for the hell of it. Winna's been around since the beginning of Book #1, and I still can't understand why she's there. Keyes lampshades this (Winna herself points out that she can't fight, hunt, or track, and must always be protected), but that doesn't make it better.

Most vexing of all, however, is that despite these manifold flaws, every once in a while there would be a plot twist that would pleasantly surprise me, and I'd find myself wondering "What happens next?" Since I think that's the ultimate job of a novelist, Keyes is, in my estimation, successful.

With strong reservations, I still recommend *The Charnel Prince*.

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### **Bevs says**

Very good, this one! So close to a 5 star rating.

The abrupt, loose ending spoiled it a bit for me and I really, really, really didn't like that last bit about Leoff. Still, highly recommended and I will definitely read the next book in the series.

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### **Althea Ann says**

This excellent fantasy series ("Kingdoms of Thorn and Bone") is very reminiscent of George R.R. Martin's Song of Ice and Fire - except that it's actually finished! (There's one more book in the series that I haven't yet read.) It follows a similar format, structurally, and the 'feel' of the writing is very similar. The story itself, however, is quite original - at least, more so than many fantasy epics. I mean, it's still got Dark Forces and Bold Warriors and Beautiful Queens etc, etc... but we want that, right?

The Charnel Prince continues the story right where the previous book left off. The titular character is indeed a royal prince - but also a traitor, afflicted - or empowered - by a backfired curse, and now undead - and seemingly unstoppable.

His aim is to murder the Princess Anne - who has escaped him with only her maid, Austrá, and is in hiding as a peasant girl, forced to work to earn money to somehow make her way home. Luckily, she is befriended by a roguish swordsman, Cazio, who helps and defends her. Unknown to her, the knight Neil has undertaken a quest to find her and help her, but it is much like seeking a needle in a haystack - and

Anne doesn't even know whether he might be friend or foe. Meanwhile, Aspar and Stephen have been charged by religious leaders, including the Praifec Hespero, to find and destroy the Briar King - but corruption is in the Church, and black magic. Who knows how high the evil may have spread? Is killing the Briar King truly the right thing to do?

Hespero is also on a personal crusade, it seems, against the brilliant musician and composer Leoff Ackenzal, whose innovative pieces buck against church dogma. Recently called to an appointment at court, the innocent Leoff finds himself over his head amongst the conniving courtiers and courtesans at the palace. Soon, he is worried about more than his position - his very life may be at stake.

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## **Monique says**

This is the second book in Keyes' epic-fantasy series. I'm not reading many of those kind of series anymore (too long, too similar, too boring, generally), but I've liked Keyes ever since reading 'Chosen of the Changeling'. So, a while ago I bought and read the first book in this series and wasn't disappointed. Took me a while to get round to reading this one, but once again: good read.

I rather like how Keyes takes traditional elements, almost clichéd characters even, yet manages to weave them into a refreshing and appealing story. The series doesn't have too many storylines but still enough to remain exciting, a very nice and interesting villain, and some excellent writing.

True, some of the characters (most notably Anne and Aspar) get on my nerves to know end and I'd be happy to see them snuff it early in the next book, but some others are really quite good. All in all, so far I'd really recommend these books to anyone looking for a traditional-ish series that yet has something new to offer.

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## **Tracy says**

Monsters, gruesome sacrifices, dark sorcery, swordsmen devoted to honor, and a young woman being driven into the arms of her potent destiny are set loose in *The Charnel Prince* by Greg Keyes. This second novel of his *Kingdoms of Thorn and Born* epic fantasy series benefits from the setting developed in the first book, and the characters are really allowed to blossom within the adventure.

For fantasy readers, Keyes delivers a complete bill of goods as he weaves multiple fantasy elements such as magic, religion, unfolding prophecies, romance, quests, palace intrigue, and good old monster fighting into a fast-paced novel. A variety of characters fill the story. Some of the characters I found to be developed very successfully, such as Anne Dare, Neil McVren, Leoff, Cazio, and Muriele, and even the bad guy, the Charnel Prince Robert. Other characters do not hook me as much emotionally such as Aspar White, Winna, and Stephen Darige. Their adventures however remain engaging to me. Their quests are of the Dungeons and Dragons variety in which they fight beasts and track priests awakening dark magic across the land.

