



Of Bone and Thunder

Chris Evans

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Apocalypse Now meets The Lord of the Rings in a bold new fantasy from the acclaimed author of the Iron Elves trilogy, filled with "heroic action that keeps fans coming back" (Publishers Weekly).

Channeling the turbulent period of the Vietnam War and its ruthless pitting of ideologies, cultures, generations, and races against each other, military historian and acclaimed fantasy writer Chris Evans takes a daring new approach to the traditional world of sword and sorcery by thrusting it into a maelstrom of racial animus, drug use, rebellion, and a growing war that seems at once unwinnable and with no end in sight. In this thrilling epic, right and wrong, country and honor, freedom and sacrifice are all put to the ultimate test in the heart of a dark, bloody, otherworldly jungle.

In this strange, new world deep among the shadows under a triple-canopy jungle and plagued by dangers real and imagined, soldiers strive to fulfill a mission they don't understand and are ill-equipped to carry out. And high above them, the heavy rush of wings slashing through the humid air herald a coming wave of death and destruction, and just possibly, salvation.

Of Bone and Thunder Details

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Author : Chris Evans

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From Reader Review Of Bone and Thunder for online ebook

Mark says

An interesting concept, well written and reseached.

loved the dragons and how they worked. Really well thought out.

Wanted more character driven storyline.

a 3.5 star read.

Whitley Birks says

See more reviews on my blog

When I read “Vietnam-era style warfighting with dragons,” my first thought was SIGN ME RIGHT UP!

What I got was “Vietnam War, with random elements replaced with dragons.” Which is a subtle but significant difference.

A lot of the disconnect in this book came from the fact that it wanted so hard to just be the Vietnam War, but it was still set in a pre-industrial society. This cause a huge amount of dissonance when it came to bullshit like “eh, crossbows are basically rifles, right?” and “yeah, they’re sending town criers over to report on the war.” (No, really, I almost rolled my eyes right out of my head at that line.) A lot of the stuff that’s iconic to the Vietnam War simply does not translate without all of the history and societal/economic/industrial changes that led up to the Vietnam War. And, really, a historian should know that already. The more I read, the more it grated on me that all this incongruent elements were being mashed together in a setting that couldn’t contain them. It’s really a shame, because it sort of tried to make “60s era setting with magic,” it just couldn’t actually go all the way and do it.

Add to that, the book didn’t really have a plot. It was, essentially, a series of vignettes about various “cool” things. “Let’s spend a whole chapter on using old dragons for panoeceanic travel! Why a whole chapter? Well, so you can hear about all the cool details I made up! What does it lead to? Um...some guy arrives at the place he was going to. WoooooOOOoooOOooOOoo.” It’s just that, over and over again. Little episodes that don’t amount to anything or build on each other. There’s no actual story in this thing, at least, not in the part of it that I read. There might be a story eventually, but if you can’t start your book at the start of your story, I’m not sticking around to indulge you.

For being what it is, it’s not really bad. The bits are interesting, so if all you want is to read about gritty warfighting with crossbows and magic, this’ll do it for you. But I really need something more continuous to hold my attention. Alas.

Raven Tiger {Paint me like one of your 19th century gothic heroines!} says

DisclaimerThis ARC was given to me for free in exchange for an honest review from Netgalley.

I really do believe this book is a combo of a high fantasy (LOTR is not an accurate description, but still a very good high fantasy) and Apocalypse Now! (though I have never seen the movie). The book did have a modern day warfare feel to it.

So YMMV but I liked it, even though it took me forever to get through it.

Steve says

I was disappointed with this book. It isn't poorly written, but it is very clichéd, full of typical war-related military trope (even though it is set in a world of dragons and wizards).

The book is obviously based on the Vietnam War (as indicated in the blurb), with very little deviation except for what was left out. Everything in the book has a direct parallel in actual history: JFK, the CIA, the Chicago mafia, the racial tension among the soldiers, even women's lib makes an appearance with women back home are protesting by burning their brooms (yes, seriously). There is no reason given for this war to even occur. The soldiers are there fighting, disgruntled and questioning why, but no reason was ever really given. Magic is used in weaponry, communications, and medicine, and what you end up with is a real war interpreted through the lens and imagery of fantasy.

