



Godfrey's Crusade

Mark Howard

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Godfrey's Crusade is a fantasy novel marked by magical lore, far-off realms, and long lines of lineage in which an imperfect knight fights for the good of others.

In Mark Howard's coming-of-age epic *Godfrey's Crusade*, a young man is driven to honor the gods, fulfill his duty, and prove his worth.

The son of a duke, raised on stories of honor and chivalry, Godfrey is promoted from the role of his cousin's squire to that of a knight for his father's duchy after he defeats a town-plaguing vampire. Having proven himself worthy of the responsibilities of knighthood, Godfrey is now faced with a crusade. He sets off to save the northern kingdom, Azgald, from a warlord, Alvir; from Nera, the Great Witch of the North; and from their army of dark god worshippers.

Amid battles, skirmishes, and sieges, Godfrey not only contends with monsters bent on destruction and slaughter, but also betrayal and the selfish agendas of his fellow crusaders. Nevertheless, Godfrey, with the help of his trusted friends Turpin, Walaric, and Madeline, and with a blessing from the gods, navigates this courtly intrigue and rises to the life-threatening challenges presented to him. In the process, he grows from a young man marked by naïveté into a mature man who's drawn lessons from his mistakes. His lack of immunity on the battlefield further strengthens him: he's a fallible man who's trying his best.

Elsewhere, power-hungry kings, delusional dukes, witches, elves, and gruff orcs round the cast out. Their variety helps to craft Godfrey's diverse, fantastical world, which is complete with a multitude of beings, religious preferences, and concepts regarding morality. All characters are described in clear terms, while the explanations of their clothing, armor, and the architecture of their lands are rich with historical context. This narrative attention to detail is balanced, while still leaving the finishing touches to the audience's imagination.

The novel moves at a steady pace, trading between Godfrey's tale and those of the villains; both are connected by Azgald, where the action converges. Before this showdown, the book's events are punctuated by punchy exchanges between characters, as well as by pertinent mental tangents. Rivals deliver cutting comebacks, and friends banter with familiarity and ease. However, the final battle is rushed through, and that the crusader armies arrive at the perfect moment to aid Godfrey strains credulity. This abrupt ending does not include allusions to coming volumes, either.

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ALEX DAILEY (August 17, 2021)

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