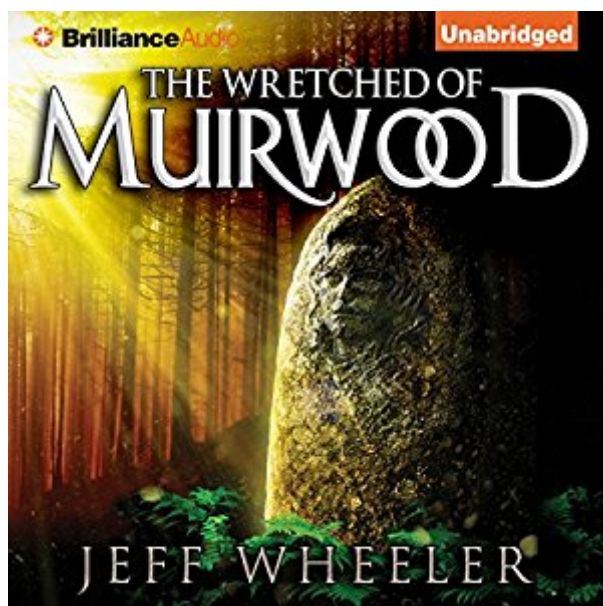


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The Wretched Of Muirwood: Legends Of Muirwood, Book 1



Synopsis

The Wretched of Muirwood, the opening novel in the Muirwood Trilogy, is the tale of the orphan Lia - who is part of a pariah caste known only as the "wretched", a people unloved, unwanted, and destined to a life of servitude. Forbidden to read or write, and forced to slave away in the Abbey kitchen, Lia is all but resigned to her fate. But when an injured squire named Colvin is abandoned at the Abbey kitchen, opportunity arises, and Lia conspires to hide Colvin and change her life forever.... Her plan becomes a perilous one when a nefarious sheriff starts a manhunt for Colvin, and the land is torn by a treacherous war between a ruthless king and a rebel army. Ominous and illuminating, Lia sets out on an epic quest for freedom with hopes to unravel the secrets of her concealed past.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I'm a pretty wide reader of fantasy, but I have to demur a little bit from all the rave reviews on this book. I didn't hate it, but I wouldn't say that I liked it. The worldbuilding is pretty good, and the protagonist is likable. The story is pretty standard: getting the smaller band of good guys to win against the overwhelming numbers of the bad guys. Fine, acceptable. What I disliked most about this book, though was the magic system. Without giving too much away, the idea of the magic in this world, called the Medium, is that if you have faith, the Medium will reward you. That is, if you're confident in yourself and what you're doing, you'll succeed. I can understand the parallels that the author is trying to draw behind the Medium and real-world religious faith, but this magic system

doesn't make for an interesting story. It robs the characters of initiative. Instead of working hard to find an innovative solution to their problems, the characters just believe in themselves, and the Medium makes them succeed. It's not a terrible story, but because of this big flaw, it's just not engaging.

Instead of employing the tropes of the fantasy genre, this story borrows ideas from the various mythologies of the Abrahamic religions and unfolds as if those mythologies played out in a fantasy setting. There is simultaneously a biblical feel and high fantasy feel. I'm surprised that I hadn't encountered this sort of thing before. It makes for a deeply rich, endlessly surprising but self-consistent world. I tend to shy away from apparently religious works, but I'm glad I read this book and the remainder of the series. (But see caveats below.) I found the first chapters of the sample gripping and ended up gobbling up this book and the next two in a hurry. The storytelling is masterful and the characters are complex and believable. There is also a romantic thread -- something else that I'm not used to reading. It includes a force called "The Medium," which appears to be an analogue of the Abrahamic God, but the author twists the language enough to make it an unobtrusive fantasy element, something more like The Matrix or The Force. It's fair to say this book stretched my horizons. I found it refreshing that many of the characters in this story genuinely try to do what is right. They are largely good people living in complex worlds, struggling with their circumstances and with who they are. They are not the typical one-dimensional fantasy characters. The author precedes each chapter with a quote of wisdom from our world that he has transformed into the language of the fantasy setting. The quotes foreshadow the inner struggles of the characters in the chapter that follows, and I found many of them thought-provoking. Although the author is an extraordinary storyteller, and although I found this series imaginative and engaging, I don't see myself hurrying to read other works by this author. It took finishing the series and putting it out of mind for a while before I understood why. As the series progresses, it becomes clearer and clearer that the future is pre-ordained and that the final outcomes are guaranteed to be good. We tend to expect this sort of outcome in most novels anyway, but tension and realism are lost knowing that the story's mythology ordains it. Aside from this general miasma of predeterminism, only a few minor flaws tripped me up. Over the course of the series I think there were three situations when I couldn't figure out what was going on, even after rereading the passages. Perhaps these are cases of the author changing the story but forgetting to strip out old language. Despite having such an obvious correspondence to Abrahamic religions, I did not feel like the author was preaching to me -- not at all. Even so, there are several references to fundamentalist Christianity, which seemed jarring

and really out of place and not at all relevant to the story. Specifically, the world began with "first parents" who ate of an apple and sinned. I find the notion of "original sin" offensive, and creationism is now just evolution denial. Why unnecessarily offend readers? More foundational to the story are rewards for the faithful and punishments for the unfaithful, borrowing from Christianity. The foundational mythology of this series appears to be the Book of Mormon and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). Most readers probably will not recognize this and will instead find themselves wondering at the author's apparently inventive imagination. This book proves that the LDS mythology does indeed make for good fantasy, at least when moved to another world. However, the constancy of this theme has me advising against allowing children to read this series, because it seems to teach that morality is a business of second-guessing others.

I tend to read a lot of different things and genres, but I have a soft spot for well done Fantasy, and this is very well done and one of my favorite purchases over the last few years. While I did recognize the influence of his religion in the storyline of the series, being of the same faith, I honestly felt like it was tastefully woven in. I really enjoyed that this book wasn't a rehashing of Tolkien or Rowling. Many authors rework the stories of these two authors to death. Having read all three books in this series, I found them imaginative, well written, and creative. And I loved that this is a book with a strong heroine at the center of the plot, but that she has an equally strong and capable male counterpart that is developed throughout the series. I think both genders are important, and both should be represented as equal, even if they have different things they bring to the table, and I love that this book does a great job of balancing out the necessity and importance of both rolls, and did so in a way that diminished neither.

This is a fairly typical YA fantasy where an orphan girl is raised as a servant but discovers something special about herself. It's quite a slow read, actually, because not much actually happens for a while. Most of the magic system is obscure, at least in this first book. So much goes on that is supposed to be mysterious that it was just annoying after a while. The protagonist, Lia, is engaging to a point but does not follow rules and ignores advice. She is supposed to be an independent, strong character, I assume, but she seemed quite selfish at times and did stupid things, even when she knew better. Colvin, the squire who stumbles into her life, is mostly useless, at least in this volume. I hoped for more for most of the characters, but was disappointed that some of them weren't given more of a role. The writing was quite good, including fine descriptions of the medieval-like world. The plot, as I said, was a little slow, but this was not an action-packed story.

This is volume one of a trilogy, The Legends of Muirwood, and you need to continue the story to reach any conclusions; The ending is not a cliff-hanger but doesn't resolve any issues. No bad language, no sex, some violence; suitable for tweens and teens

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