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Sam Sykes

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Black Halo Details

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From Reader Review Black Halo for online ebook

Pippin says

As the first, this was an honest to goodness adventure. Chapter by chapter, it is a race to figure out who will figure out the story's dilemma, the characters or the readers. So what happens when a shict ranger, a boy wizard, a fighter, a priestess, a rogue, and a legit dragonman get stuck on a desert island? Somehow, they don't resort to cannibalism, much to my great surprise.

Sam Sykes' writing is fluid and witty, full of tongue twisters such as "fist-curled, curse filled charge" that left my dyslexic brain hurting for five minutes. Fun lighthearted banter follows blood-chilling realizations, and large portions of narration are led by an unreliable narrator. These twists, turns, and mobius-bands lead to fast-paced adventure and a book I read in a day. The second book in a trilogy is difficult, always, stuck between a strong opener and a strong ender, and most second books are just okay. But between the first, second, and third books in this trilogy, the second read like the other two. The only thing distinguishing them as different are the numbers on the cover.

Jordyn says

Does this series ever actually...you know...go anywhere? I read the first book, thought the characters were interesting. The second book comes around, finished it....and the characters are. exactly. the. same. No development, no changing their minds about anything. Nothing changes. I finished this book and refuse to read the third. What's the point?

Peter says

Black Halo is a great follow up to Sam Sykes' Tome Of The Undergates. It does exactly what a sequel should: improve any flaws while still retaining everything that worked in the previous novel.

Sykes' well written characters still continue to be the highlight. He's in the same league as Joe Abercrombie and Scott Lynch with them, evoking their talent for penning quirky and unique individuals that continuously captivate and delight. The page count of Black Halo exceeds Tome Of The Undergates, yet Sykes' great writing still carries you through with ease.

That's not to say that everything has improved. While the narrative has a little more cohesion, it moves slowly and I still found it hard to get a sense of direction of where everything was heading. Obviously, the Tome is the main plot point, but it feels unimportant when the characters own problems and various battles between the multiple races of this world are thrown in the mix. Maybe that's the whole point though; the Tome is the catalyst that enables all the exciting parts of the story to happen.

In any case, I enjoyed Black Halo more than Tome Of The Undergates, and that's really all I look for from a sequel. Here's hoping Sykes brings it home in the Skybound Sea.

Amanda says

The adventurers led by Lenk have managed to retrieve the Tome and are attempting to return it to their current boss, Miron - but life is never simple. An attack by a gigantic sea serpent - an Akaneed - leaves the adventurers split up and stranded on the island Teji. Lenk, Kataria, Dreadaleon, Denaos, Asper and Gariath first have to decide whether they even WANT to meet up again! What follows is a rollercoaster ride of fighting, sneaking, magic and a few hallucinations involving talking monkeys - there might even be a little romance as well... - as the band of not-so-merry adventurers try to win the tome back, learn a little about the netherlings and Ulbecetonth, and learn a lot about themselves.

I have been waiting to get my hands on Black Halo for AGES, having thoroughly enjoyed Tome of the Undergates. I'd had a few quibbles about that book, but Tome was the debut novel of Sykes, and I figured those problems would be ironed out as Sykes grew into his trade as a novelist. Is Black Halo better than Tome? Yes, in a lot of ways - in fact, in most of the ways that Sykes was criticised about in reviews following the release of Tome! In some ways, it is still a little shaky - but again, never enough to spoil my overall enjoyment.

First of all, I really appreciated the splitting up of the gang for a portion of Black Halo. That really worked for me. For one thing, it kept me turning those pages because I wanted to a) get back to finding out what was going on with each of them since Sykes employed some rather pesky and effective cliffhangers and b) see the adventurers as a glorious dysfunctional team again. In addition, since they weren't snarling at each other, there was a lot of revealing of inner thoughts as they pondered the nature of life, the universe and everything which helped to continue the character development that Sykes hinted at in the last third of Tome.

Secondly, Sykes is possibly the most breathlessly imaginative author working right now. Seriously. I say this because I literally never know upon turning the page what I will encounter - from various lizardmen, to purple women, to giant sea serpents, to fiery pee, to roaches that expel defensively from their anus.... Yep... And I guess therein lies the main problem. Sykes is genuinely not afraid to follow the thought 'Wouldn't it be cool if...?' to its unnatural conclusion, but sometimes the ideas are wacky for the sake of it. I use as an example the heralds we encountered in Tome. In that novel they were rather freaky, fluffy seabirds that totally freaked me out - one of the best parts of Tome. In Black Halo they have morphed into truly odd birds with mouths where their foreheads should be. Which felt unnecessary!

