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Without Bloodshed Details

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Author : Matthew Graybosch

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From Reader Review Without Bloodshed for online ebook

Dave Higgins says

Graybosch has skilfully merged aspects of rock music, science-fiction, and ancient conspiracies, from both the West and the East, producing a novel which will be enjoyed by both lovers of classic techno-thrillers and anim  fans.

After the partial collapse of society, the Phoenix Society arose to hold the new governments of the world to a code of morals. Morgan Stormrider has served the Society loyally for over a decade, dealing out a clean death to any who raise arms against the Society's operatives. Tired of moving from place to place, seeing the worst of humanity, he wishes to retire. But first he must complete one last mission: bring in a newly-established dictator in alive, proving he is more than an assassin paid by a brutal cabal to suppress dissent. But when he is framed for his ex-girlfriend's murder, he is forced to question whether the accusations are true.

Graybosch has created a distinctive world which combines the luxuries of a post-capitalist society with hints of the wreckage of social collapse beneath. The history, both recorded and secret, is carefully embedded, creating a balance between leaving the reader struggling to understand the world and wondering why characters have suddenly broken into detailed exposition of famous events.

The unfolding of conspiracies within conspiracies is similarly handled, giving the reader a sense that events that are not immediately clear are a plausible reaction to secret plots that will be revealed later.

Morgan Stormrider is a well-rounded character, possessing both a complex personality and a life outside of the Phoenix Society; he still believes that killing is a legitimate part of a just society, but now longs for a stable relationship with the woman he loves. This makes his struggle to clear his name a complex tale of personal growth, rather than a simple rehashing of a gunslinger's Road to Damascus.

The other characters also lead rich lives outside of both Morgan's quest and the subsidiary plots, creating a real sense events are part of a greater whole.

However, it is this rich other life which also potentially creates the greatest obstacle to some readers: while they might be unsurprising in anim , international police assassins who are also rock-stars are not a common trope in Western science-fiction. However, the dual roles exist within a framework of mature dichotomy rather than the shallow farce of children's morning television, so a reader who gave up at that point would be doing both themselves and the book a disservice.

Although the novel is strong enough to invite rereading on the plot and characterisation alone, Graybosch has seeded occasional nods to progressive rock and other classics of music and literature. Some will leap out at readers familiar with his influences, others hide behind engaging plot, and some might be coincidence, opening the possibility of subsequent readings merging the hunting of the Easter Bunny with that of the Snark.

Overall I enjoyed this greatly. I recommend it to readers who do not despise the fusion of cultures and styles.

I received a free copy from the author in exchange for a fair review.

Amy says

I read the last sentence of this book with a chuckle and then a grin. In fact, the entire book was like that: a great puzzling series of mysteries and intrigues involving amusingly sardonic characters.

The main character is Morgan Stormrider, bad-ass extraordinaire. When his girlfriend gets murdered and his bandmate thrown in prison for it, he has to navigate a series of elusive enemies and friends in order to find out what happened. Morgan's story unfolds through the viewpoints of a large ensemble of characters, from power-hungry goddess type characters to hardcore police chiefs.

The world-building in this story is great. The science fiction elements were both believable and interesting for a future world. The fantasy elements blended quite well. In a way, the book reminded me of the great Greek myths: strange, overseeing gods and goddesses who manipulate the hero into doing their bidding (some of them even share the names of the gods and goddesses, which is a fun bonus).

Another reviewer mentioned Easter Eggs. This book is full of them. I'm sure I missed 75%, but still felt smart about the others I got. If nothing else, this is a great adventure story for geeks and metalheads. It blends elements of sci-fi, mythology, fantasy, video games, and music into a mystery/adventure/romance. Added bonus: the women in this book are actually women, and there are several of them in various positions of power. These are smart women, and one of the most bad-ass female lead characters I've ever seen. Graybosch gets bonus points from me for making that happen.

The only reason I didn't give this book 5 stars is that I was often bogged down with the sheer number of characters and the constant shifting of viewpoints. I had a hard time keeping track of all of the characters, but kept pace with the 5 or 6 main ones. I think the story could have been a little tighter if some of them had been combined. Otherwise, this is a fun read.

