



Kin of Cain: A Short Bernicia Tale

Matthew Harffy

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AD 630. Anglo-Saxon Britain. A gripping, action-packed historical tale set in the world of The Bernicia Chronicles. Perfect for fans of Bernard Cornwell.

Winter grips the land in its icy fist. Terror stalks the hills, moors and marshes of Bernicia. Livestock and men have been found ripped asunder, their bones gnawed, flesh gorged upon. People cower in their halls in fear of the monster that prowls the night.

King Edwin sends his champions, **Bassus, Octa** and band of trusted thegns, to hunt down the beast and to rid his people of this evil.

Bassus leads the warriors into the chill wastes of the northern winter, and they soon question whether they are the hunters or the prey. Death follows them as they head deeper into the ice-rimed marshes, and there is ever only one ending for the mission: a welter of blood that will sow the seeds of a tale that will echo down through the ages.

What readers are saying about KIN OF CAIN:

'The tale is **full of suspense**, it's **dark, gritty and gruesome** ... what more could you possibly want?'

'**Absolutely gripping, edge of the seat reading.** If you're into Bernard Cornwell you'll love this!'

'Clever short story by a **master story teller**'

Can't wait for the next instalment of the Bernicia Chronicles? Search 9781784978853 to pre-order KILLER OF KINGS!

Kin of Cain: A Short Bernicia Tale Details

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Author : Matthew Harffy

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From Reader Review Kin of Cain: A Short Bernicia Tale for online ebook

Ash (It's a Word Vomit World) says

For the full revised review, go to:

<http://itsawordvomitworld.blogspot.com/>

I seriously need to start reading more novellas. It really is the perfect length for a booklover with a busy life. I normally pickup an anthology for that, but this was great, and it was such an amazing story it made me want to buy a few more! I'll for sure be reading other books by this author.

Ok, so what's this story about? It's a retelling of a time long, long ago. While partying it up in the great hall with all the kings horses and all the kings men (well...minus the horses), a shriek comes from outside. After a slight hesitation, everyone arms themselves and someone opens the door, thus is introduced the beast who is known by many names: Nightwalker, Kin of Cain, nihtgenga. It's known by so many names, because no one knows what it actually is. All that is known is that its flesh cannot be penetrated by a spear, and it has killed time and time again, ripping livestock, women, and boys to shreds. And from the sounds of it, it only strikes at night.

With this night's interruption, the king decides "NO MORE", and sends his 5 "best" warriors to hunt down the beast and kill it. And so the real story begins.

Sounds like a great bedtime story, right?! Well you'd be correct!!!

I love that I found this book in the historical fiction section. If you know a bit of history about the time, you can tell that the author did his research. There are subtle hints here and there of a time so far behind us. It really was a different world back then. People looked at things differently than we do now, turning everything into a magical, if frightening, place.

The writing style fits so well with the story, but it's never over-the-top so that you can't understand what's going on. It's subtle, beautiful, and descriptive, never getting in the way of the story itself. I will say the only thing that docked this story one star for me were a few of the action scenes being slowed by just a bit too much thought and wordiness. Other than those few spots it was spot on.

For such a short piece this story does a great job bringing the characters to life, even if we get to know some better than others.

There were times I thought I could see the writing on the wall, thinking things were going to get predictable, and then it took a turn in an all together great direction, surprising me to my glee.

If you're a fantasy, horror, or historical fiction lover then you'll LOVE this novella, and you'll get a kick out of the end as I did. Even if you don't know the history behind the story, you'll find that the author has got you covered with a brief history he has written. So hey, you might even just learn something while you're at it.

Who knew you could get such an epic story in such a small book!?

I was given a copy of this book through Netgalley in exchange for an honest review

George (BuriedInBooks) says

Just wow! First I want to say thanks to Matthew for making this Novella free on the kindle store, I'm so glad he did it's amazing!

So the story is set in the same period and world as his main books the Bernicia Chronicles. Kin Of Cain ties into the story of Octa, Beobrands brother who we don't hear much about in the main books, which to me was really interesting. A creature of legend is stalking the winter nights preying on men, women and children. The king sends his best and bravest warriors to confront and kill the beast.