My biggest issue with this book is that the writer simply transcribes actual events through his "fantasy" filter, but fails to include the primary antagonists: there's no "fantasy" USSR or China, and there are no manipulators behind the curtain, pulling the puppet strings of the Viet Cong. This was surprising, considering that every other aspect of the war is included, down to mundane details like drug smuggling, brothels, and the dangers and discomforts of helicopters.

I came very close to pitching this into the DNF pile. This book wasn't poorly written, but it really failed to keep my attention. It didn't draw me in, wanting to read more. I put it down without the desire to pick it back up again for a day or two.

Only recommended for those with an intense desire to read an "new" interpretation of the Vietnam War.

Janet says

I had a bit of trouble getting into this book, but once I got rolling I really liked it. If you are a fan of military fantasy, this is likely the book for you. I thought the characters, the weaponry, and the world building were all pretty top notch. I thought at times there were a few too many characters, but for the most part they paid off well in the end. The two major downsides of this book I felt were Carny, who I think had too many sections that should have gone to Jawn, and the fact that this book needs to constantly remind you it is about the Vietnam War. It hits the "we are in it for our brothers in arms!" VERY hard at times. But I think there will be an audience who really likes that aspect of it, and I think the author did what he set out to do.

Definitely a fresh world and take on a classic Tolkien-esque fantasy world that I can see people who are fans the military aspects of books like the Malazan series enjoying.

Nikki says

Received to review via Netgalley.

Once I read some reviews pointing out this is essentially a novel about a fantasy version of Vietnam, “slyts” and all, I couldn’t unsee it. I found it surprisingly absorbing at first, though I’m generally not that interested in war stories. There are some amazing bits of description — mostly gross, but it still makes you really feel the world in which the characters live, the heat and dirt, the discomfort of riding a dragon, the futility of the fight.

But... the dull grind of it started to get to me. When they talk about this being anything like Tolkien, they really mean just because it’s got dragons. It’s basically a very thinly veiled version of Vietnam. Everything’s dirty and futile and there’s no justice in it. I couldn’t keep track of the characters, given their fantasy-fied names (which made me wonder if Evans actually bothered thinking about the language these people speak and what their naming conventions are, because I couldn’t really detect patterns), and I just... lost interest.

If you’re into war novels, though, it might be more up your alley. It’s definitely more Abercrombie than Tolkien in terms of tone, though. If you’re reading this for the dragons... to me, they were just a prop, a way of making the Vietnam War into a fantasy war.

Originally posted here.

Mpauli says

ARC copy received from NetGalley in exchange for a review

Of Bone and Thunder takes us into a fantasy setting that is heavily inspired by the Vietnam War.

The Kingdom is the dominant force in the known world and is inhabited by humans and dwarves. The Kingdom occupies Luitox, a jungle realm full of goblin/faery like people that are just called slyts by the humans. As there is unrest and the first signs of rebellion within the slyt community the kingdom sends troops to deal with those issues. But as most of the slyts don't act hostile and the troops are stationed within an endless jungle, it proves rather difficult to actually spot an enemy as the slyts only attack guerilla style.

In this setting we're following a bunch of characters, but four of them are the most prominent ones.

We're introduced to Luitox by Jawn Rathim, a thaum (think mage) who is a new recruit filled with illusions of grandeur and heavily influenced by the ideology of the kingdom.

On the ground level we're also following a shield (think unit) of 40 soldiers.

A Shield consists of a Shiled Leader (think Luitenant), a Lead Crossbowman (think Sergeant) and the normal soldiers.

One of those soldiers is Carny, a man who doesn't live up to his full potential and who tries to escape the horrors of war by taking a lot of drugs.

Another pov we get into Red Shield is Lead Crossbowman Listowk, who has to deal with all the stupid things his soldiers do and all the crazy things the higher-ups decide.