Disclaimer: I received an ARC of this book in exchange for an honest review. Graybosch is one of my favorite authors to follow on Google+. That did not change the way I chose my rating, and I can honestly say this book fits well with other 4-star books I've reviewed.

Carrie Mansfield says

2.5 Stars

An ARC was provided by NetGalley in exchange for fair review

Short version: A science-fiction thriller where the enjoyable thriller is dragged down by science-fiction elements that never quite feel like they belong in the near-futuristic Earth that is clearly modeled from events in the present. This book would have benefited with a little more world building to give the reader a better idea of what we're dealing with.

Read my full review here: <http://gildedlady.wordpress.com/2014/...>

Marva says

This first book in the Starbreaker series is also Matthew Graybosch's first published. I'm quite happy there's a promise of more to come.

Morgan Stormrider is a Adversary (warrior) for the Phoenix Group, which is a quasi-legal private army of stone-cold badasses whose job is to uphold individual rights. This seems like a great idea, but Morgan is discovering he's actually a killing machine unleashed by the XC (executive committee of Phoenix) to get rid of those who may get in the way of the hidden agenda. I'm sure we'll learn more about this in the future books, but for now imagine the daevas (or devas) of Indian/Middle-eastern mythology manipulating the human population for their own nefarious purposes.

A few other things of note. Morgan and Naomi (Morgan's lady friend) are CPMD (congenital pseudofeline morphological disorder) which make them fast healing, strong, agile, and just all together better than your standard human. But is this a natural mutation? Or is it something the daevas have created to further their interests? Okay, it's something other, but read the book if you want to know what.

A special treat for me are the many easter eggs included for the reader. I'm sure I didn't pick up on all of them, but sufficient numbers to get a kick out of watching for them. Just a hint. Watch for references to Snow Crash, Monty Python, War Games, Star Wars, Fatal Attraction and many others.

What else to say? The writing is good with few errors. The main characters, Morgan and Naomi, are likable, superhuman, but flawed enough to allow the reader to empathize with them. I'm still a bit baffled by the battle between the daevas running Phoenix, but I think the next book will continue to uncover the motives and methods of the devious gods. And more importantly, can Morgan Stormrider be a worthy Adversary? I suspect he will.

This is a nicely original and unique science fiction novel with plenty enough to leave the reader eagerly awaiting the next in the series. Congratulations to Matthew Graybosch on a very strong first outing. I don't need to wish him success because I'm sure he will succeed on the strength of his imagination and skill at bringing it to life.

Shen Hart says

We at The Review Hart would like to disclose that we received this book for free in return for an honest review

The keyword for this Science Fantasy is 'more'. That is both good and something of a hindrance. The large cast is well put together with interesting and gritty characters of both genders. The plot is also packed with conflict and many layers of subplots. The problem came with the high level of detail that Graybosch used. Detail is a fantastic tool for bringing the world to life, but Graybosch was in the habit of not giving the reader enough credit. He often stated things that could have been left to the reader to discern and understand on their own. This then created a couple of places where it dragged due to the large cast and detail overload. The range of viewpoints could have been streamlined without harming the plot, but the fact remains that this is a great book that the author should be proud of.

Full review available [here](#)

Isis says

I would like to thank Curiosity Quills Press for giving me a copy of this e-book to read in exchange for an honest review. Though I received this e-book for free that in no way impacts my review. I personally give this book 3.5 stars, but as most rating systems require whole numbers only, I shall give it 3 stars on those sites.

Goodreads Blurb:

"All who threaten me die."

These words made Morgan Stormrider's reputation as one of the Phoenix Society's deadliest IRD officers. He served with distinction as the Society's avenger, and specialized in hunting down anybody who dared kill an Adversary in the line of duty. After a decade spent living by the sword, Morgan wants to bid a farewell to arms and make a new life with his friends and his music.

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First and foremost, I must share just how much I love the book's Disclaimer. It is chock full of sarcasm, letting the reader know just what they are getting themselves into. In my opinion the odds of the book being well worth reading go up dramatically when the Disclaimer states, "If you find any allegory or applicability, please consult a qualified professional for psychiatric evaluation and treatment."