## **The Swordsmen**

It just would not be an epic fantasy without some fellows swinging steel, and Keyes excels with his portrayals of two different types of swordsmen. First is Neil. He is a knight accustomed to wearing heavy armor, using a broadsword, mace, lance, and fighting on his feet or on horseback. Within him lurks a bloodlusty berserker rage that he dips into when necessary. Second is Cazio, a character inspired by fighters of a more refined and Renaissance flavor. He uses the rapier or saber. His sword style, known as the *dessrata* in the book, is an art form. I enjoyed considering the subtleties of combat through the personas of these two characters.

Neil offers fantasy readers a good interpretation of the classic knight. He is utterly driven by his sworn oaths. Even when confronted by a bitter betrayal from Anne Dare when he is trying to save her, he remains firmly committed to his mission to help her. Neil is also sexually frustrated having lost his forbidden love in the first book, so he is knight burdened by the angst of unrequited love.

Cazio takes a more cavalier attitude toward love. His feelings for Anne motivate him to protect her in addition to his honor that demands he help a woman in need. Anne's clear disdain for his potential affection, however, prompted him to casually begin to court Anne's handmaiden Austras in an attempt to make Anne jealous. The little love triangle he concocts is usually overrun by the need to fight for their lives, but it adds a nice undercoat of drama to the characters' lives. As a fighter, Cazio is also charming in his arrogance as he continually boasts about his sword skills and more often than not proves them.

## **The Queens**

The unfolding prophecy in this story is that a queen will save the world, which leaves the bad guys in the story working very hard to kill all potential female heirs to the throne of Crotheny. The surviving female heir is Anne Dare, who is seventeen and, by the end of the book, coming into her supernatural powers. She is a well developed and sympathetic character. The author deftly transforms her from a difficult teenage girl concerned only with freedom and her beau to a maturing young woman who realizes that her responsibilities surmount her petty personal concerns.

The other queen is Anne's mother, Muriele, who is technically the Queen Mother, so she is not actually a female heir to the throne. Her character is pivotal to this novel. Much of the action swirls around Muriele as she struggles to keep her mentally deficient son on the throne as both the Church and rival kingdoms salivate over her vulnerability. Feeling Muriele's pain was easy as she coped with the crushing grief of having most of her family murdered. Her cleverness as she rolled her way through dicey palace politics was also endearing.

## **The Court Composer**

Leoff Ackenzal is a new character in this second book of the series. He is a musical genius arriving at the imperial capital only to learn that the emperor who hired him is no longer alive. Because the morale of the populace is low – due to monsters stalking the land and whole villages of people going raving mad – Leoff manages to retain his position and is commissioned to produce a rousing musical work for public performance.

The author shows that he either researched music very well to write this character or was already well schooled in music. Keyes reveals marvelous technical detail while describing Leoff's compositions. Although many aspects of the court composer character appear to be lifted straight from the movie "Amadeus," Leoff is a pleasing and sympathetic character. And his bumbling nerdiness acts as a nice foil to the swordsmen. The performance of his heretical opera at the end also creates one of the book's most



beautifully written chapters.

### **A Worthy Opponent**

The Kingdoms of Thorn and Bone epic series is shaping up to be a good read. The fantasy world is richly detailed with various languages, folklore, monsters, politics, and sorcery. Keyes created a multitude of characters, many of which are quite pleasing. For the most part, The Charnel Prince rushes along at a captivating pace, although there are several tedious scenes in which the scholarly Stephen Darige blathers on as he cross references some clue through three arcane languages. Also the paths of the characters tend to cross a little too conveniently for the sake of the plot, but this is forgivable. Whatever minor shortcomings exist within the novel are assuaged by an extremely satisfying climatic fight scene in which Neil takes on an enchanted knight that cannot die.

For good action and pleasing characters, I give this fantasy book a four swords rating – two broadswords, a saber, and a rapier.

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### **Lasairfiona Smith says**

The organization of this book is different from the first book. More of the main characters interact so the chapters aren't organized by character anymore. Keyes seems to be really getting into his writing groove. This isn't high literature but it is a fun read. The story seems to stumble a bit as we try and figure out who is good and who is evil. This changing of opinions should be written with a bit more umph but the main characters coming together gives the book the cohesion it needs. I am really enjoying how the story winds together. I expect the main characters will split up very soon in the third book but that is how it needs to be.