The short story is full of twists and turns, I can't recommend it enough to anyone who loves history and historical fiction. The book is also short which is great for people like myself that are reluctant readers or struggle to finish longer books. I found myself really caring about the characters also and the writer really manages to keep my attention.

I've been lucky enough to meet Matthew before and get The Serpent Sword signed which is long overdue it's own review.

In the end I give this book 5 stars and am tempted to read it again already!

Thanks for reading and please check out my blog/twitter at www.buriedinbooks1999.wordpress.com

David Baird says

When I first read The Serpent Sword I was shocked at how quickly Octa disappeared from the tale, it's this murder that sets Beobrand on his journey but I was left wondering who Octa really was.. was he anything like his brother?

Well now we have the chance to see a little of the man himself in a short story set before the events The Serpent Sword.

86 pages is a decent amount of pages for a short tale in my opinion and Harffy doesn't hold back. For me what I really enjoyed was this tale has a bit of fantasy and mystery to it. The unknown force that is attacking people..is it human or beast.. either way the King wants it dead!

Octa sets out with a band of men to prove himself to his King and one of my favorite characters is included in this group, Bassus! oh how I love that man.

Harffy weaves a tale which includes the death and gore we are used to but it also manages to give some depth to Octa that wasn't possible before.

The tale is full of suspense, it's dark, gritty and gruesome..what more could you possibly want?

When I was reading the tale I couldn't help but see Octa as Beowulf and reading the author note it was really

great to see the Harffy's thought process on this. It really made the tale stand out.

Personally I feel Harffy has loads to offer and I hope to see more shorts in the future as I feel they bring depth to the authors world and allow them the chance to share some great stories with us the readers. When I commit to an authors work I want to feel like they are committing to me also..to give me their best and Harffy never disappoints.

Kin of Cain is thriller/mystery/fantasy/myth/folklore and so much more wrapped in to 86 glorious pages and it's well worth the asking price.

Stephanie says

I have been a fan of the Bernicia Chronicles almost from the beginning, though I was a wary convert. Usually one to be skeptical of books when one is “supposed” to like it (I generally steer clear of popular best-seller lists, Oprah book club selections, etc.), I prefer to make up my own mind about them. If a celebrity or a highly paid marketing firm suggests it, my cynic’s mind kicks in. So when I heard that Harffy’s first book, *The Serpent Sword*, was compared to one of my favorite authors, Bernard Cornwell, I immediately pushed it aside. Cornwell has been writing for 20 years or so, and his novels have appeared on the small screen (*Richard Sharpe and the Saxon stories*). Cornwell has a huge following and is widely considered one of the best battle scene writers.

But... I wanted to know what the hype was all about. I’d seen his name pop up within the same social media circles, and decided to give *Serpent Sword* a try. And to say I was pleasantly surprised is an understatement.

I have already reviewed the main novels in the Bernicia Chronicles here and here, so I won’t reiterate why I love the series. To summarize for purposes of this review however, I will say that the key to my love is the main protagonist of these tales, Beobrand. I love that Beobrand is a hero, but he is also an imperfect hero. He has a darkness lurking somewhere inside him, and it’s this darkness which propels and motivates him throughout the plot of each book. He has strengths and weaknesses, just like a real person, and he wrestles with them, second guessing decisions, dealing with past hurts and loves. He may be a character in a story set over a thousand years ago, but in this, he is just like any modern human alive on the planet today.

Kin of Cain takes a step back in time from the novels in The Bernicia Chronicles. It is a book set in the Bernicia Chronicles “universe”, but it is a sort of prequel in novella form. Readers of *The Serpent Sword* will immediately remember Beobrand’s brother Octa. The death of Octa (only referred to in that book and not covered in *Kin of Cain*) forces Beobrand into motion, setting off the series. *Kin of Cain* takes a look at one figurative chapter in Octa’s life, before we ever meet Beobrand, chronologically speaking.

The novella is a wonderful story, something I’d expect from Harffy in the style and telling of it. The pace is good, and the characters are familiar. I don’t read thriller/horror fiction, so I am probably not doing the genre or this novella justice by using a comparison, but I will. Because the main action of the story is set at night, in a misty, swirling swamp, and the antagonist of the story commits grisly atrocities, the novella feels like a thriller to me. *Hound of the Baskervilles*, anyone? — minus Sherlock Holmes and inserting Dark Age warriors carrying swords and other sharp bits of steel, of course. It was creepy, but the horror is suggested and happens off the page, making it more thriller than horror.