As the first in a series, this book spent a fair bit of time setting up the story for the reader. Yet there was still a solid amount of action and emotion woven into the groundwork of the series. Though Morgan Stormrider is introduced as the central character, the main protagonist, yet the story certainly hasn't completely played out that way thus far. He is certainly central to the plot, it's simply that others are right there with him.

The character building is fairly tight, but given the number of characters I found it a bit challenging to keep track of them all. Unfortunately that problem remained all the way through to the end of the book for me, as I had to backtrack some pages to place a character referred to in the final pages. However if there aren't too many new characters introduced in the sequel I think it will be pretty easy to keep track of everyone and their relationships - as we understand them now. Of the current characters, for the most part they grow before our

eyes, gaining depth and maturity as the story unfolds. There are some who remain cloaked in mystery, but the one who remains the most mysterious is the main antagonist. But even this character drops a bomb or two on the readers, one of which lands almost at the very end. The new information caused enough of a stir for me that I have begun to rethink their role as the antagonist.

Set in a world that seems similar to ours, but about 100 years into the future, it appears to have reverted to more closely resemble the old caste system. Everyone has some sort of niche, all of which answer to a higher authority, with the highest for the average citizen being the Phoenix Society. Those within the Phoenix Society answer to the Executive Council, an almost entirely anonymous group of people. A group of people with no contrasting power to keep them in check. We already know what happens in systems lacking true checks and balances, so it seems easy to see where this is heading. . .

Though it took me a little while to get into the story, once I reached that point I was there for good. As I mentioned above, there are a lot of characters to keep track of, but once I got a feel for a few of the main characters and became invested in them I wasn't going anywhere. One thing I really liked, even though I'm still confused about the designation of some characters, was the use of Artificial Intelligence systems (AIs). It seemed all the characters had their own AIs to do all kinds of things for them; anything from ordering food or clothes, to running interference to allow the person they served some privacy. However there may have been some that did not use AIs, for reasons I'm hesitant to even guess at just now. I'll admit I found it interesting how Mr. Graybosch seems to have discovered a way around the ever present fear of AIs outgrowing humans and taking over the world.

The plot is solid, and the arc of the story was smooth and consistently engaging - once my attention had been caught that is. Aside from the sensation of being overwhelmed by the sheer number of characters, I enjoyed this book. I'm curious as to where this story will go from here, especially after reading the author's Acknowledgements at the end of the book. He referenced certain things that have left me planning what else to pay attention to in the future books of the series.

Katy says

Book Info: Genre: Speculative Fiction

Reading Level: Adult

Recommended for: fans of metal, scifi, fantastic worlds

Trigger Warnings: sexual assault, abuse of power, murder, violence, fighting

My Thoughts: First of all, I absolutely love the cover on this thing. It is just gorgeous. This is the first book in the Starbreakers series, and it was a terrific read. It is described at the Starbreakers series website as: "Androids unaware of their nature fight demons from outer space. It's *totally* metal." If I had known that little bit going into the book I might have caught on to what was going on that much more quickly, but it is eventually revealed to the careful reader. Additional stories that can provide background can also be found and read online by starting at the Starbreakers series website story page.

I love the complexity of the characters in this book. None of them are one-dimensional, nothing is really ever quite what it seems, and every time I started to figure out what might be going on, a new twist or kink was thrown in and I was right back at ground zero. It was beautifully done to keep the reader engaged with the story rather than frustrated. I particularly was amused by some of Claire's random ejaculations and swearing, which I am unable to add into the review due to Terms of Service issues at some of the sites where I post them. I did post some updates including some of them on Goodreads, which were apparently amusing enough that one of my friends told me she'd picked up a copy of the book based on my updates on only the

first 11 percent of the book.

The “metalness” of the stories is more obvious in the short stories available on the website, but it comes through a bit in this book, too. I think a lot of people will enjoy this book, so if it sounds like your sort of thing, definitely check it out.

Disclosure: I received a copy of this book from Curiosity Quills in exchange for an honest review. All opinions are my own.