Other than the story trying to find its own, I think the priest's character development (ie power) is done with a bit of a heavy hand but I will take it since it was so well written in the first book. So much action. I love it.

Great second book. I am looking forward to the third (hurry up and ship amazon!).

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### **Eli says**

Going into this book, I was afraid the author wouldn't adequately develop the characters he introduced in the first novel. I was a little worried that he wouldn't be able to keep up the pace. I needn't have been concerned. It was very refreshing to read a story showing interesting character development without being hit over the head with it, as I've sometimes experienced in Orson Scott Card's writing. My criticism of the first book was that I didn't quite get deeply enough into the characters' heads, but I think I see now that the story is meant to slide us gradually into the major characters' psyches. It's a refreshing balance. I have sufficient investment to care about the characters, and I don't sacrifice any time spent on the external dramas or the unfolding plot in the process. I might just have to go get the third book and jump it past some of the other books in my queue.

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## StoryTellerShannon says

Well, I feel some people are a bit harsh towards this book compared to the first one, yet, some people are also too generous in ratings. I did, however, give this four stars as I felt this was a 3.5 book, like his last one, and, the time before, I gave him a 3 star rating.

This isn't a five star novel. George R.R. Martin's A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE is a five star novel.

That said, it isn't fair to compare anyone to GRRM as he's top of the line and has been writing for over 30 years (i.e. varied in Hollywood and novel genres of sci fi, horror and now fantasy).

In comparison, Keyes has done some spinoff writing for companies but this series is the first of his own. For all purposes, he's a new writer who's making respectable progress.

Overall, I feel this is a solid book. Good but not great, but, certainly way above most of the fantasy novels being published.

Okay, now that we put it on the barometer, time to actually discuss the story.

CHARNEL PRINCE (CP) follows shortly after the first novel. In this tale we have three basic story lines:

- (1) Anne Dare's group as she tries to return home and avoid capture (i.e. this includes Neil, the guardian of the queen, trying to track Anne down as well);
- (2) Aspar and previous company trying to track down the Briar King, per orders of the Church, and destroy it with the equivalent of an arrow of slaying (i.e. note that these items existed mythologically before the D&D game); and
- (3) Focus back on the kingdom with viewpoints mostly on the Queen, who has few allies, and, the composer, who stumbles into court intrigue.

The composer, by far, is the most interesting as there is a focus on music and a national anthem equivalent, which has rarely been done in fantasy works.

In the first novel, I felt that it broke down like this:

### GOOD POINTS

- (1) Lots of time spent on a believable History;
- (2) good cast of character;
- (3) it moves;
- (4) author is good at creating emotional affects; especially fear and curiosity

### BAD POINTS

- (1) dialogue needs work. While it doesn't suck it lacks complexity and nuances that we expect in dialogue;
- (2) Some of the characters, like the dialogue, needs development. Lots of archetypes for those who like it;
- (3) a few plot holes.

In the new novel, I would say that the good points still exist and the dialogue is no longer a problem as much. There are still a lot of archetypes used, as well as a few minor plot holes.

BTW, Keyes based many of the kingdom names on the Historical Roanoke colony (i.e. the English colonists who strangely disappeared).

Overall, a good fantasy book but not a great or superlative one. But, once again, better than most fantasy works, so, worth the read.

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## **Mei-Lu says**

The Briar King was a bit of a slog for me, but this book was such a good read, it made the slog completely worth it.

I absolutely loved the way the characters and storyline developed and one of my favorite characters in the series is Leoff, who was introduced here.

If you like pseudo-medieval geo-political fantasy (you know, princesses in peril, civil war, mystical monsters, evil monks and secret assassin guilds) you'll love this series. If like me, you feel this type of fantasy tends to be cliched and only like it if it's good (a la George RR Martin's "Ice and Fire" series) then you'll still like this series. Because this series has a lot more going for it than mythology, knights and princesses, it's about humanity and the struggle to make good choices in a world that contains evil. In between the fun victories, wrenched from the teeth of cliff-hanging chapter endings, this book has real moments of beauty and poetry.

I'm not quite ready to say I loved this book, but I really really liked it.

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