



Ghosts of the Citadel

Jen Williams

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Part I of THE COPPER PROMISE

It is said that the Citadel is haunted, and that anyone foolish enough to enter will never return. When a mysterious nobleman offers them a small fortune to explore its depths, sellswords Wydrin and Sebastian decide they can afford to be a little foolish - it's a chance for adventure, riches, and they might even have a tale or two to tell in the tavern afterwards. But they will soon discover that sometimes there is truth in rumour...

The complete novel, THE COPPER PROMISE, is available from Headline in Trade Paperback and Ebook in February 2014

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Ghosts of the Citadel Details

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Author : Jen Williams

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From Reader Review Ghosts of the Citadel for online ebook

Drusillah says

So far it was very interesting and I can't wait to see what happens next! I liked the writing style and it felt natural. Sometimes the dialogues or descriptions were slightly confusing, but I'll give it 5 stars anyway because it kept my interest.

Matt Dent says

It was in a conversation with Jennifer Williams herself where I discussed the nature of reviewing; that reviews of books that most people give are by nature likely to be positive, as if a book is bad most people would put it down and not finish it. So in the first sentence, I've already made two things clear: that I know the author, and that I liked this book.

Quest fantasy and I haven't historically had the best relationship. For a long while I regarded it as stagnant, boring and unoriginal. I think it might have been the elves. It probably didn't have too good an opinion of me either, but since I'm a badass I never really cared. Two things have conspired to change that opinion: HBO's TV adaptation of Game of Thrones, and Bethesda's life-consuming open-world fantasy game Skyrim.

But to the book. The Copper Promise: Ghosts of the Citadel, follows a motley crew of adventurers entering the titular citadel for various reasons of their own. The crippled Lord Frith is searching for the key to regaining his castle, whilst mercenaries Sebastian (the Ynnsmouth Knight) and Wydrin (the Copper Cat) hunt for gold and riches. The synopsis seems pretty standard for quest fantasy, but the hero (if there is one in particular) isn't a farm boy, and there doesn't seem to be an evil emperor in sight.

Where it comes of its own is quite obvious and simple; it's rather brilliantly written. The characters in particular shine, and all of them feel like real people. I think Wydrin is my favourite; rather than being a wilting princess or Amazonian wall of muscle, she's an actual person. This is what fantasy so often misses out on, and characters become subservient to the plot. Rather, the plot should be driven onwards by the characters, by their personality and motivations. Williams clearly gets this.

Another endearing factor is that it's a novella. So it's short. In a genre world that seems dominated by sprawling epic tomes, a little brevity is like a cool breeze on a summer's day. There are fewer words devoted to info-dumping, and more to in-story exposition. I finished this book in about a day, primarily because I couldn't put it down. It was engaging, exciting, and left me looking very much forward to the next installment.

If you got a Kindle for Christmas (you lucky thing!) then I would heartily recommend you give The Copper Promise: Ghosts of the Citadel a read.

Laura Lam says

A highly promising start...I'll definitely continue with the next installment!

Nicholas Butler says

Look if rip-roaring, hell for leather , boudy and salaciousness fantasy and epic , epic characters are the sort of thing you read to avoid looking up from your morning commute then BUY this now.

James Sundquist says

Well written but not what I expected, or really wanted. Bit too much of a D&D dungeon raid but the characters are cool. Next part might be better but my To-read list will go on without it for now.

Michelle says

Before I started reading this book, I read a few reviews on it. I cannot agree with them. I got really disappointed, especially after reading a few blog posts from Jennifer Williams, which are quite well written.

The only reason to why I finished the book is that it is short and will count towards my goal for books read this year.

I didn't really get any proper feelings for the characters, as they are very superficial (and especially Wydrin got on my nerves quite quickly). There are quite a few plot holes.

And the fact that I could figure out what would happen before it did most of the time didn't leave any room for surprises.

I'm definitely not gonna read this book again.

Gray says

Exciting, intelligent and very entertaining novella. D&D-esque adventure with good characters, fine worldbuilding, some very cool action scenes, and doses of humour. Sparked memories of being immersed in the old Atari ST version of FTL's brilliant Dungeon Master.

On to Part II: 'Children of the Fog'!