In Black Halo Sykes shows us some more of the world he is building than just sea and islands, and his worldbuilding is rewarding if still a little sparse. He doesn't hold his reader's hands in info-dumping the nature of the world we're reading about - there are hints that the netherlings come from off-world, that there have been various titanic battles in the past, mentions of cult-like Jackals, and much more about the nature and rules of magic. This adds a richness and a depth that was absent at times in Tome of the Undergates.

As I mentioned in my review of Tome, Sykes demonstrates a skill with prose that is rather stunning at times. Oddly poetic, even in the midst of all the killing. That is very much present in Black Halo.

Oh, and there were a couple of scenes in Halo that I had been waiting for through the WHOLE of Tome - involving Lenk and Kataria! *cheeky hinting*

Okay, in conclusion - after my rather rambly discussion of Black Halo - this was a very fun book to read, with some surprising depth. The humour prevents it being at all po-faced - which other author would include scenes involving a monkey discussing philosophical ideas or trees with latent desires for peace? Or a

conversation about the nature of hallucinations by three men wearing just loincloths? For those slightly disappointed in Tome of the Undergates, I think you'll find what you're looking for in Black Halo. For those who loved the first - hold on to your pants, you're in for a wild ride!

Sean Whathisface says

Let me start by saying I am a very, VERY slow reader. I take my time when reading -- I like to read word by word, really paint myself a picture of what's happening. So, when I say that by page 200 I was skimming through chapters, I want you to fully comprehend the implications.

I have to agree with other reviews -- this book is entirely too long and wordy for what it's trying to convey. While I enjoy authors that take time to give us details, this is not what Sykes provides. He ends up rehashing the same exact ideas over and over again, making us read what has already been established in previous chapters, but with no additional information to make it worth our time.

I find myself getting bored with the story. Which sucks because he's got a really fun cast of characters here. They're all the biggest cookie-cutter tropes ever, but it's still intriguing to see how he moves them through the world and how they interact with each other, as well as within themselves. Denaos, Asper, and Dread are my favorites in this respect. Their personal conflicts and backstories intrigue me where others do not. But we don't get a lot from them, unfortunately, and so I'm left wanting.

I'll read the final book because, hell, I've made it this far -- but I have to admit that at this point, I could really just leave it all entirely. It's more a sense of duty than any real desire to see the conclusion.

Stefanie says

I really struggled to figure out why I didn't like this book. The characters are funny, the violence is violent, the threat is significant. And then about 75% into the book I realized I didn't like it because it feels like nothing matters. The characters don't care about saving the world, they don't care about their own lives -- they aren't fighting for or against anything, they're just fighting because it's what they do. The lack of intention makes it really hard to care what happens to the characters or the world.

Ranting Dragon says

<http://www.rantingdragon.com/black-ha...>

Lenk and his merry albeit sociopathic band of adventurers are back in Black Halo, the second book in The Aeons' Gate series. Having recovered the Tome of the Undergates and stopped a giant fish demon from escaping Hell, Lenk and his crew are now stranded at sea, waiting for rescue from the mainland. However, as you would expect, all does not go according to plan, and soon the group is separated and washed up on an island reeking of death. What follows next? Deadly Librarians, fiery urine, giant lizardmen and much more, as Sykes makes a grand return in his second book and does what he does best, crafting a compelling story with humor, pathos and just a little bit of insanity.

Spot-on writing

By this point, fans of Sykes should know that he can write, and he can write pretty damn well. Tome of the Undergates had plenty of humor, a tight plot, great characterization, and a surprising amount of pathos. Black Halo continues this trend and in better form. Sykes steps his game up in this book, and you really get the sense that he's coming into his own. The dialogue is crisper, the scenes crackle with tension and description flares to life with beautiful prose. Black Halo does have its fair share of obscene humor and moments of questionable sanity, but they always serve the story and they are always well written.

The world is bigger than you know

Tome of the Undergates took place on a ship for the majority of the book. We heard names of cities, cultures, religions, and so on through the characters, but the reader never got the chance to experience them except through memories. This time, however, Sykes makes a wise move and begins to pull back the curtain, showing what the rest of the world is like and who occupies it. Several new characters are introduced; my favorite is Bralston the Librarian, but every reader will find their own. The world is growing under Sykes' steady hand, and by the end of the book, you'll have a better appreciation for the magic you see, the cultures you come to know and the demons that you come to fear.

