

Master of Sorrows: The Silent Gods Series, Book 1

Justin Travis Call

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Artifacts, ancient secrets, and an aching desire to prove himself force neophyte Annev de Breth to contend with magical forces in *Master of Sorrows*, the first book in The Silent Gods series from Justin Travis Call.

Annev, a student at the Academy Chaenbalu, is an underdog. He has a physical disability that he is ashamed of and conceals. However, Annev is also tougher than he looks. He's ambitious—driven to become an Avatar, a warrior-thief who steals magical artifacts from people who hoard and misuse their powers.

As he learns the Avatar's craft, Annev's faith in himself is invigorating. From his obscure origins—as a child, he's raised by his parents' killers—onward, the novel levels up. Annev battles school rivals, magical enemies, and the final boss: a twisted master bent on absolute power. Ultimately, he has to decide which side of a magical war he wants to be on.

Disability and physical limitations are a recurring theme, and some stereotypes play in, as when a disability is interpreted as evil or as a weakness that correlates with moral infirmity. But the story is visceral and heartfelt, most focused on gritty details.

Murderous magical tools and a glittering array of weapons punctuate it. In one scene, a handmaiden blinds a witch with a handful of spores; moments later, a blackthorn copse's "barbed black needles punctured her thighs, back, and arms, their ridged two-inch-long spikes holding her firm." Violence is a constant—bones break in new ways from chapter to chapter—and tenderness is rare. The closer Annev gets to the truth, the higher the stakes are, threatening his life and the world that he lives in.

Master of Sorrows is a rousing and imaginative high fantasy novel—a promising beginning to a new series.

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