Synopsis: *"All who threaten me die."*

These words made Morgan Stormrider's reputation as one of the Phoenix Society's deadliest IRD officers. He served with distinction as the Society's avenger, hunting down anybody who dared kill an Adversary in the line of duty. After a decade spent living by the sword, Morgan seeks to bid a farewell to arms and make a new life with his friends as a musician. Regardless of his faltering faith, the Phoenix Society has a final mission for Morgan Stormrider after a dictator's accusations make him a liability to the organization. He must put everything aside, travel to Boston, and prove he is not the Society's assassin. He must put down Alexander Liebenthal's coup while taking him alive.

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Lynda says

The first of a series, Graybosch's Without Bloodshed introduces a cast of super-powered enforcers licensed to kill by what emerges as a snakepit of upper ups emeshed in a latticework of intrigues. The protagonist, Morgan Stormrider, is a hunky killing machine with a homey domestic side. Cat lovers will enjoy both the actual feline pets and the cat-DNA aspect of Stormrider and fellow adversary Naomi. While it is a little hard to keep up with all the baddies blotting in the background, the friendships and romance sweep along consistently. The story is seasoned with Dickensian characters in supporting roles. I was particularly fond of the motorcycle gangs like the Fire Clowns. Oh, and there's a rock theme throughout, underpinned by Stormrider and love interests belonging to a band. The surprise ending is a set up for more to come. As the series is called Starbreaker one presumes the scope of cleaning up a city or two, in the first book, will be leaping to the astronomical.

Scribblescribe says

You know, initially I liked this book and I must admit that it's better than much of Stephen King that I've read, Dean Koontz and Joe Hill. However, it edges a bit close to mainstream tastes and cliches for my own liking. It suffers from a lack of world-building, an overidentification with cats, and not enough backstory. This makes it lack the depth I wish it had, however it did succeed in making me suspend disbelief.

For example, I have no idea what the world is like post-Nationfall. Graybosch never bothered to explain this and there are many unanswered questions such as Who is Imaginos? What is the deal with the Executive Council? Who the heck are Amellech, Astoreth and Thagirion? What are asura simulators vs. devas? What the heck is up with CPMD other than to let the author express his liking of cats?

Back to something good. The author managed to make me look up several words/terms/concepts in wikipedia and dictionary.com while reading. This is good, this means the author challenges the reader. I urge him to keep doing this to stretch the reader a little bit.

I found the attempt at trying to mimic humanity lacking. The character building was poorly done. I hate the cardboard cutouts of Naomi and Morgan. And also the oversexualization of women in this novel. There's this myth that women control men through sex and several women such as astoreth, claire and Thagirion (I can't spell her name) do this, as if their only power lies in what they can give men. There were also several times that women in the book conceded power to men, such as when Naomi was fighting against Thistlewood and Morgan ex deus machina style came to save her at the nick of time, and also when Thagirion was fighting Imaginos...and conceded to his power and then submitted to him sexually. Also the author falls into the trap of only being able to describe women in sexual terms, such as Thagirion's milky white back and her cascading hair. Does he do that with the men? No, so it's clearly meant to sexualize women. Is it necessary? No. It's sometimes funny how sexism works subtly in works of fiction, perhaps even unawares to the authors themselves.

The author comes close to the complex political maneuvering of G.R.R. Martin's Westeros, but doesn't quite hit the mark. This is a shame really because there is a lot of political maneuvering, hidden motives and actions going on behind the curtains so it could become like this, but not unless more worldbuilding, research and character building (to emphasize individuation between characters) is done.

Another strength of the author's is that he is skilled at sex scenes. he accurately employs the senses of the readers.

Overall I remain unsure of whether I would like to read the prequel to this novel or the sequel. The novel seemed to hover too close to cliches for my liking, and yet the storyline is very interesting. I may pick up another book of his. We'll see.

In anycase Graybosch deserves to be more well known despite his faults because he is much better than other popular novelists I've read. I'd give him a chance if I were you despite my gripes and reservations. The elements held within this novel are original and fresh. It's the kind of book that'll leave you thinking long after you've closed it. And me? Well, I just think I'm a picky eater when it comes to books myself. So, give it a chance and then make your mind up for yourself.