Double edged sword

Ah, the plot, the double edged sword, so to say. On one hand, I'm really happy with the plot of the book, because not only is it well written, it continues the wonderful characterization of our main characters while showing us a living, breathing world. However, by the end of the book, I couldn't help but feel that this book was just used to get certain players into place for the third book.

Don't get me wrong; what Black Halo lacks in advancing the threat, it more than makes up for in its characters and their discoveries. We understand more about where everyone comes from, and their relationships together grow in strange and interesting ways (I'm looking at you, Lenk and Kataria!). In a way though, it seems that was the main purpose of Black Halo: to continue exploring the inner conflicts and desires of the Adventurers. Lenk's sanity, Kataria's identity crisis, Denaos' guilt, Dreadaleon's complex, Asper's condition, and Gariath's search for life are all written very well and are as compelling as they've ever been. My only problem was that I felt these explorations of character did not balance well with moving the plot of the demons forward; that only reappears towards the last third of the book.

So why should you read this?

If you enjoyed the insanity that was Tome of the Undergates, then you are going to love Black Halo. Not only does Sykes continue his streak of intense characterization, larger than life monsters and hilarious moments, he does it all better than before. Even though the plot sometimes takes a backseat to the exploration of character, it is not something that holds the book back from being a wild ride from start to finish. I have a feeling book three, The Skybound Sea, will deliver.

Joseph says

If for some reason you picked up Black Halo BEFORE Tome of the Undergates, stop what you're doing and read the first book first silly.

For the rest of you, you probably already know what I'm going to say because you are familiar with Mr. Sykes work. A blend of ultra violence and side splitting comedy, an epic quest hinting at a larger world hidden underneath, and a group of characters unique and enthralling.

This guy knows what he is doing. This is a love letter to Fantasy Fiction. This is elf butts.

If I'm being honest though, I did prefer the first book. The Island that Lenk and crew find themselves on wasn't as interesting a setting as the Riptide to me. It's cool, I mean, there are giant Sea Monster skeletons, and keg shaped lizard people, and some kind of demon angler fish thing that walks on land, but it didn't feel lived in or developed. It felt hollow, just a tool to serve the story, completely serviceable, but lacking when compared to the Riptide and the Smugglers Den from the previous book.

There was also some pacing issues I had with the chapters, they sometimes felt too long with too many points of view splitting them up. I think I would have liked smaller chapters to space things out more.

These are both small complaints, overall Black Halo is an excellent sequel and I'm excited to finish the trilogy so I can begin the next three book by Mr. Sykes.

Favorite things were, Bralston, he's awesome and I would read a series of books just about him being a Librarian, Gariath kicking ass, the interactions between Daneos and Xhai, and Lenk's running gag of being upset by a lack of pants.

Best way to describe these books is It's Always Sunny meets D & D. Swords, Magic, and a bunch of assholes in between.

Read this is you've read Tome of the Undergates and loved it, and lets be real, if you read Tome of the Undergates you loved it.

Hurry, those hostages are running out of food and water!

Kai Mundwiler says

Well, that took way too long to read.

A portion of that is my fault with having an extremely busy month, but Syke's material, while written with a superb voice and tone is full of fluff that just didn't do anything for the story. There's something to be said for surprising the reader but leading the reader along through a darkened room while throwing darts at him or her w/out provocation isn't the best way to get me through a book.

It was good to get to know the adventurers on a deeper level, especially my favorite, Gariath. They were fleshed out with more history and were given more depth to their personality. I just had to wade through a lot of "stuff" to find out all that stuff.

Syke's first book was essentially two battles and a little convo and background in between. I think he went the opposite direction w/ this sequel and there was a lot time spent in stagnation and the story suffered for it. Consequently my favorite part was the end when a sense of completion to their time spent on the island started to crop up and the presence of one of the stories antagonists arrived to really press down the pedal.

I'm going to continue reading Syke's books even if it was just for the writing. It's imaginative, creative, and extremely well written. But what I want to see is a tighter story. A story that has an arc where you're not confused as to who's talking, what's going on, and where things are heading.

Stacey O'Neale says

This book was reviewed by Michael Cummings, senior reviewer with the Fantasy Book Addict.

