



Song of the Serpent

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To an experienced rogue like Krunzle the Quick, the merchant nation of Druma is full of treasures just waiting to be liberated. Yet when the fast-talking scoundrel gets caught stealing from one of the powerful prophets of Kalistrade, his only option is to undertake a dangerous mission to recover the merchant lord's runaway daughter—and the magical artifact she took with her. Armed with an arsenal of decidedly unhelpful magical items and chaperoned by an intelligent snake necklace happy to choke him into submission, Krunzle must venture far from the cities of the merchant utopia and into a series of adventures that will make him a rich man—or a corpse.

From veteran author Hugh Matthews comes a rollicking tale of captive trolls, dwarven revolutionaries, and serpentine magic, set in the award-winning world of the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game.

Song of the Serpent Details

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Joseph Zurat says

This was kind of a mess. The main character is an unwilling participant and is forced to be passive in deference to his cool magic snake neckband (aside from a few moments). The secondary characters are all fairly one-note (though it was admittedly cool to have a Troll as a supporting character). The thing that is purportedly the mystery (Dude runs off with damsel) isn't very interesting and we as readers don't really find out any interesting things about what is actually the mystery (A Not-Illithid is in stasis in a spaceship in a volcano and he is kept in check by a weird snake guy who pops up every thousand years or so).

The setting feels strange compared to previous Pathfinder settings. A prospector's boom town? Really? and the Dwarves, what, just started a country and no one really noticed? (I've come to find out that apparently this region hasn't really had much fleshing out in Pathfinder, so I guess it is nice it is getting any attention at all.)

That said, I'll give it some credit for creative use of the Not-Illithid using its psionic powers to make people think they are "Chosen Ones", and again for an interesting Troll. Also, it is shorter than the other Pathfinder novels and it was a really fast read. To me, it felt like the sort of story a first-time GM would have. A few cool ideas for encounters that don't really fit together really well into a whole, and an end that is REALLY heavily influenced by the Chariots of the Gods/Cthulhu Mythos. "Alright, you guys beat the bandits, now you find a boom town that TOTALLY isn't where the bandits are from. Cool, you took care of that, now there is a society of Dwarves brought together by a prophet/leader dude. Did I mention some of you have mysterious dreams about your heroic destiny? Now that you are in the volcano there is a spaceship with a Mindflayer, er, I mean a lilly-headed snakeman."

Joel Flank says

This is a great homage to the Cudgel the Clever by Jack Vance. Krunzle the Quick is the protagonist who quickly gets in over his head by trying to steal from a powerful aristocrat, and is magically bound to performing a highly dangerous task for him. Along the way, he uses his wits, and a few partially controlled magic items to stay alive as events build around him and he discovers that his "simple task" is nothing but.

Mphecker says

The first of the Pathfinder novels I couldn't even force myself to finish. The main character is cardboard, he is literally dragged around for the first third of the book against his will, and he only lives that long because of the enchanted items he's given that do all his fighting for him. The weakest of the what is typically an excellent series, in my opinion.

Ross says

This book is a wonderful tribute to Jack Vance. I see a lot of negativity directed towards this book, much of which seems to be due to the fact that the reviewer doesn't actually know that this book is intended as a tribute, and is instead confused by how different it is than a "normal" Pathfinder book.

That being said, Krunzle the Quick is a great mix of Cudgel the Clever and Liane the Wayfarer, hilariously amoral but smart enough to survive when he's very much outmatched. The story itself is based on The Eyes of the Overworld, complete with a slightly more talkative (and much less easily nullified) version of Firx, in the body of a snake-charm named Chirk. There's even a little bit of Lyonesse thrown in there for good measure. Throughout it all, though, it's still Pathfinder.

The book is fast-paced, never dull, and full of the kind of dialogue that Vance was famous for. The prose isn't quite as over-the-top as Vance's, but that's a good thing; it makes the story seem more authentic and less derivative. If you love Jack Vance, or even if you don't, give this book a try. You won't be disappointed.

Carlos G. Flores says

The Song of the Serpent starts as a classical tale of rescue the damsel in distress with a few twists to the story. The hero is a lowlife, the damsel is an uptight merchant and the ugly troll is an unlikely ally.

I like how a mechanic between Chirk and Krunzle developed from a simple "business transaction" to a more comedic synergy. Although the characters evolve way too little they are interesting ones.