The only down side to the novella, which really isn't saying much, is Octa. Don't get me wrong: I like the guy. But because this is a novella, I felt that we didn't really get a chance to know him very well. Several times he echoes regret at leaving his mother and little brother at the mercies of his brutal father, Grimgundi, as he goes off on the king's service, but beyond those reveries we don't see much of the inner Octa. I don't fault the novella for this. It's a novella. There isn't a lot of literary real estate for such luxuries. I have just been spoiled by the superb development of Beobrand over the course of several novels.

The novella ends with one little surprise for lovers of classic literature. I won't spoil it for those who have yet to read the book. But this one is a delight, and I have to chide myself for not catching on a little sooner to what Harffy was doing over the entire course of the novella. Especially when you consider the fact that I remember, in retrospect, his social media posts about the fact that he was going to do it!

I recommend *Kin of Cain* to fans of *The Bernicia Chronicles*, but because the story is set independently outside the series, it works very well as a stand-alone. For this reason, I also recommend the novella to those who think they might enjoy Harffy's writing but don't know if they want to commit to a feature-length book.

Speesh says

Without doubt, *Kin of Cain* is spine-tinglingly, nerve-jangling, read-through-your-fingers superb!

It's both a Bernicia short-story, and the work of a writer now catapulted into the ranks of the very best the Historical Fiction genre has to offer. If I hadn't already been 100% convinced of that, I wouldn't have agreed to take part in the Blog Tour to promote the book, put it like that. It's clear, that for lovers of Historical Fiction, 7th Century Britannia is the place to be right now, because with writing of this depth and quality, Matthew Harffy is in danger of giving the Dark Ages a good name.

In Dark Ages Bernicia, in what is now the northern part of England, an ancient evil presence seems to be abroad. Stalking the land, killing and dismembering whatever comes its way in the night. The King tasks his warriors with hunting, finding and dealing with this un-named menace.

The Serpent Sword The book is set in the period before the first book in *The Bernicia Chronicles*, *The Serpent Sword*. So, cue a load of background information on characters already familiar to us from the series proper? Cue the feeling that it was a side-spur, a passage that got left out of one or other of the three (so far) *Bernicia Chronicles* proper books, padded with a hasty start and finish? Nope. Absolutely, no way. It might be short, but it's bursting with fresh ideas, atmosphere and images.

Kin of Cain is, incredibly for a short story/novella, a multi-layered, multi-faceted work, dealing with folk law, folk-memories, Roman, German, Anglo Saxon, Danish, that created demons for peoples who didn't fully understand their world. It's a fear of the unknown that, despite all our modern, 21st Century science and technology, is still inside us all.

I got first, shades of Robert E. Howard, he of *Conan The Barbarian* fame. He also wrote a lot of other types of stories, amongst others, horror, or rather, terror tales. Steeped in and dripping with doom, gloom, fear of the ancient unknown and menace. That's what *Kin of Cain* first suggested to me. The phrase, "*Blackness that moved, A shape amid the shadows,*" also sprang unbidden to mind. As did *Eaters of the Dead*, by Michael Crichton. But I'm probably getting ahead of myself here.

What I think you have to think about of, is that these peoples weren't originally from the area, these lands. They are Anglo Saxons, and we always think of that as who English people are. These peoples may have been troops or mercenaries left behind by the Romans, the mention of their gods and traditions here, make me think that they still have their roots elsewhere, on the continent. They've clearly brought along with their gods, their superstitions and their folk-memory.

The King - and their honour - sends the warriors, out into the night, where ordinary people fear to tread, to seek the demon that is plaguing the land and the people. They might be out in the night but as the story progresses, as the characters develop, it seems they are all fighting their own inner demons in one way or another. Perhaps each seeking something else. Octa, is the main character here. He's the older brother to Beobrand, the main figure of the Bernicia Chronicles books and what it feels like he is seeking, by putting his fear and courage to the test, is a confrontation with the awful memories of his father. Octa knows he has to go out there, find and then confront the fear, or he will never escape the mental chains in which his father has bound. Then there's the title. *Kin of Cain*. The Christian Priest has also come to drive the old 'demon' gods out. Maybe, by conquering the demon, he can rid them of their pagan beliefs, and they can rid themselves of their past, and start a new legend, a new history the one that we now know as 'England.'