Book two of the Aeon's Gate trilogy picks up mere moments after the end of Tome of the Undergates with the intrepid Lenk recording recent events in his journal. The Tome of the Undergates has been recovered, and yet the gates of hell remain closed. Lenk and his five companions set sail to bring the accursed relic away from the demonic reach of Ulbecetonth, the Kraken Queen. But after weeks at sea, tensions amidst the adventurers are rising. Their troubles are only beginning when their ship crashes upon an island made of the bones left behind from a war long dead.

And it appears that bloodthirsty alien warrior women, fanatical beasts from the deep, and heretic-hunting wizards are the least of their concerns. Haunted by their pasts, plagued by their gods, tormented by their own people, and gripped by madness personal and peculiar, their greatest foes may yet be themselves.

You can read the rest of the review here: <http://www.fantasybookaddict.com/2012...>

Beth Cato says

Sykes's Aeon's Gates Trilogy uses all the usual fantasy tropes but with inventive, vivid energy. I found this second book to be even stronger than the first, which sometimes felt slow due to the excessive spats between characters. Here, the characters are attacked at sea and they each end up on a blighted island, most of them separated and assuming the others are dead. The perils on the island are many, but the adventurers may be their own worst enemies.

I will continue onward to the third book soon; I am reading them in the collected volume *An Affinity for Steel*.

Jason says

4 Stars

Black Halo, book two in the Aeons Gate series by Sam Sykes is almost as fun to read as the first book. This epic quest styled sword and sorcery series is on the dark and dirty side. It is filled with potty humor, violence, and action galore. The cast is a unique bunch of sort of good guys, but mostly bad, people and more. As I said with book one, Sam Sykes throws everything into these fun novels. You will find lots of magic, demons, swords, and bows, and dragonmen and monster too.

The good and the bad of this book are the characters themselves. As a motley crew of anti-heroes, villains, monsters, and bad ass people, they can be tough to like. Lenk, the leader of the group is a human with some serious mental issues. He is the heart of the story and thus the character that I liked most. Gariath comes in a close second as who would not love an extremely large and angry red dragonman. This book does shed more light on our heroes, but it also makes it clear what a serious bunch of self-centered, whiny, and gloomy bunch they are. Suicide is a serious thought that each have at one point or another or another or another. I found myself distracted while reading this book as they are so damn filled with doom and gloom, and they are not afraid to whine about it.

On a positive note, Sam Sykes makes these books so much fun to read as they are filled with action and humor. I found both novels one and two to be serious page turners that I did not want to put down.

A sort of synopsis that demonstrates his style:

“I suppose I also neglected to mention that I haven’t been alone in this endeavour. No, much of the credit goes to my companions: a monster, a heathen, a thug, a zealot and a savage. I offer these titles with the utmost respect, of course. Rest assured that, while they are undoubtedly handy to have around in a fight, time spent in close quarters with them tends to wear on one’s nerves rather swiftly.

All the same … I don’t suppose I could have done it without them. ‘It’ being described below, short as I can make it and ending with a shict’s ass pointed at me like a weapon as she slumbers.

The importance of the book is nothing worth noting unless it is also noted who had the book. In this case, after Miron, the new owners were the Abysmyths: giant, emaciated demons with the heads of fish who drown men on dry land. Fittingly enough, their leader, the Deepshriek, was even more horrendous. I suppose if I were a huge man-thing with a fish-head, I would follow a huge fish-thing with three man-heads.”

Sykes pens an awesome action scene:

“She was first.

She heard him approach, felt his breath on her neck, knew his presence; that was all so unimportant. She whirled about, the blade in her hand, the curse on her lips, the shield rising; that was just insignificant. His own blade rose swiftly. He could see himself in its reflection, see the dead, pupilless eyes staring back at him. Then, he was gone, vanished in a bath of red. He couldn’t remember when the blade had found her neck. He couldn’t remember what he had said that made her look at him with such pain in her mouth, such fear in her eyes.

But he remembered this sensation, this strength. He had felt it in icy rivers and in dark dreams, in the absence of fever and the chill of wind. He remembered the voice that spoke to him now, as it melted and seeped out of his skull. He remembered its message. He heard it now.

‘Strength wanes, bodies decay, faith fails, steel breaks.’

‘Duty,’ he whispered, ‘persists.’”

This book is much less an epic adventure than book one and it mostly takes place in one location. The story line itself hardly advances at all from where Tome of the Undergates ends. Our cast of misfits end up scattered, apart, and all have dream of killing one another. The world itself is fascinating and the way the

story seems to be heading is as well. I hope that in the third book Sykes can bring the best out of our characters and make us route for them one way or another.