Colin Barnes says

Ghosts of the Citadel is the first of a four-part serialised collection of novellas. This harkens back to serialised fiction of old. There are more and more rumblings around the interwebs of how this is the future of short-form fiction on eReaders. After reading this, I can say for certain I hope that is true.

There used to be a time when reading was about having fun, exploring new worlds and being enchanted by massive freakin' fantasy creatures. We still have that to some degree, but things are so much more serious

now. (See Game of Thrones as an example of this 'serious fantasy' — my eyebrows are knitted together and my voice is low like Brian Blessed when I say that. Grrr, serious.) This is all fine and dandy. I, too, like a good Grrr, serious fantasy novel every now and then, but it's nice to contrast that with pure unadulterated fun.

Of the story itself, we follow a trio of adventurers into the aforementioned Citadel. Jennifer Williams starts the story with a little bit of a prologue in chapter 1 to set up a bit of the world and lay down a few story lines. I was gripped from the very first page. Despite this novella following pulp traditions, there is no lack of skill in the prose, imagery or craft. In Lord Frith, Jennifer expertly creates a character with a multitude of motivations and goals (Can't say too much about the beginning as it would spoil the story), so that when he pops up later in the story, it all ties together perfectly.

We are then taken into a vignette scene of true dungeon-crawling wonderfulness with two comic characters, Chednit and Gallo who get into a spot of bother in the eerie gloom. From this scene onwards we get tons of marvellous atmosphere, tension, and quite often, hilarity.

We then zoom to a frothy, swill laden tavern where we meet the two cornerstones of the story, and the main character in which the series is named after: The Copper Cat, aka Wydrin. She is a spiky, charming, dagger-wielding go-getter who has burned her way into my subconscious along with her disgraced Knight, Sebastian. The dialogue throughout between these adventurers is witty, snappy and a joy to read. Jennifer clearly knew her characters well when she wrote this, as they leap off the page with fully formed three dimensions. Wydrin will soon be a classic fantasy character and one of my favourites and probably yours, too.

Ghosts of the Citadel, being a novella, is a short read. I completed it in two sessions and loved every minute of it. There's great pay off at the end, plenty of daring-do, and wondrous adventure throughout. The pacing of the story is perfect. We have great fight scenes with frenetic energy, then calmer scenes that are no less enjoyable. Jennifer proudly claims some classic tropes in this dungeon-crawler and twists them in her own style which makes for an incredibly enjoyable and believable world. I cannot wait to get my hands on the next instalment; these novellas are going to make a wonderful collection, and I heartily recommend you check this one out.

Heide Goody says

This is a fantasy quest novel, but what sets it aside from others is the language and the characterization. It starts with a (fairly violent) bang, and sets up some compelling motivation for the mysterious Lord Frith, who we follow through the book, never quite sure what he's really up to, but we can be certain that it will lead to trouble...

We meet the adventurers shortly afterwards, who are "swords for hire". What's truly delightful about this is that Wydrin, the female one, looks innocent, has numerous bad habits, and is the legendary (and deadly) Copper Cat, bristling with knives.

There's lots of humour and snappy exchanges between Wydrin and Sebastian, (Knight and side-kick) I'm so pleased that this is the start of a series, because Wydrin is a wonderful character that I want to see in other situations.

Phil says

Fantastic novella, a return to the Pulp Fiction greats I used to read in my youth. Brilliant characterisation, an

interesting setting and some flashes of lively bater between the characters.

Ren Warom says

I haven't read any fantasy in the longest time. There are reasons for that. Fifty book long cycles where each book is less a novel and more a stolen relic from Stonehenge (collect enough and you can build your own Machu Picchu if you can find a big enough plot of land, say, Russia) legions of elves, dwarves, witches and fair maids in revealing gowns and boring, predictable plots involving ordinary young men thrust into greatness. So imagine my delight when I find that not only is the Copper Promise a slender, pert little snippet of a novella but lo, not one heaving bosom, Dwarf, Elf or lowly farmhand who discovers he's the Next Big Thing in the Kingdom in sight! What bliss.