The last main character is Vorly, the Flock Commander of Onyx Brigade. He commands a flock of 6 huge black dragons, who are mainly used for transport.

The novel itself is seperated in three parts and each part is a singular event in the war and is loosely connected by the characters and subtle plot development.

But overall this is not an epic fantasy that wants to tell a great coherent tale, it's more of a military fantasy that focuses on the very personal reasons of every character to fight.

Your enjoyment of the novel will most likely depend on how fascinating you find the Vietnam scenario and how much fun you have in looking for little similarities, cause the books is full of well researched details. Let me give you two examples for this:

The racial tension between white and african-american soldiers is shown at the example of the dwarves in *Of Bone and Thunder*. The dwarves were slaves for the humans and only recently have been granted full citizenship. So the dwarven soldiers still carry a grudge towards the humans and many human soldiers still see them as slaves a only call them "mules".

Another example would be that at one point a town crier from the kingdom is flown in to observe the troops and the battles, so she can go back to the kingdom and report what she saw at the front.

This is of course in reference to embedded journalism, that was very common during the Vietnam War.

For me this was a really fresh scenario and I had fun to spot all the little similarities. So, if the setting speaks to you, that novel will be very interesting, if not than you won't enjoy it as much as I did.

Oh, and one final thing. You might want to give this a try, if you're a lover of dragons, cause the dragons are depicted very interestingly as quite raw and wild beasts, that heat up their bodies to produce the energies to fly and have to be cooled down by ground crews, when they land. And there are some very memorable dragon scenes in it that should be worth the time of every dragon lover.

Link to the video review on my YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-jAZ...>

Benni says

Review: <http://bennitheblog.com/bookbiters/of...>

The Kingdom has waged war on Luitox, a land situated in an otherworldly jungle and populated by people called "Slyts." More than three years into the war, there's still no end in sight. Although the Kingdom has power in numbers and continues to send in troops, the Slyts' guerilla-style warfare has all but stalled significant progress.

Billed as "*Apocalypse Now* meets *The Lord of the Rings*," *Of Bone and Thunder* draws inspiration from the Vietnam War. The book excels in capturing the hell that is war, something one rarely sees in fantasy literature. The colorful dialogue and slang take you down into to the trenches. The clash between the idealistic new recruits ("fawns") and the more seasoned soldiers calls to question the motivations and efficacy of the war. Magic is not magic, but rather "thaumology"—science that the general populace does

not understand. Those called “wizards” are actually battlefield medics.

In addition, readers disappointed with the sparse information regarding dragons in Marie Brennan’s *The Natural History of Dragons* can take comfort in getting up close and personal with the dragons of *Of Bone and Thunder*.

Despite the above achievements, *Of Bone and Thunder* fails to reach its full potential. Just as the Vietnam War seemed interminable, so did *Of Bone and Thunder*. Whereas *Apocalypse Now* found focus in its distinct mission to kill Colonel Kurtz, *Of Bone and Thunder* relies on a goal more traditionally found in the fantasy oeuvre: winning the war. The problem with such a vague, generalized goal is that there’s little narrative progression for the reader to cling onto. As we stumble from skirmish to skirmish, battle to battle, aside from admiring the gritty-but-gorgeous writing of Chris Evans, there’s little to do but ask, what’s the point? (And as far as I can tell, the point isn’t that it’s all pointless.) The parallels between the Kingdom’s war and the Vietnam War are made early in the book, and unfortunately, the bulk of the book merely restates the same theses or are at best variations of the same theme. There’s no commentary or insight in *Of Bone and Thunder* that wasn’t better conveyed in *Apocalypse Now* or that movie’s inspiration, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.

In fact, the ending to *Of Bone and Thunder*, as well as its treatment of major characters as heroes (albeit with shades of grey), undercuts the questionable nature of the war. Although a last-minute surprise development raises some more questions, those questions are promptly and summarily extinguished. It’s as if the book decides to split the difference between the endings of *Apocalypse Now* and *The Lord of the Rings*, which unfortunately leaves *Of Bone and Thunder* worse off than either.