The book lacks the creativity on the plot, but makes up for it in the depth of each situation.

Bahman Naraghi says

Real fun read. My first introduction to the Pathfinder world.

Daniel says

In familiarizing myself with the Pathfinder world, I'm noticing a similarity in the books I've read. That similarity being each part of the world fits a different genre or time period of fantasy. One book was old Romania with vampires and werewolves. Another book was late 18th Century France before Napoleon with constant beheadings. This one was the closest to stereotypical fantasy thus far. It still lacked because it focuses on one part of the world and doesn't seem to mesh with the other parts.

Therefore my rating is based partially on the world not being cohesive. The Pathfinder world seems more a playground for any and all ideas to fit under one overarching umbrella. I don't see these characters fitting into the other books.

The other part of the rating is the story. If you are looking for filler, read this. If you are looking for a 'can't put down' story, walk away. There was too much deus ex machina to make me want to root for anyone in the book. The main character has little to no control over what he did. The situations faced were overcome only by something outside the party. There really was no sense that failure could happen. It was only 'how did

they get out this time' questions.

I never like giving a low rating. I try to find the good in a book. My need to be honest outweighs inflating the rating. Though, if you made it this far and need something to read, four stars for beating out the other 'filler' books that are out there.

Trevor says

This book started out terribly. I really wondered at first if I would be able to get through it or not.

Thankfully, somewhere halfway through the book, it started getting a little better and made it bearable to get through. A lot of the initial story just seemed really stupid, especially running around with those crazy boots. Also, much of the plot, even at the end, makes little sense.

Caleb Wilson says

In 1966 Jack Vance publishes "The Eyes of the Overworld", which details the picaresque adventures of Cugel the Clever, a not particularly clever thief who attempts to steal from a wizard, gets caught, and is coerced by the insertion of an alien creature into his torso into going on a long and grueling book-length errand. A bit less than a decade later, the creators of Dungeons & Dragons borrow heavily from Vance's work, incorporating ideas such as spells which vanish from the memory after being cast. (Were it not for the existence of Fritz Leiber's Grey Mouser, I'd think the D&D "Rogue" was based almost entirely on Cugel as well.) Vance inspires a generation of fantasy writers, some more obviously than others. Michael Shea is one of these writers, with his Nifft the Lean stories (which I love), and another is Matthew Hughes. Hughes writes wonderfully in the Vancean mode, and his stories, which can be imagined to take place in Cugel's distant past, and while clearing owing a debt to Vance, transcend imitation or pastiche. Dungeons & Dragons, over the decades, spawns a number of offspring, including, in 2009, one called Pathfinder. The publishers of Pathfinder commission a number of original novels set in their world. One is written by Hugh Matthews. Hugh Matthews is Matthew Hughes. Hughes's Pathfinder novel features a thief named Kunzle the Quick, who attempts to steal from a rich merchant, gets caught, and is coerced to run a long and complicated errand after the merchant places an enchanted and intelligent snake necklace around his neck.

Hughes's Pathfinder novel is called "Song of the Serpent," and I liked it. And the motif of a snake biting its own tail is very appropriate considering this looped chain of influences.

Chad says

To begin with, the story was rather mediocre, and it suffered from a number of common annoyances in pop-fiction -- including one of my pet peeves, stories where the protagonist doesn't actually do anything, but rather has things happen to him all the time. In this case, that particular peeve was especially blatant, where he is literally controlled by forces outside himself, specifically the magical equipment "given" to him as he is coerced into acting as another's stooge. I did not even get to feel sorry for the main character of the tale, because he's such a contemptible, self-satisfied bastard with no redeeming features.

He neither developed nor revealed any redeeming features of his character in the course of the story, many of

the plot elements were clichéd and prone to stereotyping, the story never really stopped being about the most obvious central characters having stuff happen to them in ham-handed manner rather than about them actually doing things, and the ultimate villain was a let-down. There was no reason to sympathize with anyone of note, really, except an escaped slave and (oddly enough) a troll in the tale.

