



Saints of the Waters Ford

James McEachern

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In James McEachern's fantasy novel *Saints of the Waters Ford*, a young knight protects his island home.

A decades-long war between humans and the preternatural race of beings known as “the folk” has left the island of Breton isolated. The humans remaining on the island hear scattered news that the war continues between humans and the folk, with both sides devolving into anarchy. Elis, a young man living on Breton, decides to honor his father and take up the mantle of paladin knight. He dons armor and sets out to defend the people from any atrocity, along the way finding allies in unlikely places. The island isn't involved in the larger conflict, but the animosity between humanity and the folk remains strong. With each quest he tackles, Elis discovers more about Breton and his place in the never-ending conflict.

Elis recounts his adventures in an engaging episodic manner. Each chapter focuses on one major conflict or quest that he takes on during his service as Breton's sole paladin knight: he comes up against a dragon, a race of talking foxes, and a Kraken. And, though the chapters appear in chronological order, each works as a self-contained story in which Elis stumbles into a conflict, prepares for it, and attempts to win—or find a diplomatic way out. His successes pile up.

People's conversations have an ancient tone, and the book comes to feel like an oral history that's been passed down through generations. However, some modern colloquialisms appear and are distracting. Still, Breton's sense of community and interconnectedness is deep and inviting.

Elis is a steadfast, loyal friend among Breton's citizens—a welcome sight to most people on the island. But the worldbuilding is somewhat limited because Elis narrates the tale, and his own perspective has been shaped, and bounded, by Breton life. He knows little about the outside world or the ways of the folk. Thus, intriguing suggestions about the outside world arise, but without being fleshed out. This changes somewhat as Elis's experiences expose him to new and wondrous creatures and ideas.

Set against the backdrop of a war whose outcome is uncertain, *Saints of the Waters Ford* is a magical fantasy novel in which an isolated community is protected by a determined knight.

JOHN M. MURRAY (September 26, 2023)

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