



The Castle of Kings

Oliver Pötzsch , Anthea Bell (Translator)

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An epic tale of murder, treachery, bravery, and love

In 1524, in what is now Germany, hundreds of thousands of peasants revolted against the harsh treatment of their aristocratic overlords. Agnes is the daughter of one of these overlords, but she is not a typical sixteenth-century girl, refusing to wear dresses and spending more time with her pet falcon than potential suitors. There is only one suitor she is interested in: Mathis, a childhood friend who she can never marry due to his low birth status. But when a rogue knight attacks Agnes and Mathis shoots the knight to save her, the two are forced to go on the run together, into the midst of the raging Peasants' War.

Over the next two years, as Agnes and Mathis travel the countryside, they are each captured by and escape from various factions of the war, participate in massive battles, make new friends both noble and peasant, and fall in love. Meanwhile, Agnes's falcon finds a mysterious ring, and Agnes begins having strange, but seemingly meaningful dreams. Dreams that lead the two lovers to revelations about their place in the world and in the emerging German states. With *The Castle of Kings*, Oliver Pötzsch has written a historical yarn that calls to mind Ken Follett's *The Pillars of the Earth* and Bernard Cornwell's *Agincourt*.

The Castle of Kings Details

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From Reader Review The Castle of Kings for online ebook

Kate says

I enjoyed The Hangman's Daughter, and I really liked this one as well. The description threw me off a bit (it's a long time before the two main characters go on the run), but I get why it gets compared to Ken Follet's Pillars of the Earth- both are epic and show the struggle of the peasants.

The ending wasn't quite what I was expecting, and at least one character completely surprised me. It made for a good last read of 2016!

dluvsbooks says

Potzsch paints picturesque landscapes, whether it's damp, dark castles, the stink of a medieval tannery, or whirlpool-plagued Rhine River rapids . . . Combine Princess Bride with Germanic history circa 1500, add a dash of Lord of the Rings, and there's a week of good fun." - Kirkus Reviews

After finally finishing this I came to the conclusion that this book was too long. I enjoyed it but didn't really love it. Maybe, because the book is in third person or maybe, because by the time I hit page 525 I was quite done with it. Going to be reading something with less inches now:)

Liviu says

I really loved this book though the writing (or translation) is occasionally flat (overall the book makes you turn pages to see what happens next), the story line fairly predictable at least after a while (including the final twist) and the way the main characters (Agnes and Mathis) escape quite a few sticky situations verging on jumping the shark by the n-th time, but Agnes, Mathis (and an assorted cast of memorable villains: a foreign assassin, a vicious and devious Count, a rebel who wants power rather than improving things, a truly brutal traveling showman, while a few other secondary cast are more ambiguous but all are coming to life brilliantly), really stay with you and I cannot pay a higher compliment to the novel that it made me want to visit asap the places described here, the Trifels castle of the title - there is an afterword by the author with more about it - and other assorted castles and locations on the Rhine where the action takes place, so much so that I hope I will be able to fit a day trip there when i go to Basel in September, while I was already planning to visit the Rhinefalls and the castle there which appear prominently in the novel too

The blurb is really not that accurate at least in details, though it is accurate in the general flow of the story, but there is a lot happening and the book starts in Trifels and the surrounding areas and then goes quite a few places with lots and lots of action, a bit of the supernatural and superb imagery

Highly, highly recommended and a top 5 novel of the year for me

Stephen Richter says

I thought that if Kate Reading narrated the book, it must have merits, but it did not. Despite an interesting

setting, Germany in the early 16th Century amongst peasant revolt and the rise of Lutheranism, the book just dragged in parts.

Steven Z. says

In a July 20, 2016 interview with the New York Times, author Oliver Potzsch remarked that in his latest book, *THE CASTLE OF KINGS* his goal was to write a “German Ken Follett” type novel. The story is set in the Holy Roman Empire during the 16th century. At the time Germany was made up of a large number of principalities whose princes owed fealty to Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. The period described in the novel is in the midst of the 1524-1525 Peasant Wars between the German princes and their peasants who revolted against the high rents they were charged to work the land. The situation was also exacerbated by the continued religious struggle that was launched by Martin Luther that would lead to the Protestant Reformation.

