

## The Hatchet Men

**Simmeon Anderson**

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*In the fantasy novel The Hatchet Men, supernatural beings work to protect humanity from looming danger.*

In Simmeon Anderson's fantasy novel *The Hatchet Men*, an ancient war carries over into the modern era.

Thousands of years ago, a race of godlike beings, the Watchers, crashed to Earth. They gifted powers to remarkable humans, transforming them into Hatchet Men who were near immortal, vulnerable only to each other. Two factions formed: the Ghosts and Shadows. The two groups waged war across centuries, altering the course of history. Now, the Ghosts are missing, and the Shadows hope to keep humans from destroying themselves or the planet.

In the present, the Shadows, hoping to wipe out a drug cartel, enter a night club, where a young member of their group feels an instant connection to Jennifer, a human. But gunfire is issued, and in the aftermath, the mob wants retribution against the Shadows. This forces the Watchers to step in and address growing threats.

The book spends too much time following the first Hatchet Men to show how they amassed power. As it moves toward its present, it skips over interesting developments, leaving questions open, including about how the enhanced humans function in society without revealing their secrets or drawing the ire of the Watchers. Later, much more time is devoted to covering Jennifer as she learns more about herself and the Shadows. Beside these developments, the mob threat is distracting, particularly since the organization is up against immortal beings; the intrigue of the early pages is lost.

Further, most of the Shadows and members of the mob are indistinct and unchanging, impeding the story's sense of tension. The central characters are underdeveloped as well: Jennifer learns much, but remains much the same; others are confined to single identifying traits. Both the book's heroes and romantic interests are less compelling because of this.

Many of the book's conversations are anachronistic early on, with ancient people speaking in modern slang; these habits extend to the book's alien beings. And in the book's present, the exchanges between the Shadows are too expository, explaining their weaponry and fantastical technologies to excess. While their intriguing terminology hints at the larger world, it is overwhelmed by superficial details.

Within the story, the Shadows and their alien masters take frequent trip off planet; these are jarring when compared to the rest of the story. Meanwhile, the conflict between the Shadows and the Ghosts, which is built up to be a large issue, is under addressed by the book's end, which leaves too many questions unanswered.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (August 21, 2021)

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