But we're back to what is it that can make the biggest, fiercest warriors the land has to offer, quiver and quake, afraid to go out into the night beyond the light of their campfires? It's something as simple, yet terrifying, as their own imagination, of course. This, Matthew captures brilliantly and perfectly - and he does the same to us. We imagine what it must be. And he makes it grow and grow in our imagination. Fears made physical and deadly. Whispers that can kill. Nothing they can lay their hands on. In the dark corners of their own minds, the dark corners of their own people's past - the demon, is all their fears made real. That image of the imagination making the beast ten times taller, ten times bigger, that look at how the folk-imagination works, imagination made real, also reminded me of Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* books. *Kin of Cain* is where the legends and memories featured in *Mythago Wood*, began. What Matthew has understood, is what makes us frightened, is not seeing and not knowing. Not ever seeing more than a glimpse, at the edges of vision, at the edges of the campfire light, of what frightens you. That's why horror films, like *Alien*, work so well. You never see more than a glimpse of the monster only ever what it leaves behind.

As I hope I've suggested, *Kin of Cain* is a real idea bomb for me. One to be savoured and read late at night, by candle-light, in an abandoned farmhouse, out on the moors...

You can buy *Kin of Cain*, now. Paperback or for your Kindle at Amazon

Also at Kobo, iBooks and Google Play

Related reviews on Speesh Reads

Karina says

Set in Anglo-saxon Britain (630 AD) it represents a classic adventure story (really a story because this is actually a novella) and it has all the right ingredients : the king, the mead hall, the warriors,a famous sword, the ice-cold marshes, death and the shadow of a monster.An absolute brilliant read.

Hollie says

Nice short story!

This was a well told possible story of a legendary story, not to give any spoilers. Added in nicely to the adventures of Beobrand and gives a little more insight to his brother Octa.

Mary Yarde says

Cain, that murderous creature, was banished by God for killing his brother. He has been silent for a long time. But now the monster stirs once more and takes up arms to continue his savage war.

A blood-curdling cry in the darkest of nights. Lifestock slaughtered. Good men dead. This cannot continue. King Edwin will not allow such a monster to remain at large. He must be hunted. He must be killed.

On a cold winters day, King Edwin's favoured thanes set out on a quest to find and kill the beast that has brought such terror to their King's beautiful kingdom. But this will be an adventure like none before it. And all their lives will be changed forever...

As poetic and as exciting as the Old English epic poems of times gone by, Kin of Cain: A Short Bernicia Tale by Matthew Harffy really appealed to me. The story is an action-packed adventure where new horrors (both real and imagined) lurk around every corner. The characters, particular Octa are fresh and vibrant — very real in the telling. Octa was a perfect protagonist. He is strong but weak. Brave but fearful. Very human. I thought he was wonderfully portrayed.

For those of you who love the old epic poems, this story will be very familiar to you. I am not going to give away any spoilers, but very early on in the story, I cottoned on to what Mr Harffy was writing about. I have to admit, the story he depicted is one of my favourites!!

Mr Harffy has written a fresh take on a very old story. It was a very satisfying retelling with a few little twists of his own.

I thoroughly enjoyed Kin of Cain: A Short Bernicia Tale and I shall look forward to reading more books in the Benicia Tale saga.

Kate Joekel says

Excellent retelling of one of the earliest 'hero' stories.

I have enjoyed reading the Bernica books, and when happened upon this novella by the same author I purchased it.

Exciting and fast moving, this is a prequel of sorts and features Octa, elder brother of the hero of the Bernica books. Also appearing is the sword Hruntung and it's original owner. Enjoy reading this addition to the Benicia novels.

Paula Lofting says

Kin of Cain

630 AD and terror and winter grip the lands of Bernicia, the northernmost kingdom in the lands of the Englefolk. A monster stalks the hills, livestock and men have been found torn asunder, their bones gnawed, their flesh gorged upon. King Edwin sends his champions, Bassus and Octa, with a band of trusted men to rid the kingdom of this evil. As Bassus leads this brave war band into the northern hills, they soon question whether they are the prey or the hunted, but whatever the darkness brings it will sow the seeds of a tale that will echo down through the ages.