The novel begins in the Palatinate, a small German principality that the Rhine River navigates. Mathis a sixteen year old boy is returning from an errand delivering horseshoes for his father who is the blacksmith for the castle of Trifels. On his route through the small town of Annweiler he passes a large gathering of people who are about to witness the hanging of three individuals, one of which is Mathis’ own age. Due to the socio-economic catastrophe caused by the plight of the peasants, families were starving and the therefore resorted to poaching, a crime punishable by death.

The novel itself meanders with a Folletesque tinge. We find a developing love story between Agnes, a falconer, and daughter of a knight who is the castellan of the Castle at Trifels, and Mathis, who is the son of a blacksmith. As Agnes and Mathis are confronted by the mores and social norms of the time period one is reminded of the love story between Ned Willard and Margery Fitzgerald in Follett’s latest novel, *PILLAR’S OF FIRE*.

The novel presents two worlds that are on a collision course. Agnes’ father Philipp Schluchteren von Eferenstein represents the feudal code of knights and the courtesies that men offered each other even on the battlefield. There are a number of scenes, both peaceful and violent whereby this plays out. Eferenstein’s beliefs are confronted by modernity, particularly when it came to the battlefield. The development of gun powder and artillery is replacing courtly combat that relied on broad swords. Eferenstein has difficulty accepting this and the kinds of agreements one must make with other Dukes, Counts, and former knights in order to survive. This generational gap is also seen in the relationship between Mathis and his blacksmith father, Hans Weilenbach who has casted swords and armor for decades and now must deal with a son who has become an explosive expert.

Potzsch has created a number of story lines which all seem to intersect. Mathis’ development as an expert in the deployment of artillery and his relationship with Agnes who must deal with a stubborn father. The presence of robber knights like Hans von Wertingen and their impact on the local economy and the lives of everyone, Dukes and peasants included. Agnes’ obsession with her dreams which present a 13th century figure named Johannes of Brunswick and his alleged conspiracy haunts her – what do they mean and what is his relationship to her contemporary world? The relationship between Eferenstein and a young Count, Frederick von Lowenstein-Scharfeneck who enter into an alliance which has a major impact on all the major characters, the machinations of Mayor Bernwart Gessler of Annweiler, the role of the Peasants Revolt and the rebels who live in the forest who organize to deal with the high burden of taxes and the demands not only by secular leaders, but the Catholic Church itself. Lastly, and most importantly is Agnes’ quest to learn the history and significance behind a ring that belonged to Frederick Barbarossa that falls into her hands leading Agnes to a monastery where the secrets are hidden.

Potzsch has woven an intricate and complex plot that makes excellent use of German history. The conflict between Luther and the Church, the peasants and the princes, and princes against princes dominates. What emerges is a series of flawed characters that Potzsch develops with remarkable detail. Efenstein, Agnes, Mathis, and von Lowenstein-Scharfeneck have already been mentioned. But individuals like Father Tristan, Agnes' confessor and medical healer, Shepherd Jockel, a peasant leader, and Melchoir von Tanningen, a traveling minstrel and swordsman, in addition to the brotherhood of 12 whose secrets can alter the course of European history contribute greatly to plot development.

Potzsch's creativity creates many twists and turns as the murders and disingenuous behavior on the part of a number of characters continue to mount. Potzsch describes beautiful landscapes, dark castles, Rhine River rapids, information about arquebuses, falconets, mercenaries, and a wonderful summary of the Hohenstaufen and Habsburg monarchies. This is a big book, but an engrossing and enchanting one at times that is well worth the read. Again, if you enjoy Ken Follett, you most certainly will enjoy Oliver Potzsch.

Shawn Mooney says

Abandoned less than 10% of the way in due to the laughably stock characters, hackneyed prose, and the complete absence of any nuance in the story. It read like a bad children's novel. Not a bad young adult novel, a bad children's novel.

Joyce says

I've enjoyed Potzsch's mysteries, and since I'm always on the lookout for Germany-set historical fiction, I was looking forward to this. Unfortunately, I found it an uneasy blend of history and myth/folktale with a magical ring and quest and kings from olden times. That said this is a well-researched historical novel set during the Peasant War in 1524 and 1525 with some real historical figures and a strong sense of time and place with medieval life and customs and weaponry highlighted. The author's note at the end separates fact from fiction. Although it does drag at spots--way too many adventures and escapes and dangerous adversaries for Lady Agnes, a countess, and her childhood friend and eventually lover peasant Mathis, with whom she is on the run--the pace is relentless; authentic characters except perhaps the unconventional Agnes--though there likely were women of her ilk; action/adventure story line with dreams and visions interspersed; framed by authentic historical details; richly detailed descriptions; romantic but gritty and gripping tone. Kate Reading does a good job with the multi-syllabic German names.

