



Hard Times in Dragon City

Matt Forbeck

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Retired adventurer Max Gibson has seen better times. Ever since he and his treasure-hunting friends struck it big and called it quits a decade back, it seems like things have slid downhill.

It's hard enough to scrape by in a sprawling mountain city in which elves and dwarves live higher than humans in every way. It's worse at night, when the groans of the zombies laying an eternal siege to the city provide a ceaseless reminder that the Dragon Emperor himself is the only thing that keeps the hordes of hungry dead from storming the walls.

When Max is called in to help investigate the wholesale slaughter of a long-dead dwarf friend's family, he thinks maybe he's finally hit bottom. Then the love of his life — the elf who left him when their careers as adventurers ended — walks back through his door, desperate for his help and with nowhere else to turn.

It's not getting any easier. That's for sure.

Hard Times in Dragon City is the first novel in the Shotguns & Sorcery setting.

Hard Times in Dragon City Details

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Author : Matt Forbeck

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From Reader Review Hard Times in Dragon City for online ebook

Kibbin says

From the mind of Matt Forbeck, and written as part of a twelve books in twelve months programme he ran for himself, Hard times tells the story of ex-adventurer Max Gibson, no not that one, who lives in the titular city where zombies claw at the walls, Elves literally look down on the rest of the intelligent races, by privy of living higher up the mountain than they and the whole thing is overseen by their ruler, a literal dragon. So how does a comic book writer handle a noir private dick in a simple world of swords and socery?

In fact the whole world presented in the book is rich and fleshed out in fun and interesting ways that are never lingered on or spoon fed to in long dry bouts of exposition. It feels like a logical step for the more meta aware fantasies running at the moment like World of Warcraft and their ilk. It is a time where swords are still worn but the practicality of a good gun is making it the favoured weapon of choice. When wizards are known to walk amongst them many seemed to have bothered to pick up few spells here and there and carry their wands in quick draw holsters just in case. The magic itself is diverse and colourfull but never seems to overpower the character or beat him down too hard likewise. Instead its used well and measured out without ever leaving the reader to question, if he could do X, why not just do Y and be done with the story? It's a world where delving through old tombs can give the right mind enough money to set themselves up and live quite comfortably instead of enforcing the old 'Fafhard and the Grey Mouser' system where everything must be drunk away before the next book in case things ever got dull. Though the book does indeed surround its city with hoards of zombies they do not play a large part in the story and when they do, they could probably be substituted for wargs or gelatinous cubes, though I reckon the mental image will be somewhat diminished. However it remains to be seen if their role will become more important as the trilogy progresses.

We open to Max finding that the family of an old adventuring buddy has just been brutally murdered by a very skilled sword. Working only nominally with and often directly against the "chief of police" Yabair, Max sets out to find out what happened and why. His quest will lead to many of his old adventuring party, some of which have fared better in their new lives than others. The city itself stands upon a mountain with the richest at the top and the poorest at the bottom with the logic that should the hoards at the gates ever get in the poor can provide an effective meat shield for the upper-class until the problem is rectified. The story seems to nicely move Max up and down the slope giving us a good look at the world around us without feeling like a fantasy tour book.

As you might be able to tell from the description of the book, the title or the banner "Shotguns and sorcery" this book is about as pulpy and trashy as they come and I've got to say I really enjoyed it. The dialogue is quick witted, the pace fast and furious and each of the characters feels fleshed out enough so the city does not feel as though it is filled with a drove of cardboard cut outs. Everyone seems to have their own lives outside of Max's that bleeds nicely into the world around them.

It's a short book that does not outstay its welcome; however we do not end up with a "Brewing storm" situation though this does not mean it feels like a whole novel cut into parts. Though much is set up in this book which I assume will be played with in the two follow ups this is indeed a full story if a short one.

Nick says

Really good book! Almost had a Dresden Files-like vibe to it, but with a bit more fantasy added. Well

written and engaging, I think I'll pick up more of his work.

Daniel says

A surprising blend of fantasy and noir, *Hard Times In Dragon City* is an excellent start to the *Shotguns & Sorcery* series. Max Gibson is an great character and guide to the socially and literally stratified streets of Dragon City, taking us down the dingy alleyways of Goblintown, the zombie-infested wilderness surrounding the city, the pristine boulevards of the Elven Quarter, and beyond. Along the way we meet a cast of characters firmly inhabiting the gray area of the moral spectrum that make life "interesting" for Max and give us glimpses into the larger story and world.

Grab your fedora, pack your enchanted gun and wand, and dive into the streets of Dragon City.

Scott James says

Cover to cover awesome. Matt Forbeck's 12 for 12 project is well worth reading, and the first book in his *Shotguns and Sorcery* trilogy is every bit as good as both the hard-boiled detective novels of the pulp era, and the flashing swords books that replaced them in that space.

Think the *Maltese Falcon* as written by Fritz Leiber, and you'll have a sense of Forbeck's hero Max Gibson. And better yet, you can follow his wand-wielding protagonist in short stories in various anthologies, as well as a stand-alone short story.

If you want a good, fast read, look no further. If you're a fan of rollicking, sword-swinging action, then you've found the "write stuff."

Hendel says

I love fantasy noir, and this was a fun quick fix (burned through it all in one evening) while waiting for Glen Cook to produce another Garrett book. This is the first of a trilogy, but is a complete story on its own while also setting up interesting hooks for the future books. The setting is fairly standard fantasy stuff, exposing its roots as an RPG. Humans, dwarves, elves, halflings, dragons, retired adventurers, stop me if you've seen any of this before. Hoping for more of the "shotguns" aspect (so far guns are about the only non-magical tech aspect of the setting) or for other unique elements to emerge. But the characters worked for me, as did the plot twists. Again, I did read it nonstop.