Ryan Toxopeus says

Matthew Graybosch's science fantasy is an excellent book, and I highly recommend it to anyone. The pace is

quick, it's full of intrigue, the plot is complex, and Claire might just be my favourite female character of all time. I'm not sure if I should characterize her as a major minor character, or a minor major character, because the cast is quite large. There are a lot of heads you'll be in throughout the course of the story, and that can get a little confusing at points. It's interesting seeing what everyone's thinking/doing, but I think some of them might have been better left cut out to further increase tension for the reader (I found Chapter 1 killed what could have been a great surprise at the end). Furthermore, several characters go by more than one name, and they aren't simple names. I'm still not sure I can tease apart all the characters.

The one thing that made the reading experience strange was all the references to movies/music from previous decades, considering this story takes place in the 2100's. At first I thought perhaps it was a character or two who had a weird fixation with the distant past, but as more and more characters appeared to have knowledge of our own past (but apparently not our present), it felt more and more strange. Why would people have knowledge of an obscure bit of metal history, yet there is no mention of more modern day musicians? Perhaps because, ultimately, the repetitive nature of our current music industry is forgettable. Another thought hit me, and that was perhaps more modern movements were lost in Nationfall. But I couldn't come up with a reasonable answer for why that would have happened. In the end, the question remains. How many people in our current decade have a working memory of art from 100 years ago? Very few, I'd wager. Perhaps this will be answered in future books, or maybe not.

Either way, I eagerly await the next book for the masterful way Matthew Graybosch weaves the lives and plots of the characters together.

William Hahn says

Get ready to have your mind bent!

Is this genre-shredding tale about technology? Or magic? Maybe it's a rockumentary or fan-fic for Moto Mag or even Guns and Ammo. I read the whole thing and have no idea. But "Without Bloodshed" is fun, smart, and will make you think.

After reading it, I can't even say it's truly dystopian, because I've come to believe that this tale reveals so much of the author's personal vision for an ideal anarcho-atheistic alternate future. Sure, governments and religions across the world have fallen, ending traditions that went back millenia; but naturally, Al-Jazeera is still with us! And some of the old gods- devised in the spitting image of what Arthur C. Clarke said about magic and technology- have spent all that time alongside various flavorings of the human race that have emerged, evolved, or been built in recent years. It's a murder mystery, a conspiracy, a police thriller, and probably seven or eight other plot-lines at the same time. Just brace yourself, that's my advice.

There were some things that rubbed me the wrong way, of course. I can't sign on to some of the values Mr. Graybosch espouses- at times with a paper-thin cover of words- but I cheerfully admit, his worldview is thought-provoking and consistent. If I had to pick one theme for "Without Bloodshed" I would say it's all about proper behavior. The heroes don't need outside authorities to tell them how to control their anger, persevere in the face of conspiracy, maintain loyalty to friends or sacrifice in the service of those less powerful. The appropriate manner is constantly on display- restraint in the face of tension, even-handed tolerance of gender, sexual orientation and semi-race. At times I think the author stays on his soapbox too long- there's not much about Morgan Stormrider's actual deeds that either King Arthur or Leonidas would quibble with, despite or because of all the outside authority they yielded to.

My biggest problem with the story was grammatical, but not in the way you'd think (the book is very clean and well-edited, and the font is gorgeous). But in telling the tale, we read of private chat/texts, off-camera narration and personal thoughts all in italics. That format-choice can't bear the weight of all that's put on it, so I had to constantly stop and check back to see which was meant, and whose mind I was in.

In a more technical vein, I think Graybosch chooses some odd moments for exposition. When the pariah ronin faces down against the degraded biker gang, and everyone's been lied to, nothing could be more clear than that folks are about to die in numbers. Why, then, would this be the best time to hear about the specific

brand of the biker's hogs, why their manufacture made them poor sellers and how difficult they might be to fix? But after all my whining I had to shut up, because I couldn't tell without Googling whether this was an existing cycle or not.

Point being- Mr. Graybosch knows his stuff- about weapons, advanced tech, politics and personal morality. He's wound them together in a fun epic tale, with great stakes and imagery. And it will definitely make you think.