Something about the storytelling itself changed around the halfway point, however, so that events started becoming entertaining to read. Where earlier the improbable course of events had seemed unbelievable and ridiculous, some of the most absurd occurrences in the latter parts of the book made good sense, in context, even as I found myself chuckling at their absurdity. There was a period of about a chapter's worth at the end, in what one might call the climax -- though I'm not sure the book has one -- where a dull recounting of the actions of the real hero of the story (a previously minor supporting character who ultimately proved to have essentially no personality as presented by the author's narrative even after its heroic role was revealed) elicited no particular interest from me as the reader, but it at least served to explain what happened and pave the way to the final conversation of the novel.

The final conversation wrapped up with some mildly interesting banter, and the final line in the book made the whole thing worthwhile . . . barely, if you happen to have a sense of humor somewhat like mine.

I really don't think I could reasonably recommend this book to others, but I did find it enjoyable overall, balancing the good parts against those that were dull, annoying, or just plain poorly written (including the first half of the book, for the most part).

Brandon says

My least favorite of the Pathfinder Tales books so far. The author's style seemed awkward to me. In the first part of the book, the main character seems to be along for the ride. He has very little control over what he does. Later in the book it gets a better, but he still seems to be spending most of his time asking depending on a specific magic item.

Chris says

Vatican pastiche

Matt Hughes has made a niche out of Vancian stories, based on Jack Vance. This captures the style and is fluently written as is most of his work. This work is written in a particular series for a RPG which may have provided something of a limitation in the somewhat clinched use of dwarfs orcs and trolls, although Hughes manages to escape the straitjacket of the conventional fantasy race restrictions, and ensure his races actually come to life, as distinctive characters. I felt that there was some change in the style in that it began as the somewhat tongue in cheek style of his other work, but then changed to a more conventional sword and sorcery tale, with an ending perhaps intended to leave the protagonists free for the next adventure. The magical denouement was a bit contrived and I felt perhaps left mysterious because Hughes had been under pressure to finish rather than a more clever resolution. He has commented that perhaps this didn't fit into the other parts of this RPG series but I suspect this may be because his writing and sardonic style may be more sophisticated than others. But overall a good romp!

Larry says

I think this book deserves 2.5 stars. There were parts of it were it had my whole attention and I was loving it and there were parts that didn't seem to flow very well with the larger work. One of the major problems with the book was the protagonist whom was both fairly unlikable as well as cliche'. While the side characters did improve ones interest in the tail, particularly in the case of a certain exceptional dwarf and troll, as they were side characters they could only add to the benefits of the story so much. The ending had a sort of bitter sweet feel to it that one may not enjoy but may have worked with the theme that the author was aiming for. Overall I think the writer took some risks while crafting this tail, it won't appeal to everyone, but this a fairly intense adventure story that some people will find pleasing in either part or whole....probably part though.

Peter says

This is the 3rd Pathfinder tie-in novel I read. The first two being from Howard Andrew Jones (who's books are highly recommended).

This one was quite different in tone. Where Jones adapted his normal style to a more party-based, high magic adventure story, this one starts out as a Jack Vance pastiche, mostly of his Cugel books.

Which makes sense, because Hugh Matthews is a pen name for Matthew Hughes, who has written a lot of science fantasy inspired by Jack Vance. As this is close to his regular fiction, I'm not really sure why he used a pen name.

Weirdly enough, somewhere after the first part, Krunzle starts picking up party members, and some weird prophecy type plot lines kick in. The second part felt more like a early Pratchett-pastiche, mixed with some Old Ones Cthulu type backgrounds without much horror elements. I enjoyed the Vance type part more, although compared to Cugel, Krunzle is even less clever, and the way he is controlled, makes him without any agency. The most fun character in the end was the troll.

In the end the novel felt like Matthews was trying to match his usual Vancian type story with the party based stories the Pathfinder novels usually have, but it felt like a mismatch.

Peter says

The first few chapters of this book I thought this was going to be a two star book. This is a tie-in novel for the pathfinder roleplay game, and this book does not feel like a pathfinder tale. There are even some magic items and magic spells used that I can't find in the pathfinder rules. Also the magic does not always feel like the magic in pathfinder feels. Sometimes I even thought that this was a novelidea that the writer already had, and when the opportunity came he reskinned it as a pathfinder novel.

So why did I give three stars to this book. Despite the way I felt in the beginning this book kept me reading. The characters and the situations were quite interessting and the story was pretty fast paced. The inspiration came clearly from Lieber, Howard and Lovecraft.

