



## Oathkeeper

*J.F. Lewis*

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Rae'en has taken her father's place as First of the practically immortal Aern, a race created by the Eldrennai as warrior-slaves to defend them from the magic-resistant reptilian Zaur. Freed from all Oaths by Kholster's death, Rae'en decides to wage war on the Eldrennai anyway out of rage and grief.

The war between the Eldrennai and Zaur has begun. Bloodmane, leader of the now independent mystic-warsuits, has underestimated both the sheer numbers of the Zaur and their field leader General Tsan. As the warsuits prepare to assist the Eldrennai in the defense of their Watch cities, the Zaur warlord, Xastix, launches the bulk of his forces at the Vael in an attempt to cut off all outside help.

Prince Rivvek, having been accepted as an Aiannai (Oathkeeper) before Kholster's death must claim the Eldrennai throne by completing the Test of Four so that he can enact his plan to save as much of his kingdom as possible. Meanwhile, his brother Prince Dolvek hatches a plot to enlist the aid of the plant-like Vael to defeat the Zaur horde who are in league with the decapitated head of a dethroned deity.

## **Oathkeeper Details**

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## From Reader Review Oathkeeper for online ebook

### Jared Millet says

*Oathkeeper* is a middle book, and at first glance it's got a case of middle-book-itis. Namely that book 1 got to do all the world building, book 3 will tie up all the loose ends, but book 2 has the thankless job of moving all the pieces introduced in book 1 around the board and getting them in place for the eventual conclusion.

However, what really sucked me in to *Oathkeeper*, once I figured it out, was that more than any other book I can think of, this is a book *about* gamesmanship and moving pieces around. Everybody is playing a game in *Oathkeeper*, but no one is playing the same game. Each character is going by their own rules, devising their own strategies, and playing for their own stakes, all at the same time. It's kind of like watching a bunch of people playing chess, checkers, backgammon, and go, *all on the same board* and having it make some weird kind of sense.

There are the telepathic warrior race of Aern for whom life is like an endless first-person shooter. There's the new king of the elves, who's playing a grim game of "who lives, who dies" in order to save as many of his people as possible. There are the plant-like Vael who are trying to balance all warring sides in a tenuous peace. Then there's Kholster, the hero of book 1 now elevated to godhood, who sacrificed himself to change the rules for his people and is now learning gamesmanship on a more cosmic level.

All-around satisfying. Looking forward to book 3!

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### Callum Shephard says

*Oathkeeper* is an outstanding second instalment to this series, and continues to prove that this could be one of the most uniquely layered and complex universes since Frank Herbert's *Dune*. The world is one of sentient warsuits, cannibalistic offshoots of the elf species, ancient oaths and immortal societies. As the growing onslaught of the reptilian Zaur threatens all and ancient oaths drive the Aern to war, two princes initiate a desperate gambit to preserve their kingdom from the storm and enlist the help of new allies.

Easily the greatest strength of the book is the truly staggering detail and thought put into the world as a whole. With each culture and species varying wildly from any expected fantasy tropes, and instead taking on entirely new forms. The story here is one of complex political manoeuvring as it is war, with the very ambitions and acts to take the throne hitting just as hard as a full scale siege or armies annihilating one another. It builds a sense of grim atmosphere and a thread of surprising realism for all its otherworldliness. Combined with the thought behind the world's history, this assists in giving events far more grounding and substance.

The characters themselves also prove to be astoundingly diverse, the most prominent of who retain a clear voice and arc despite the vast number of characters involved. While they can occasionally be hard to keep track of given the multiple threads, there is never a point where it's possible to start confusing one for the other. This is helped substantially by one of the better uses in recent years of having each figure effectively fulfil an archetype or representation of one aspect of their people.

The serious criticism to be made here is that it locks out new readers from the story. There's no real moment

to truly catch up on what's happened beyond the blurb, and very little time to catch up. No sooner do you start the book, the plot takes a dramatic turn with a crippling loss in Tranduvallu. It's a location of obvious importance and home to a major faction in this war, yet there's little opportunity to take in the unusual nature of its populace or role in the world before it is besieged. The story itself also rarely lets up, meaning that if you're confused or having difficulty in the opening chapters; it will not be any easier as you progress.

On the whole, Oathkeeper is hardly light reading material, but those seeking an incredibly detailed and sprawling fantasy saga would do extremely well to seek this one out.