Daniel says

3.5

Tara (Spinatale Reviews) says

Before I started this book, I was incredibly excited to read another work by Oliver Potzsch. His Hangman's Daughter series is one of my favorites and I really enjoyed the The Ludwig Conspiracy. His characterization is usually top-notch, his settings so beautifully described that you can imagine yourself there, and his plots defy woven, with surprises even for the most astute of readers. Unfortunately, after reading the first half of the book, I ended up skimming through the rest because the plot had become incredibly slow.

This book was wonderfully researched and had the potential to be a well-written, beautiful piece of historical fiction. All of the components were there, they just didn't quite fit together correctly. As with his other books, the setting was top-notch. Agnes and Mathis' world came alive for me, I could easily picture the crumbling ruins of the castle, the slightly sinister forest, the prison pit, etc.

However, The characters themselves lacked personality, any depth, or consistency with their actions. I wasn't able to connect with either of the protagonists, which made it difficult for me to care about what happened to them. Agnes had the potential to be a very interesting character (she's caught up in a huge conspiracy and gets visions), but the writing didn't allow her to achieve that potential. Additionally, Mathis was never really developed beyond his rebellious tendencies and love for Agnes. The secondary characters were a little more interesting as they had slightly more depth, but it wasn't enough to make up for the protagonists.

I think the plot itself was interesting and intriguing. Had there been about 200 fewer pages in this book and some heavier editing, it would be an incredible work of historical fiction. As it was, I enjoyed the way that the mystery unraveled. Skimming the last half of the book, I was able to pick up on the major plot points and arrive at the ending with a fun comprehension of how the final scene had been set up.

After looking at the rave reviews of the German version, I'm not sure if the flaws in this book were the fault of the author or the translator but either way, the english edition does not live up to its potential.

I received a free advance copy of this book from Netgalley in exchange for my honest review. This review is also available on my blog.

Elizabeth says

If this is an adventure novel, it does a good job of continually dishing up danger, escape, wars, fighting, etc, but the writing style (or translation) was cringe-worthy too often. Bodice-ripping is a male fantasy, I guess, as the author used it at least twice, along with rapes and attempted rapes, that just did not sit well with me. The story was long and complicated and some of this trite material could simply have been left out.

The heroine was alternately bold and simpering. The hero, unbelievable. The villains- cruel. None were complex. I do thank the author for the setting and the historical background.

Judy Chessin says

This book has been compared to Ken Follett's castle/cathedral series. It has the same epic scope covering the Peasant wars against the German princes and land owners as well as the religious Reformation beginning at the time. However the characters were not nearly compelling as Follet's. I enjoyed the history and the castle and church lore. I loved the back history of Agnes' life. However, as a character I found her shallow (or was it merely the narrators artificially high voice in reading Agnes -- often making her sound like a 9 year old

girl?). The book was too long for characters I didn't enjoy enough.

Patrick says

Schon als ich das Buch zum ersten Mal in der Hand hatte, war ich erstaunt, was es für ein Wälzer war: Fast 1000 Seiten zählt das Werk, also nicht gerade ein Leichtgewicht. Nicht verwunderlich vielleicht, bedenkt man, dass sich die Geschichte um nicht weniger als das Schicksal des Deutschen Reiches dreht, wie schon der Inhaltstext des Verlags verrät:

1524. Die deutschen Lande werden von den Bauernkriegen zerrissen. Dem Adel droht der Verlust der Macht, dem Volk Hunger und Tod. In den Wirren dieser Zeit suchen vier Menschen ihre Bestimmung: Agnes, die Burgherrin der einst mächtigen Staufferburg Trifels, will ihr Erbe bewahren und die Rätsel der Burg lösen. Mathis, Sohn eines Burgschmieds, träumt von der Gleichheit der Menschen. Er schließt sich aufständischen Bauern an und kämpft für seine Ideale. König Franz von Frankreich strebt nach der Kaiserkrone. Um sie zu bekommen, muss er den Schatz der Stauffer finden. Karl V., gewählter deutscher König und selbst ernannter Kaiser des Reiches, sieht seine Macht bedroht. Vier Menschen, vier Leben. Und ein Ort, der den Schlüssel zu ihrem Schicksal birgt: Der Trifels. Hort vieler Geheimnisse. Legendäre Burg der Stauffer.

