

The Price of Thorns

Tim Susman

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Humans and supernatural beings have complex interpersonal dynamics in the rich, exciting fantasy world of The Price of Thorns.

In Tim Susman's epic fantasy novel *The Price of Thorns*, a thief under the command of an ancient queen experiences magic and mysteries while on a quest.

The book begins in media res: after stealing jewels in a small town, Nivvy is strapped to a spinning wheel and pelted by rotten fruit. Bella—an enchanted, deposed queen who has somehow escaped centuries-long imprisonment and is thirsty for revenge—offers Nivvy freedom in exchange for stealing her former kingdom. It's an outrageous proposition, but Nivvy agrees to the thief's contract.

Thus, Nivvy sets out to recover Bella's kingdom—a quest that requires that he attain several artifacts, and that it is impeded by the fact that nothing is as Bella remembers. He navigates challenging locales including an active volcano that's home to an insane fairy and a submerged castle. He has to outsmart other colorful beings in the course of his travels to earn artifacts and information, and many of those whom he meets have unhappy histories with Bella. And even though a betrayal transforms Nivvy into a weasel, and he faces imprisonment and other factors that waylay him, the narrative moves forward at a steady pace, reveling in its adventures. Indeed, rumors of Bella's activities and hearing travelers share key bits of information with each other keep the story active even when Nivvy is stuck.

Nivvy is an engaging hero whose informal voice is clipped and slang filled. His jokes are frequent, befitting the worldview of a thief. But in difficult situations, he collects himself, changing his tone to suit his needs. He mirrors Bella's mannerisms, for example, hoping to sound like he is upper-class. And Bella's and Nivvy's clashing personalities often take center stage. She works to adapt to the present; Nivvy struggles with the strictures of his quest.

Beyond Nivvy and Bella exists a complicated world in which humans and supernatural beings have complex interpersonal dynamics, "former humans" reside, and everyone contends with a magic system that has shifted over thousands of years. This background is filled in at a gradual rate, via the stories that Nivvy hears from those whom he encounters—stories that also foreshadow events to come and that are collected in the book's appendix for reader reference.

Working toward an emotional showdown that leaves hope for potential future adventures, the intricate fantasy novel *The Price of Thorns* follows a spurned queen as she seeks revenge and an ambitious thief as he makes his own way to happiness.

JOHN M. MURRAY (October 25, 2023)

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