I enjoy a good scary story, or movie, I'm one of those people who prefer the ghost ride to the wheel at the fair, however, it would never occur to me read a tale that was both historical and horror. I really enjoyed this atmospheric ride, and I could feel the tension as though I were with the characters in the marsh.

There is little to criticise in this book, it is well written, and the characters are likeable. In *Kin of Cain* Harffy takes the strands of an ancient story and creates a believable plot, that, although wildly imaginative, could easily be interpreted as belonging to the supernatural, especially to a people whose everyday lives were governed by superstition. And when you read the last few pages, you think, "Wow," that's a clever way of linking it to the one of the most popular tales that ever came out of the Anglo-Saxon period.

I've not been to the northernmost parts of England where the lands of Bernicia used to lie within the boundary of Northumberland, stretching itself beyond the Hadrian's Wall and into what is now Scotland. But it's easy to imagine dark brooding hills, swathes of land called moors, and marshes where only the remotest scatterings of steadings dwelt. At night, you can think of wolves howling as they bay at the moon, trees clouded in mist, standing like sentinels to guide a traveller's way across the moorlands, and in the marshes the sound of the reeds rustling as creatures make their way about their nightly business. All these wild imaginative elements add to the mysteries of this shadowy land. But despite the eeriness, one cannot help but think there is beauty in the darkness, even at night, with all its terrors.

The story of Beowulf is commonly known as the brave warrior and his fellow thegns, who come to kill the monster. In this version, Mr Harffy has created the setting in Northern England, which has a similar type of setting to that mentioned in the tale – and is where his Bernicia chronicles are set. Of course there are differences between the real version and his, but the presentation is atmospheric, sinister, tense and darkly weird. Descriptive prose, his strength, is how he hooks the reader:

They trudged onwards towards the smoke that must have risen from a hearth fire. The promise of warmth and shelter, and perhaps fresh ale, drove them forward until the light became too faint for them to make out where they were going.

The marsh was redolent of decay; dark and hidden scents, as of death. The warriors' feet and the hooves of the horses churned the quagmire. Stagnant pools bubbled at their passing. All around the swamp sighed and whispered like a living thing.

Had I read the quote above as a blurb, there would be nothing to stop me from wanting to read this book. Octa, one of the main characters, is the brother of the hero of Harffy's Bernicia books, Beobrand. The latter does not appear in the tale of *Kin of Cain*, and Octa has but a cameo appearance in the first of the chronicles, *The Serpent Sword*, which Beobrand stars in. But that small part Octa plays was enough to tickle the taste for more of him. References to him are interesting, intriguing even, and I think a lot of people are glad that Octa has a story for himself.

Because this is a novella, we do not get to know Octa as well as we later come to know his brother and his friend, Bassus, but there is definitely a hero in the making. Sadly, his career was ended before it barely started, but I am hoping that we can see more of him, and what he might have been had he lived longer, in

more of these short novels – or even possibly a whole novel devoted to him, and Bassus. What I enjoyed most about this book was the way the author creates the right environment for my mind to easily conjure the visuals. I could hear, see, and smell the entire stage, from the rolling waves on the beach below the cliff, to the wind driven, plaintive cries of seagulls flying overhead. The dark sky, with its patches of blue and cloud, the aroma of the decaying pieces of flesh that the brave warriors walk unknowingly amongst in the night on their search for the monster, are as unforgettable as waking up and getting out of bed for work in the morning. If this is the type of style you like to read, a style that sucks you into the book and places you firmly within it, then this book is for you, and possibly starts a whole new genre of Anglo-Saxon horror.

I think that the author would enjoy greater success if he were to continue to write more of these types of stories and more about Octa, but who am I to say what he should write, for whatever he does, I think he will do it well, and having read the other stories in his chronicles, he is a master story-teller.

Tattooed_mummy says

Well! Unexpectedly this turned out to be much more my cup of tea than Matthew's other novels (which are a tad too blood thirsty for my liking) This is a slight move away from that, though there is blood aplenty. I really enjoyed the supernatural feel to the story and the scary other worldliness of the dark marshy landscape. It reminded me a bit of The Company of Liars, in that you start to believe the weird old tales yourself, will the band of warriors find a monster or a man behind the mysterious slayings?....

spoiler: (view spoiler)

All in all a really good short story. And an interesting idea.