Instead we have the redoubtable, drink-swilling, more knives than you can shake a herd of Ninja at Wydrin with her dry wit and her Nanny Ogg-esque fondness for a jolly good raunchy sing-song. Fighting alongside her is Sebastian, the Knight with a shady-ish past. Now knights often appear in such quests but he's no tired, bitter, desperately grizzled lump of muscle whose sword seems magically ensorcelled to fell even the largest dragon just by looking at it. He's engagingly and reliably human, just as Wydrin is. These two make mistakes. They slip up, trust when perhaps they shouldn't and don't always look before they leap. It makes them likeable. Better than that, it makes them feel like old friends you could hit a brain-pickler of a pub crawl with, get into heap loads of marvellous trouble and still laugh about it the next day even as your face slowly blackens to the hue of a rotten banana and Wydrin posts up wood prints of you flashing your bits on the top of The Constipated Rooster.

Now the most unusual character, and the central character in the this first part of The Copper Promise, is Lord Frith. He's a bundle of contradictions if ever I saw one, in looks as well as psychology, but it's all believable and he has definite, chilling reasons for the way he is. His single-minded drive is gradually revealed as the story goes on until we find out that there is nothing he will not do, nothing he will refuse to suffer, in order to make right what was done. We are left, in truth, with the impression that it is Frith who will cause more problems for Wydrin and Sebastian than they (or rather Wydrin) could ever find for themselves. Despite his somewhat dogged and unrepentant single-mindedness often making him terse and unreliable I found myself liking Frith enormously and feeling intense sympathy for his cause. He's quite the character and I think he'll only get more interesting as the story grows which makes him nigh on irresistible.

In short, and in brief (don't look so relieved), this is a rollicking good ride of a novella and, whether you're still trying to build that Machu Picchu (I'm sure the Russians whose land you're trying to usurp aren't too chuffed) or whether you gave it up after becoming trapped in your own house by an ever growing mountain of tome-age, you will love The Copper Promise. It's fresh, original, full to bursting of wonderful writing and I for one look forward to reading the next part so I can find out what happens to Frith, Wydrin and Sebastian.

The Library Ladies says

(Originally reviewed at thelibraryladies.com.)

A few days ago, poor Kate was having to hear the long tale of woe from me regarding my latest book choice “The Copper Promise.” I remember specifically mentioning that I couldn’t quite put my finger on what the problem was that I was having with the book itself since it featured many of my favorite elements (a spunky heroine, a team adventure, strong high fantasy setting, etc). But for some reason the pacing felt off.

Well, the other day I was doing a bit of research into the book itself when I had a big “Aha!” moment: This book is a compilation of four novellas that were bound together to make the book “The Copper Promise!” It was really a light bulb moment, and now, with this in mind, I am going to move forward with reading/reviewing the book as it was originally published as four separate but serialized stories.

Right off the bat, it was a much more enjoyable experience re-approaching this series as novellas. Read on its own, “Ghost of the Citadel” is an action-packed, snappy-paced adventure story featuring three misfit characters. Tonally, this novella is closer to some of the fantasy of old that was much more campy and poppy. The world-building features classic monsters, fabled wars between mages and gods, and a mysterious Citadel that is the temptation (and seemingly always the death) of adventures throughout the realm.

Our adventures feature Wydrin and her partner Sebastian, a well-established mercenary duo on the look out for their next job. And a fallen lord, Aaron Firth, whose family was murdered and was run off his lands after suffering gruesome torture at the hands of his captor.

As this was a shorter novella, readers are thrown into the action with very little back story for any of these characters. We know a bit more about Firth from a prologue featuring him, but we pick up Wydrin and Sebastian straight from the tavern. I’m intrigued by the hints of backstory for them both. Sebastian heralds from a mountainous realm where he was once a member of an illustrious knights force, but was discharged for unknown reasons. Wydrin seems to have a simple reputation for being one of the best mercenaries out there Wydrin is the type of character who is right up my alley, so I was a bit disappointed by lack of backstory (even hints!) that we were given for her, other than that she is great at her job. Firth was honestly my least favorite character, but I feel like the series is setting him up for a redemption arc, of sorts, so I will wait to see what comes of that in the next three stories.

The story ends on a cliffhanger, so beware of that. But the cliffhanger, and the arc of the story itself, all feels so much more natural when read as an individual novella rather than a section of one book, so I strongly recommend trying to find the ebooks and reading the series in that version.