If the book’s strengths—the writing and worldbuilding—are enough for you, *Of Bone and Thunder* is definitely worth the read. But the book’s ambitious setup left me wanting more: more narrative direction, more thematic cohesion, more unique commentary above and beyond that from its sources of inspiration.

Additional note: I received my review copy on July 28, 2014, only 8 days after author Chris Evans wrote that he was still tweaking the final pages. As the final pages were quite rough in quality (especially the dialogue and a tonally dissonant sex scene), I will refrain from commenting further on those pages prior to checking the finished product.

I received a digital review copy of the book via Netgalley, courtesy of Gallery Books.

Review: <http://bennitheblog.com/bookbiters/of...>

Bob Milne says

Not having read Chris Evans before, I picked this up based solely on the cover blurb of "Apocalypse Now meets The Lord of the Rings." It was a bit of a calculated risk, given that I'd exhausted my patience with Vietnam war stories way back in the 80s, when just about every TV action drama had that one big 'event' episode full of jungle flashbacks, but the concept of a gritty, realistic, magical fantasy intrigued me.

I must say, the chapters that open *Of Bone and Thunder: A Novel* is absolutely remarkable. They offer up a painfully realistic approach to riding dragons into battle, one that completely strips the experience of the magic and the awe that we've come to expect. Evans makes us feel the heat beneath the dragon's scales, the punishing wind that threatens to peel us off its back, the stomach-churning acrobatics of living flight, and the hot, wet vomit splashing across your face from the passenger in front of you. More than that, he forces us to

appreciate the logistics of training these magnificent beasts, and the perils of pushing them beyond their limits.

From there, Evans thrusts us deep into the jungle, for what I found to be the weakest part of the tale. We get a lot (and I do mean a lot) of detail regarding jungle warfare tactics, the politics of war, and the challenges of being lost and alone at the front, surrounded on all sides by enemies that you can't see or hear . . . until it's too late. That alone was okay, but the constant reminders of inflexible authority structures, men losing their minds, rampant drug addiction, and quandaries of faith and morality simply got to be too much for me. It got to the point where I dreaded any scene that opened on the mountain.

Fortunately, Carny's jungle scenes are only one-third of the story, and we get two much more interesting story arcs with Jawn and Breeze. Jawn Rathim is an idealistic Thaum (i.e. wizard) who volunteers for one tour of duty out of a sense of . . . well, duty. It's through him and his experiences that we get to know the 'enemy' as just another group of people, little different from the human heroes/oppressors. He gets tangled up with the fantasy equivalent of the CIA, adding another Vietnam parallel to the story. Breeze is another Thaum, working on changing the nature of warfare with her magic. It's through her that we get to understand the challenges of fighting over long distances, in unfamiliar terrain, with equipment that's either broken or tired. She also serves as something of an impartial observer, exposing us to the more personal conflicts of the battlefield, such as with the Dwarven conscripts who never let anybody around them forget their history of racial slavery.

As is often the case with real-world conflicts, it's often hard to tell the heroes from the villains - and just because we call them heroes, it doesn't mean they're all good guys. It's a war that one side thinks it should have won a long time ago, and which the other side sees as a matter of survival. Evans gives us war that is dark, violent, and ugly, a conflict that tears men and women from their natural lives and twists them into something else. *Of Bone and Thunder* is a hard book to get excited about, in the traditional sense of cheering on heroes and jeering the villains, but it's an interesting read . . . one that makes you rethink the traditional 'glory' of fantasy battles. It does leave a rotten taste in your mouth, but I think that's precisely the point.

Originally reviewed at Beauty in Ruins

Lulu // RoadsideReader says

Received ARC via NetGalley

This book was absolutely amazing, though I do believe the comparison to *Lord of the Rings* is a bit misleading. Whereas *Lord of the Rings* focuses on the macro image of war and the struggle between good and evil, *Of Bone and Thunder* focuses on war at the micro level, taking a look at the toll it takes on the participants who have little time to sit and philosophize over the morality of war or good and evil as they try to survive. It is much more *Apocalypse Now*, mixed with hints of *Heart of Darkness*. The parallel to the Vietnam War is overwhelming, but presented with enough fantastical elements that it doesn't stray out of the fantasy genre and into purely war and military fiction. Weapons are traditional, without a single firearm. There are wizards and dragons and elementalists/magicians with the ability to manipulate energies (called thaums.) Dragons supply air travel to the troops and firepower from the air.

