

The Grey Star

James Bartholomeusz

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Existential questions in the midst of grand conflicts, all peppered with elves, goblins, and otherworldly creatures—and James Bartholomeusz juggles them all well.

This last installment in James Bartholomeusz's Seven Stars Trilogy finds orphaned human Jack still on his intergalactic adventure, winding toward a final showdown between good and evil, if lines can indeed be so distinctly drawn. Exciting and fast-paced, *The Grey Star* includes enough exposition, artfully woven in, to catch readers up on the transformative events of previous adventures without interrupting the pace of its own climactic occurrences.

Jack, a once-lonely teenager, now finds himself respected as the awaited Übermensch, uniquely suited to pursue one of the shards of the Risa Star, which, if put together again, is rumored to possess unparalleled powers. His still-missing best friend, Alex, is in the likely grip of the malevolent Cult of Dionysius, and jaded Lucy is trying to settle into life back on Earth, all the while aware of the comparative banality of its daily concerns. Bartholomeusz strikes a seamless balance between these existence-threatening conflicts and the coming-of-age tribulations of his appealing characters.

With Lucy sitting a round out, Jack and his plucky elvish companions, Ruth and Dannie, are left to continue their quest for the Risa Star.

Bartholomeusz pens inevitable showdown sections with crafty eeriness, maintaining tension as swift encounters with darkness propel the characters forward. "An immense black-cloaked figure was rising in the spectral dread against the horizon, consuming the penumbra sky with impenetrable obsidian," reads a climactic scene, one of many employing the vivid and elevated diction characteristic of this project.

The pages of *The Grey Star* skillfully upend standard notions of good and evil—even the idea that creation itself is a necessarily generous act. The revelation of the personality behind the whole conflict, the Sage, presents readers with the gripping challenge of reevaluating all previous notions of right and wrong. Is the Sage a devious puppet master—have these characters ever been free in their quest?

Existential questions in the midst of grand conflicts, all peppered with elves, goblins, and otherworldly creatures, could be enough to weigh most projects down, but Bartholomeusz juggles these diverse elements well. He strikes a balance between Lev Grossman and Philip Pullman, and *The Grey Star* should enthrall readers of all ages. An impressive and certainly satisfying conclusion to a trilogy which should stand out in its genre.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (Winter 2014)

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