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### **Grace Troxel says**

This review originally appeared on my blog, Books Without Any Pictures:  
<http://bookswithoutanypictures.com/20...>

Oathkeeper is the second installment in J.F. Lewis' Grudgebearer Trilogy. Kholster was once the leader of the Aern, a slave race created by the mad sorcerer Uled in order to fight against the reptilian Zaur. The Aern are bound by the oaths that they take, and if they break an oath, they lose the ability to communicate telepathically with other members of their race. Because Kholster technically died as he ascended to godhood, the Aern are now released from his oath to kill all of the Elderannai, who had once enslaved the Aern. Instead, his daughter Rae'en has taken Kholster's place as leader, and must decide how the Aern will deal with their former oppressors. As Rae'en contemplates her choice, the Zaur are closing in as part of a master plan that could doom both the Elderannai and the Aern if they can't resolve their differences.

I love the way that Oathkeeper plays with gender and gender norms. There are so many strong female characters who shape the world in which they live, and then there are other characters who defy convention altogether. For example, General Tsan. The Zaur have traditional gender roles where the men fight and the women breed. However, Zaur gender isn't fixed, and people rotate genders throughout their lifetime. Tsan is a fighter, and he/she takes an illegal drug in order to keep the metamorphosis from happening. But she slips up and begins changing, at which point she manages to come into her own and command respect for who she is and what she's capable of in a time of crisis. I found Tsan fascinating not only because of her gender, but because I found myself cheering her on even though she was ruthlessly fighting for the side of the enemy. Very few characters are flat, no matter what side they are fighting on, they all evolve and experience growth over time.

J.F. Lewis' world is breathtakingly complex. You've got a bunch of different races that each have their own historical baggage, and they're trying to coexist but rubbing up against each other because they can't erase their tainted history. The Aern can't let go of what the Elderannai did to them, and you can't blame them for not easily forgiving atrocities. And because the Aern and Elderannai both have extremely long lifespans (the Aern are nearly immortal, and the Elderannai are basically elves), it's not easy to forgive and forget, because lots of people who were a part of it are still alive, and there's some serious PTSD going on. Think Germany right after WWII. And then there are the Zaur, who emerge in this book not as some mindless enemy, but a proud and intelligent people who were just as much a part of Uled's influence as the Aern. And that's just the tip of the iceberg, and doesn't even get started on the politics between the gods. To say that this trilogy is ambitious is an understatement, and yet, J.F. Lewis pulls it off with style and leaves me begging for more.

My only complaint with Oathkeeper is that it falls into the George R.R. Martin trap, or rather, too many point-of-view characters, only some of whom I cared about. The story would have been a bit clearer if some

of the extraneous characters/arcs were cut out, and we focused instead on the key players. Even so, the story was so engaging that the extra characters were easy to forgive, and I don't know that those characters won't play a key role in the next book, so I may be speaking too soon.

Oathkeeper is a fantastic continuation of a series that is truly epic in scope. I can't wait to see how the series ends!

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### **Oskar says**

I read this book and loved every second of it. High Fantasy of the best kind

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### **Milan says**

I absolutely loved it!

First novel served as an introduction, second as a setup and third hopefully will be the resolution. And it worked amazingly.

First novel gave almost no indication (will have to reread it again to make sure) that Uled will be the "big bad" not Kilke.

I like that Zaur won't all be bad scaly evil monsters. Zombie dragon and zombie armies as enemies in last book will be great :D Especially since it seems like all the rest of the races will unite.

Growth of Dovek from the idiot he was in first book was nicely handled and I liked that Rivvek schooled Rhaeen before he went through the port gate and that she realized he was right if I can judge by what she did. I think it drove home the point that she acted badly even more because she liked Rivvek.

I also loved the whole god parts and Kholsters manipulation and education of the others. Having him reunite with Wyland and she becoming a goddess herself was awesome. I hope she extracts some revenge upon Dienox now that they're on equal terms.

I suspected Vax was Wyland and Kholsters son from book one and glad to have that confirmed. I hope he gets Awakened now that his Mother ascended to godhood.

Only part I mildly disliked was all the parts with "Snapdragon" I found him superfluous other than a way to introduce Tsan and eventually have Yavi and Dovek figure out something was wrong with Xastix and allow for the rise of Uled.

Real shame Coal died although he was kind of an ass at the end :D

Anyway can't wait for the third book :D

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