Die Erwartungen waren also entsprechend hoch, als ich mit dem Buch begann. Die Geschichte dreht sich in erster Linie um Agnes, Adlige und Erbin der Burg Trifels, und ihren Jugendfreund Mathis, der ein einfacher Schmied ist. Eine unglückliche Liebesgeschichte ist also vorprogrammiert. Agnes kommt „zufällig“ in den Besitz eines alten Siegelrings und wird kurz darauf von fiebrigen prophetischen Träumen geplagt, die sich um den Trifels drehen. Zusammen mit Mathis versucht sie im Verlauf der Geschichte, das Rätsel um den Trifels und ihre Träume zu lösen. Dies passiert vor dem Hintergrund der Bauernkriege und den politischen Auseinandersetzungen des Habsburger Kaisers Karl V. mit seinem französischen Widersacher Franz I.

Eines gleich vorweg: Pötzsch hat für seinen Roman eine sehr gute Recherchearbeit geleistet. Die Schauplätze und Reisewege sind wunderbar ausgearbeitet und geschildert, bis hin zu einem Reisetipp im Anhang des Buches, mit dem man die Schauplätze der Geschichte selbst besuchen und auf den Spuren der Protagonisten wandeln kann.

Doch leider erschöpft sich damit das Positive an dem Roman auch schon fast. Denn Pötzsch schafft es nicht, seine Figuren glaubwürdig zu beschreiben und handeln zu lassen. So stolpern sie über die kompletten fast 1000 Seiten von einem Unglück ins nächste, ohne groß aus ihren Fehlern zu lernen, dennoch kommen sie immer wieder mit (mehr oder weniger) heiler Haut davon, was mit der Zeit doch etwas unglaubwürdig erscheint, zumal die Charaktere sich auch nicht sonderlich bewegt von den Unglücksschlägen zeigen und diese einfach hinnehmen. So anschaulich die Orte, Burgen und Plätze im Roman beschrieben sind, so farblos bleiben leider die Charaktere und ihre Dialoge, besonders Agnes, die sich gegenüber Mathis immer wieder übertrieben zickig verhält, was wohl dazu dienen soll, die Liebesgeschichte zu untermalen, auf Dauer aber eher nervig wirkt. Gefühle und Emotionen kommen nicht wirklich herüber, was dazu führt, dass man sich nur schwer mit den Figuren identifizieren kann. Generell sind die Charaktere etwas platt beschrieben und Stereotyp. Agnes ist das Abziehbild einer gebildeten jungen Frau, die sich nicht mit ihrem Platz in der mittelalterlichen Welt abfinden will und lieber Hosen denn Kleider trägt. Mathis ist der naive Weltverbesserer, dem alles gelingt, was er anpackt. Obwohl er nur Sohn eines Schmiedes ist, bringt er sich selbst nur mithilfe von Büchern bei, Kanonen und Schießpulver herzustellen, und wird somit gleich ein

gefragter Geschützmeister. Wer sich einmal ein mittelalterliches Feuerwerkbuch angeschaut hat, der weiß, dass das ziemlich weit an den Haaren herbei gezogen ist, besonders was das Schmieden von Feuerwaffen angeht. Ohne Lehrmeister ist es ein recht großes Wunder, dass Mathis sich nicht selbst in die Luft sprengt mit seinen selbstgebauten Waffen. Die Widersacher der Helden sind nicht weniger stereotyp beschrieben, vor allem der „böse schwarze Mann“, der mordend durchs Reich zieht, offenbar mit unbegrenzten Mitteln ausgestattet ist, überall seinen Willen bekommt und jeden Kampf gewinnt. Wirklich glaubwürdig oder spannend ist dies meiner Meinung nach nicht.