Peter Gould says

Nice short story from a new perspective about some of the background and secondary characters in Mathew Harffy's other series set in Bernicia during the dark ages.

Paul Bennett says

First let me say thanks to the author and the fine folks at Aria for including this poor, humble scribe with the illustrious group of reviewers on this Blog Tour. Since I am leading off this tour, I reckon it's appropriate for me to announce, "Welcome, and now, on with the show."

More Dark Age tale telling from the author of The Serpent Sword. This time he weaves a story that is well known but puts his own twist on it, and in a manner that is both entertaining and foreshadowing. The main character in this tale is the older brother of Beobrand, the hero of Matthew Harffy's excellent Bernicia Chronicles series. Octa becomes part of the group of warriors chosen to ferret out and kill a night stalking monster wreaking havoc among the common folk. As he has done in the full length tales, Mr. Harffy brings to vivid life the ethos of a dark age warrior; the fealty owed when oathsworn, the bonding between fellow sword brothers, the ale hall boasting. The quest to find the monster is emotion and action packed. A boggy, misty, fen land can play with a man's mind, so too can facing the limits of one's endurance in a very trying

situation. Unrelenting drama unfolds as the warriors close in on their quarry and not a few surprises make their task that much more interesting. I enjoyed learning a little about Beobrand's big brother and the sword that plays such a large part in his tale. 4.7 stars and a Hoover Book Review's coveted "Job well done" acclamation. :-)

Blurb:

AD 630. Anglo-Saxon Britain. A gripping, action-packed historical tale set in the world of The Bernicia Chronicles. Perfect for fans of Bernard Cornwell.

Winter grips the land in its icy fist. Terror stalks the hills, moors and marshes of Bernicia. Livestock and men have been found ripped asunder, their bones gnawed, flesh gorged upon. People cower in their halls in fear of the monster that prowls the night.

King Edwin sends his champions, Bassus, Octa and band of trusted thegns, to hunt down the beast and to rid his people of this evil.

Bassus leads the warriors into the chill wastes of the northern winter, and they soon question whether they are the hunters or the prey. Death follows them as they head deeper into the ice-rimed marshes, and there is ever only one ending for the mission: a welter of blood that will sow the seeds of a tale that will echo down through the ages.

Author info:

Matthew grew up in Northumberland where the rugged terrain, ruined castles and rocky coastline had a huge impact on him. He now lives in Wiltshire, England, with his wife and their two daughters.

Pre-order links

Amazon: <http://amzn.to/2lqNXhW>

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Blair Hodgkinson says

After reading Matthew Harffy's first novel, I was pleased that I could now read a prequel novella. I won't get into spoilers here, but suffice to say that this short quest adventure is as gripping and tense as the longer novel with which it connects so well. The story is fast-paced, atmospheric and dark with touches of mystery and horror interlacing well with the narrative. The connections to old Anglo-Saxon literature, even for one who only dabbles in the study, will become obvious and clear as the story unfolds toward a satisfying and even amusing conclusion. Recommended.

Krystina Morrison says

I just finished Kin of Cain by Matthew Harffy and I thought it was a really exciting story! Quite the adventure. The novella is short but doesn't fall short on adventure. It follows a band of Anglo Saxons on a journey to find the beast named the "Kin of Cain". It was so interesting and I really enjoyed the storyline behind the Hrunting sword. It added a nice touch to the story. The chapters seemed short and seamless resulting in a fast read. I liked the characters and they felt so relateable because even though they were tough guys, you could feel their fear at the uncertainty that was the beast. It's nice to see that in a story especially one full of action like this one. I enjoy seeing some of their customs regarding the dead. The ending parts are shocking to say the least as the beast's identity is revealed and it's for sure a crazy twist! I am definitely going to read more of the books set in Bernicia.

I give this book a 4.5/5 stars. I would like to see more about females from this time period but I understand it is a short story and can't cover everything in that world. I really enjoyed this and recommend it if you want a short, fast, exciting ride!

I received an e-book arc of this story from NetGalley free of charge. I really appreciated the opportunity to read and review this book. This book is set to release March 1, 2017.