Readers are thrust into the middle of a war that should have been won ages ago, according to main public of the Kingdom. We meet soldier Carnan "Carny" Qillibrin, a crossbowman desperate to leave the jungle and beginning to tire of the war. He and his fellow soldiers have been climbing through the mountainside jungle in search of the enemy, natives of Luitox whom the soldiers call Slyts. We follow his unit through the war

and through their losses. It feels frighteningly real and Evans did an amazing job capturing the feelings of anger, futility, and despondency, but also the sense of camaraderie and responsibility that begins to form between completely people from completely different upbringings due to battle. The soldiers vary from illiterate farmers, to bards, to killers, to simple villagers and religious zealots, yet they each play a vital role in their unit, the war, and the story itself. There's Wraith, the expert killer who might not be a good soldier, but is an expert at tracking prey and taking them out quickly and quietly. The stereotypical soldier, Big Hog, who cannot read but is a man of the earth, able to follow directions, inspire others, offer comic relief, and still maintain enough faith and hope that the war will end soon and he will make it back home to his farm. Above all, we have Carny, the protagonist of the unit and the embodiment of the everyman, a poor villager who was thrust into a war because he had nothing else going for him in life. A boy who fights because to quit would mean death and when faced with the grim truths of war in reality, as opposed to war in propaganda, turns to local narcotics to numb himself.

In addition to the soldiers, we have dragons and their riders fighting in the war. While the dragons are treated as wild animals, and not as sentient, thinking, magical beings, it is nearly impossible not to care about them. I myself grew incredibly attached to the main dragon, Carduus, that by the end of the novel, I was frantically searching for news on his fate. They are described with such a scientific mind, that I was impressed at how well thought out they were and the "science" behind it made sense (at least to my non-scientific mind). The dragons are the main form of long distance transportation, used by the army to bring new soldiers into Luitox, as well as flying current soldiers deeper into the Lux. Maneuvering these dragons are their riders who have always relied on hand signals and intuition to drive them, and new additions to the dragon system, thaums – magical people who can manipulate energy. They are a recent addition as they try to perfect the dragon system. The thaums enable long distance communication between riders and are able to navigate through the air with better precision. The main rider we follow is Vorly, who rides Carduus along with thaum Breeze. Vorly cares for the dragons more than he cares for most of the soldiers and almost as much as he care for his own life.

Like the militants themselves, the reader never really has a firm grasp on what the war is about, or what the Kingdom hopes to gain from starting or ending it. We know as much as the soldiers know, immediately putting us in their shoes and creating an empathizing link. We know that there is a question of legitimacy regarding the current ruler of the Kingdom. We know there threatens to be a blood civil war at home in the Kingdom over how to deal with the illegitimate rulers and whether power should be given to one faction or various factions or the common man. What we never really know is why the Kingdom is invading Luitox. The land produces little that can be used by the Kingdom, all of the produce described as disgusting to taste by the soldiers. It provides no necessary trade route to a friendly country. The war exists only as a distraction from the troubles at home. An excuse to keep the peace within Kingdom borders intact. This is all we know about the war at the macro level. To some, it may prove to be a distraction and they may come to dislike the lack of information regarding the war. They may come to think of it as lazy writing, but it isn't. It's an incredibly well-constructed literary device to force readers to bond with the characters. Readers are not given an option to rationalize the war, or form an individual opinion about whether it is justified or not, just as soldiers aren't. You are just at war and that's the only reality you know because it's the only thing that will help you survive.

