

*Jester-Knight* Review by Paige Ambroziak

I don't often read high fantasy, but I have read Tolkien's must-reads since I teach *Beowulf* almost every semester to my college students and like to include some of his criticism for good measure. One of the things I like about the Old English epic is that it is simple in ways and deals with relatable themes. Its monsters are messy and yet completely understandable, and Seamus Heaney's translation hits the mark every time, allowing my students a way into the epic poem they may not have had otherwise. Simply put, the language is clean and descriptive when it needs to be.

And so to my point. Joey Madia's *Jester-Knight: Book One of the Ambir Dragon Tales* offers its readers the same kind of experience. It doesn't alienate, and in fact the language he uses is balanced on that fine marker between simple and elevated. He writes beautifully, cherishing his sentences for the visual scenes they paint. For instance, how lovely is this: "Kal-Gadras took his leave and rode for the southlands and his home. Aldemere watched him disappear into the blackness, which was thick as a mountain man's winter cloak." And this, a brief moment describing a chair at an important assembly: "Although it was made simply of wood, with no adornments, it seemed to carry the weight of the decisions that were made by its former occupants. History ran through the grain and pulsed in the knots."

More importantly, Madia has mastered the skill of elaborating the necessary moments without sacrificing the story's forward thrust, which is not an easy task. The story itself is rich with the life of a kingdom in a fantastical world that is not so foreign that one needs a new lexicon to understand it (as some may have done with *The Hobbit*, *Lord of the Rings*, etc.). The surroundings and populace, which are not all human, are relatable and more importantly believable. They are likeable characters—well, the good guys anyway—and are drawn with a hand that evinces a certain artistic love. One can't always see how much a writer loves his characters on the page, but some writers are gifted in showing you how important they are to him. Madia is one such writer. The story he tells doesn't just give us a peek into a few characters' lives, but actually pulls us into a world where honor, loyalty, and love are its central characteristics, whether one is human, an elf, or a dragon.

I loved this story, and its hero (in every sense of the word) Alde. He reminds me of Telemachus, Odysseus's son, and that can only be a good thing. I look forward to book Two and highly recommend this novel for all ages. The thread of morality that Madia follows throughout the tale will warm your heart and make you want to invite others to visit the world of Glittereye, too.