To sum it up, these are seriously fun anti-hero based, witty, and funny, sword and sorcery novels that should not be missed by fantasy fans. I cannot wait to read the third book!!!!

Highest recommendations!!!!

Michael Cummings says

Book two of the Aeon's Gate trilogy picks up mere moments after the end of Tome of the Undergates with the intrepid Lenk recording recent events in his journal. The Tome of the Undergates has been recovered, and yet the gates of hell remain closed. Lenk and his five companions set sail to bring the accursed relic away from the demonic reach of Ulbecetonth, the Kraken Queen. But after weeks at sea, tensions amidst the adventurers are rising. Their troubles are only beginning when their ship crashes upon an island made of the bones left behind from a war long dead.

And it appears that bloodthirsty alien warrior women, fanatical beasts from the deep, and heretic-hunting wizards are the least of their concerns. Haunted by their pasts, plagued by their gods, tormented by their own people, and gripped by madness personal and peculiar, their greatest foes may yet be themselves.

Critics of the first book lamented that the characters were too thinly sketched, the bulk of the book being taken up by some longer than usual action scenes. In this second volume, Sykes flips that expectation on us. We delve deeper into each of the characters, getting more tantalizing glints of their depth and background as they recover on the island of the dead. To be sure, while the first book was a book of struggling, this second volume gives us a better understanding on why each of our characters - and I don't just mean our protagonists - are struggling and what it is they are trying to achieve. Which in the case of our (un)lucky band of adventurers is largely what they are struggling to run away from.

The problem, of course, is that we spend most of the book introspecting the characters, their flaws, backgrounds, motives, and favorite past times that we never quite make any headway in the story. In fact, the only real progress in the books is delivered by two new characters that are external to the adventurer party, one a librarian (don't snicker, librarians can kick your butt) on a mission to stop any who use magic without paying the price (Oh Netherlings...), and the other who is commonly known as the Moth, a vassal of the Deep Shriek sent out to release the Father. The story advances under the stewardship of these two characters, but they have scenes too far and few between to give the rest of the novel momentum.

And this is why the second volume of a series usually drags. The first volume hit us with such force and speed, the second volume had a bar set higher than it could reasonably achieve.

And yet I will still recommend this book to you. It was a well written and fine addition to the series, with all the Shict loving you can handle. Hopefully in volume three, now that we understand what compels most of the POV characters in such detail already, we will return to the tour de force that was book one, but with a better understanding and appreciation of what is driving Lenk and his merry band.

Travis says

Yet again another great installation in the Aeons' Gate Trilogy by Sam Sykes. Please view my entire review here then pick up this series as soon as you can.

Review of Black Halo by Sam Sykes

Andrew Benesh says

I enjoyed the first book in Sam Syke's Aeon's Gate Trilogy (Tome of the Undergates), but I truly loved this second installment in the series. In this book, Sykes steps up the emotional intensity and complexity of his characters, leaning more heavily on their relationships to drive the story than in his previous writing. The result is a more emotionally impactful and smoother read. Curiously while this book has a smaller scope than the last, it feels like we see more of substance in the work Sykes has built.

This novel finds our heroes stranded on a strange island, facing new enemies and continuing their struggle to secure the Tome. As they slowly work their way back to one another and a sense of unity, each must re-examine their motivations for joining and maintaining the quest, their loyalties to one another, and what their ultimate goals are. Readers are shown greater compassion for the characters than in the previous novel; previously underdeveloped characters like Denaos and Gariath become plainly tragic figures over the course of the story, and we see Kataria and Lenk seek to solidify their identities under the pull of culture and romance. Dreadalon and Asper are shown with greater strength and vulnerability than in the prior novel. We also meet some fascinating new characters – in particular, the greater development of the Venarium and Bralston add new dimensions to an already complex conflict.

The new depth of emotion does not mean that humor is lost; to the contrary we see a great deal of Syke's clever wordplay and slapstick humor throughout. For instance, never before had I considered that wizards might accidentally urinate fire. In general, the tone of this book feels brighter even though our heroes suffer greatly throughout it. The story feels more hopeful and dynamic.

The conclusion capitalizes on the depth of relationships Sykes has built over the course of this and the preceding book. Although aspects of the final battle are fuzzy, the tension between the characters is sustained effectively. As reader, you want to go directly to the third book, if only in the hopes of seeing certain villains die a horrible, terrible death.

This book is a lot of fun. If you enjoyed the first book, then you should continue with this one.
