

Azure Adventures: The Lost King

Maximilian J. Heirich

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In the epic fantasy novel Azure Adventures, a race to find a missing king draws unlikely allies together.

In Maximilian J. Heirich's fantasy novel *Azure Adventures*, a war-torn realm's king vanishes, compromising the uneasy alliance between human beings and orcs.

Thirty years ago, human holy warriors waged a battle against a cabal of fantastical races, who were led by orcs. The humans lost, and also lost control of a power gifted to them by a benevolent deity in the process. Eventually, though, the orcs retreated, and humans and elves flourished again.

In the present, Burue, a dwarf veteran of the war, hears rumors that the tenuous peace may be threatened. There's a conspiracy afoot, designed to initiate infighting. Meanwhile, a human ranger, Vellborand, has partnered with a dark elf, Securis, to fight an army of undead.

Drawing upon Dungeons and Dragons monsters and races, this intriguing novel is designed to appeal to fans of the game. The races of Azure include both human beings and terrifying, birdlike warriors; the mix is simultaneously strange and inviting. The magic system around the holy warriors is developed in novel terms: the knights use light to their advantage, even as the forces of good continue to dwindle. And Burue, Vellborand, and Securis rely on their wits, and each other, as they confront the growing threat to their world and work to find the missing king. Troubled Burue stands out: he enlisted to avoid punishment, but is later framed for murder. He considers his values as he flees from the society he fought to protect.

The vastness of the world is emphasized in conversations, where disparities between groups become apparent: an illiterate guard's limited vocabulary contrasts with the fast, accented speech of the dwarfs, who still employ rough-and-tumble slang. However, the clipped words and colloquialisms are also sometimes an impediment to the story's movement. Further, the prose reaches to cover every detail of every scene, from sensory reactions to the precise movements of instances of combat.

This sprawling novel devotes ample space to introducing its characters, their backgrounds, and their shared histories. The obstacles they tackle on their way to facing the undead army are numerous, including clashes with local bandits, medical care after an attack, and an instance of Securis and Vellborand fighting off a herd of hyena-like humanoids. In the inevitable showdown between the forces of good and evil, the fate of the land is placed in peril; it's a dramatic conclusion that teases future adventures.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (July 3, 2021)

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