Reviewing this book has been incredibly hard because there is just so much about it that I love, it becomes overwhelming at times. The prose is great, the descriptions are perfect and work really well at creating the suffocating atmosphere of Luitox. The characters are believable and sympathetic. The depiction of warfare is accurate, as is the effects it has on its participants. The dragons are fantastic. It is a heavy read, but definitely an enjoyable one and a book I look forward to buying a physical copy of and rereading often.

Of Bone and Thunder Review was originally published on By Lulu with Love

Blodeuedd Finland says

I really liked his other military fantasy series, but this one was haaaaaaard to like. After having read half of it I so wanted to throw in the towel, but then I already spent one day reading and was all aaaaaaargh! So I read 50 more pages, and then just started skimming.

Do not ask me to tell you about the characters, I can not remember anyone's name. I do not remember anything about anyone. This was Vietnam, except it wasn't, except it totally was American solderers talking, crawling through the jungle, shooting civilians, realizing they will never win this stupid war, flying dragons instead of helicopters. Any real combat was scare, next to nothing. I knew about about the rash on a soldier's crutch than actual fighting.

I was bored, I need to know names, but all soldiers blended into each other, except for that spy guy Rickets and Jawn the magician. See I know two from dozens.

So not for me, a pain to read, and it's a stand alone, of course the war was not over, think of the actual war, they will just continue to go around that jungle until they give up and are shipped home.

Martin says

ARC received from NetGalley

I enjoy fantasy books; I enjoy war films but had never delved into the genre when it came to literature. Described as “Apocalypse now meets The Lord of the Rings”, this book caught my eye. Evans, an author whose work I haven't read, has a new fan. Of bone and Thunder is one of the few books which have blown me away. An interweaving of Vietnam combat and scenery with themes that are more commonly found in fantasy made this book both original and captivating. Different races, magic, dragons and medieval weaponry made for an every turn of the page more enjoyable than the previous.

The first part of the book isn't steeped in action; it is more world building and character development which to me as a reader is just as entertaining, I like to believe in the world I am reading about, therefore setting the scene is paramount. Politics, drug use and the hunt through unfamiliar territory for an elusive enemy are some similarities between the book and the Vietnam conflict. For me, including themes and situations that ran parallel to a real-life conflict added to the verisimilitude of the story. I also enjoyed the dialogue between soldiers, the bloke-ish banter, cursing and the use of acronyms as you would expect on the front line. The characters within the book are well defined, each fascinating, with their own personalities, flaws and beliefs regarding the war. This makes for dynamic relationships, with moments of conflict and friendship.

From action scenes to epic battles, soaring through the air on Rags/dragons or simply scouting the jungles of the enemies' native lands; the detail with which Evans writes is so captivating and vividly descriptive, it engulfs the reader and gave me an almost cinematic experience. It would be awesome to see this turned into a movie.

A fascinating story narrated from the viewpoints of several service men with different roles within the war against the “Slyts”. An incredible interlacing of their experiences which all lead to the conclusion and an action packed, heroic and emotional ending. A compelling story of courage, leadership and sacrifice. Highly recommended for lovers of fantasy and military fiction.

Kaora says

Actual rating: 3.5 Stars

ARC received from NetGalley

I admit I first picked this up because of the stunning cover and secondly because of the comparison to the Vietnam War. What a great and interesting way to educate about a turbulent time in our world's history. It is a topic I wanted to learn more about, but just had not gotten around to it and this seemed like a perfect time to learn while also reading my favorite type of book.

I thoroughly enjoyed seeing the parallels in this book, and found myself going back to read about the Vietnam War to find even more parallels. This is a history lesson wrapped up in a well written military fantasy book.

Let's start with the negatives.

I did have some issues with connecting as there was no back story to the characters, but I did manage to connect to some of them just by being with them through their struggles in an unforgiving place. There was also not a lot of explanation. I would have liked more on for example how long one eighth of a candle is, or more time describing some of the beasts or the world the author had created.

Now onto the positives.

The dialogue was clever and thought provoking. The author was great at getting his point across, but making it seem natural. There were also humorous moments dropped in, emphasizing the camaraderie between the characters, and making me laugh out loud. The battle scenes were full of action and well executed, and the world was intriguing. This is a talented author, who I would love to see more from.