Jennifer Povey says

Pretty good read - it oscillates between cyberpunk and fantasy. It has cat people - but they aren't quite the overdone trope.

Also, a decent romantic subplot and plenty of sword fights.

There's also some libertarian propaganda in there - it's clear the author likes the idea of a world without governments, or at least a world where people only sign up for government if they want to. It's also clear he knows corruption might get in the way of that dream.

A decently fun read. Good characters and I have a weakness for genre-bending and cyberpunk.

Matthew Cox says

Without Bloodshed is an engrossing tale of intrigue, honor, loyalty, and love set in an Earth different from our own only in the existence of powerful enigmatic immortals. These beings influence events among mortals beyond the awareness of humanity, an aeons-old war against ancient 'gods.' The political events and satirical take on human nature could very well happen in reality in not-so-many years.

Known for being the deadly hand of the untouchable Phoenix Society, Morgan Stormrider has a reputation for being lethal. As a member of an organization responsible for upholding what remains of law in a world rebuilding itself in the wake of governmental collapse, he wields absolute authority - but at a heavy price.

His latest assignment requires him to bring his target in alive, a tactic he is not often wont to employ. Someone knows this, and has chosen him because of it. This task is further complicated as the line between ally and adversary blurs, while foes in high places hope for his downfall.

Matthew Graybosh has created a richly detailed world filled with intricate characters caught up in a psychological chess game with deadly consequences. Sprinkled with liberal references to the heavy metal that inspired his world, Without Bloodshed is a must-read for any fans of music in the vein of Blue Oyster Cult and Queensrÿche, among others. His characters are believable and complex, the conspiracy deep, and the setting meticulous. It is obvious that he spent great time and effort crafting both story and setting, effort that shines through in his writing.

Anyone fond of metal, video games, technology, science fiction, or anime should add Without Bloodshed to their collection.

Kasey Cocoa says

Wonderful world building and blending that keeps readers engaged and wanting to learn more. The characters, while superhuman, are also flawed and well fleshed out making them easy to like and connect with. The plot is interesting with unique flavor and fast paced. It's a difficult book to put down once you start reading it. Very well written with only a few minor flaws. I'd recommend this to anyone who has ever enjoyed a sci-fi book. A free copy was provided by the publisher in exchange for an honest unbiased review. Read more reviews, author interviews and enter giveaways on my blog.

Eric says

In the future, nations have fallen. Independent city states and confederacies dot the North American landscape, supported by the Phoenix Society, an organization dedicated to protect the rights of individuals.

Mysterious people manipulate and marshal their forces. A drug runner has taken control of Boston, backed by armed bike gangs. In the middle of it all, Morgan Stormrider is trying hard to hang on to his ideals, and his faith in the society.

This book was interesting in a lot of ways. The actors behind the scenes, their abilities and histories are all heavily influenced by ancient Vedic, Kabbalistic and Gnostic religious teachings. It's woven deftly through the narrative, there to be seen but not called out.

The story itself is engaging. The choice to put Stormrider, an enforcer, into a position where he must succeed with at little violence as possible amplifies the tension. The choice to show us what the actors behind the scenes are up to keeps the story rolling when the mundane details might have bogged down. The inclusion of several characters whose motivations and moral stance are murky at best was also refreshing. The romantic subplot, while never really in doubt and thus not really a source of conflict, was sweet and sincere and a nice palate cleanser.

The two major downfalls as I see them are this:

1. Past perfect. The author chose not to use the past perfect tense, which causes some confusion in a few places, and makes the text read awkwardly in others. With the entire story in the past tense, it wasn't always immediately clear when events being described were further in the past.
2. Pop culture references. This is definitely a subjective thing, but I always have a hard time believing that people in the future (2112 in this case - I see what you did there) would commonly reference 20th century culture. Maybe it would be more well known than our current familiarity with the 19th century, due to digital archiving and the like. But the number of people quoting Monty Python or Queensrych would still be very small. They'll have been replaced with other cultural touchstones by then. This caused several serious cases of eye rolling and lack of immersion. I find this to be a common problem with indie books set in the relatively near future.

All in all, it was a good read, with enjoyable characters, a tight plot, and great world building. I'll definitely be getting the series.