Die Bauernkriege, die den Hintergrund für die Geschichte bilden, werden hingegen sehr anschaulich und teils auch sehr kompromisslos beschrieben – auch hier wurde wieder gut recherchiert und man merkt Pötzsch die große Liebe zum Detail an. Gleiches gilt für die Passagen, die sich mit der Auseinandersetzung der beiden Herrscher Franz und Karl beschäftigen. Leider bleiben diese für die Handlung größtenteils ohne Konsequenz. Wer sich für die deutsche Geschichte interessiert, kann hier aber auch einiges Interessantes mitnehmen.

Die Geschichte selbst erscheint ein wenig märchenhaft, besonders auch aufgrund von Agnes' Visionen, die dem Ganzen doch einen mythischen Anstrich geben. Sicher nicht jedermanns Sache in einem Historischen Roman. Mich hätte es weniger gestört, doch bleibt die ganze Story leider etwas unglaubwürdig, vor allem auch das Ende. Und überdies zieht sie sich doch sehr lange hin und man fragt sich, warum es unbedingt so viele Seiten sein mussten. Immer wieder passieren den Helden Dinge, die die Handlung unnötig in die Länge ziehen und nicht unbedingt hätten sein müssen, so dass der eigentliche Faden öfter mal in Vergessenheit gerät und sich kaum Spannung aufbauen kann, zumal viele Wendungen vorhersagbar sind.

Noch ein Wort zur Aufmachung des Buches: Hier war ich wirklich positiv überrascht, was für einen Aufwand der Verlag investiert hat. Ein schönes geprägtes Cover ist heute ja schon fast Standard, aber auch das komplette Buch ist durch farbige Akzente verschönert. Die Seitenzahlen sind durchgehend mit roten Verzierungen versehen und die Kapitelanfänge sind durch große Initialen abgehoben, die an eine mittelalterliche Handschrift erinnern. Für das Äußere des Buchs würde ich glatt 5 Punkte vergeben, doch geht es ja in erster Linie um den Inhalt, und da sieht es leider weniger rosig aus.

Alles in allem verbleibe ich daher mit 2,5 Punkten für „Die Burg der Könige“. Das Buch war ok, ich bereue nicht, es gelesen zu haben, aber es war einfach viel zu lang und bot wenig Spannendes. Dennoch weiß Pötzsch offensichtlich gut mit den Handwerkzeugen für einen Historischen Roman umzugehen und ich werde seiner „Henkerstochter“-Reihe auch eine Chance geben, zumal ich schon mehrfach gelesen habe, dass diese bedeutend besser sei als „Die Burg der Könige“.

Rezension von <http://klingenfaenger.blogspot.de>

Nikki_Hill says

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Mary Alice says

Strong female lead, but a predictable story

Amanda says

History certainly comes alive in Oliver Pötzsch's *The Castle of Kings*, but I'm afraid that's the only part in this story that does. While Pötzsch's knowledge and passion for castles and the stories they bore witness to are quite evident in this massive tome, there were some major elements that lacked such impassioned fire. The adventure? Splendid. The setting? Detailed. The twists and turns, however? Nauseating. The characters? Opaque. Emotionless. Frustrating. Conflicting in their personalities. Oh, I could go on.

The history, and the full picture of the story at hand, is quite intriguing. But the characters within that story left so much room for improvement. If anything, I found them to be quite pedantic, whiny, and downright annoying. How are we supposed to connect with these characters if we don't give a flying flair what happens to them? I just couldn't bring myself to connect with these characters, and for that, I didn't enjoy this story as much as I wanted to.

Also, the execution of some of the story's elements drove me mad. A few of the more intriguing points to the story weren't extrapolated upon, whereas the uninteresting points seemed to fester for far too long. It is this type of unbalanced creativity that led to such a dismal outlook on a promising endeavor. Such was my frustration, as I thoroughly enjoyed Pötzsch's *The Hangman's Daughter*, but I was ultimately unable to connect with this story, thereby dampening my interest and crushing my expectations. But, of course, readers have quite differing interests, so don't let such harsh criticism put you off of a great story.

Indeed, it is not my inability to connect with such loathsome characters that should deter you from venturing forth into *The Castle of Kings*. Pötzsch's writing style is superb, quite solid, and succeeds in telling the tale of a great historical adventure. If you are a fan of castles, historical tales, grail quests, and knights in shining armor, I would suggest giving this story a shot. For I am but one reader, and who am I to deter you from experiencing the adventure yourself?