Recommended for fans of history that want something a little different.

Cross posted at: Kaora's Corner

seak says

"Apocalypse Now meets Lord of the Rings" is an apt description of this book as long as you recognize anyone's comparison with Lord of the Rings is interchangeable with "Fantasy."

Not even high fantasy, which Lord of the Rings is, but in the case of Of Bone and Thunder it's more on the grimdark, realistic fantasy level.

The Kingdom (America) occupies the jungle of Luitox (Vietnam, pronounced Luto) and back home citizens of the Kingdom are blissfully unaware of how bad things are actually going. But, it's hard to come to grips with the fact when you already *know* your country can't be beat.

Chris Evans created an incredibly realistic world here with different peoples at war, humans, the slits

(derogatory name for people of Luitox), and even dwarves.

The armies of the Kingdom ride dragons, or rags as they're commonly called, who have been domesticated as much as dangerous fire-breathing dragons can be. Plus, there's magic in the form of thaumaturgy and all the divided allegiances you could ask for.

What I liked about this book was the focus on the common soldier. Mostly, we follow a shield (a handful of soldiers) and their tasks on Luitox. We see their grumblings with their senior staff, their difficulties with the "slyts", their treatment of the new recruits, and get to know them quite intimately. You easily feel at home with this grouping.

Also, we follow Jawn Rathim, a thaum, and later a grouping of dragon riders.

There's lots going on and it's obviously a well-thought out world. I also liked the use of the strange words that become commonplace by the end of the book. You feel part of the world and the soldiers who tend to have their own language as well.

Because it is a Vietnam-type book, there's lots of racial tension and even more focus on the grim. I have to admit to getting a little worn out by the end of the audiobook because it was constantly a downer. It's only natural given the circumstances, but it is wearing.

Speaking of the audiobook, the narrator, Todd Haberkorn, did an excellent job. He nailed the voices and quickly became unnoticeable, which is the sign of a great narrator - you forget it's being narrated. There are lots of gruff soldiers and yet he had a different voice for each and it wasn't even too difficult to recall who was talking with all those harsh voices.

Count me impressed with this book. I don't know what I expected, but this book is quite unique with its take on an unstoppable fantasy kingdom who's met its match. The world is all its own and the characters are relatable if not loveable.

3.5 out of 5 stars (recommended)

Colin says

I picked this up at Dollar Tree because it had a dragon on the cover. I figured, "I'll try pretty much any fantasy book with dragons for \$1!" I enjoyed it far more than I expected to. The story is a pretty open analogue of the Viet Nam war (as experienced by the American troops), with the Empire trying to put down an uprising of the Forest Collective. It's fantasy, so dragons (shortened to "rags") are air cavalry, witches and wizards are the medics, and crossbows replace rifles. Dehumanizing nicknames for the enemy "slyts" are present, but it seems clear that the enemy isn't actually human anyway - it's a fantasy novel - and there's a danger there, I think. There are intelligence agencies operating in theater, too. I found it a little less palatable that a race of fantasy dwarves, nicknamed "mules," who had been slaves until fairly recently, seem to take the place of African Americans (down to some who wonder if they shouldn't side with the Forest Collective - "No slyt ever owned my people as slaves! No slyt ever oppressed my people!") - now the author is **really** playing with fire, by making a minority race in his fantasy analogue of America **really** inhuman, non-human, but putting some of the words of African Americans into their mouths. Despite the fact that some of this seemed very tone-deaf to me, the writing itself was very well done. Each scene is well-crafted. But that's my other problem with the book. While each individual scene is well-crafted, they don't necessarily join together to make a satisfying narrative. That may have been deliberate - the message that war is NOT a

satisfying narrative, that to those who lived through the events of the Viet Nam War, it just seemed a mass of chaos and one blunder after another. It was worth reading, both for the clever handling of the allegory and the good writing in individual scenes, but I can't give it more than three stars for its flaws. Still, I look forward to finding out if there was ever a sequel!