I bought the trilogy, along with the author's *Brave New World* superhero trilogy, as part of a Kickstarter funded project, and am glad I did. Looking forward to the next two books.

Michael Quinn says

Really enjoyed reading this. Matt sets up an interesting world - probably one I will revisit and read more on

once I get some other books read.

Eric Troup says

This was my first exposure to the fantasy-noir genre—unless you count The Dresden Files ... which I suppose one must. But this is different. Rather than take place in a contemporary setting with fantasy elements mixed in, this story takes place in a fantasy world, with fantasy elements as the main ingredients. I loved this story, but even more, I loved the setting. I can't wait to read the next book in the series, but even more, I can't wait for the role-playing game that's in the works. If you like noir, action, humor, and, of course, fantasy, you owe it to yourself to give this book a read. It's loads of fun!

Joe says

I have read all 3 of the books in this series in the past couple of weeks and found them quite enjoyable.

While short, they are full of action and the characters are well fleshed out and can be related to. The writing is good and the stories are compelling. However, you can tell that they were written as part of a quick-writing challenge, in this case the author attempted to write 12 books in 12 months. While I do not think this affected the stories very much, it did affect the editing. There are a lot of little errors like missing words, extra words or incorrect punctuation throughout the series. A good editor would be a big help on these books.

Even with these editing issues I wholeheartedly recommend this book and the entire series to anyone that enjoys a good fantasy story.

Colin Francis says

Entertaining but flawed

The story was entertaining, though simple. Plot points seemed very coincidental and unexplained. Intermittent spelling and grammar errors didn't help.

Abhinav says

<http://sonsofcorax.wordpress.com/2012...>

I'm a huge fan of Matt Forbeck's work: whether it's novels or comics. I have yet to read any of his work that I didn't like, and he has been the most consistent author for me to date, not to mention that he's also the one I've reviewed the most! That creates certain expectations of course, and Hard Times In Dragon City fulfills those expectations quite nicely. As the first Shotguns & Sorcery novel, this is the fourth in his 12-for-12 project in which he aimed to write one 50,000-word novel a month. I've read the first trilogy, Matt Forbeck's Brave New World, and it's superb superhero fiction. Exciting stuff!

Shotguns & Sorcery - Hard Times in Dragon City

Ever wondered what fantasy noir would be like, with dragons, elves, halflings, dwarves and zombies? Matt Forbeck presents exactly that scenario in his latest self-published novel, set in his Shotguns & Sorcery RPG setting. The novel focuses on former adventurer and treasure hunter Max Gibson as he investigates the brutal deaths of one of his dead friend's family members. Events lead him beyond the walls of the Dragon City, and even to the Dragon's Spire at the heart of the city, where it's ruler holds his court. As with any and all of Matt Forbeck's work, his characters are excellent. Max Gibson makes for a wonderful protagonist with a distinct cynical personality and a flair for the tongue-in-cheek. Matt builds him up really well throughout the novel, and gives him some great dialogue as well. Captain Yabair of the Dragon Guard, Max's former lover Bellezza Sanguigno, Max's former adventuring partner Moira, and all the characters that populate the novel are all just as fantastic characters. I really liked the tense professional relationship between Max and Yabair. A buddy comedy starring these two would be awesome.

Dragon City, whether beyond its walls to the zombie hordes or within to the Dragon's Spire, is a wonderful setting. I really like the mix of gunpowder weaponry and magic, which makes for a really good change from most other fantasy novels that I come across in my reading. Some really wonderful sights and sounds in the city, and it also has a very rustic, frontier town feel to it. I'd love to read more about the setting!

With some great pacing, a very exciting murder mystery, an even more excellent detective-protagonist, I can say with confidence that Hard Times In Dragon City is an amazing novel. As is my usual complaint with Matt's 12-for-12 novels though, I really wish that these novels were longer!

Rating: 9.5/10

Sherwood Smith says

When I was young it was easy to read every book published in SF and F. Now it's impossible. Upside of that is new discoveries: if it hadn't been for the Epic FantasyBundle last summer I might never have discovered Matt Forbeck, and that would have been a shame because he writes one of my favorite flavors of fantasy: a blend of action, magic, and humor.

Max Gibson is an ex-adventurer who just wants to kick back and enjoy his friends and a good beer at his favorite hangout in Dragon City, the capital of an empire ruled by an actual dragon. But when he discovers the family of an old adventurer friend having been murdered, he has to solve it. Especially when the wrong person is accused--and he believes the chief suspect is his ex-girlfriend, a beautiful elf woman who had slummed with the adventurers for a time.

The pacing never lets up as Max ventures out against the zombies beyond the gates, and gets chased up and down the tangled levels of the city, finally ending up at the top when surprising things happen. The mystery gets solved in this first of a trilogy, but there are plenty of tantalizing threads left dangling.

I loved Max's voice, expressed through an expert blend of vivid image and humor.

Ibrinar says

What you would expect from the description, relatively standard but not a bad read.

Ellie Ann says

Hard Times in Dragon City is a fantasy mystery I couldn't put down. It was fast paced and had such engaging scenes, from the goblin town chase to the verbal sparring with Yabair, to the character development to the world building, each word was placed just right. Matt Forbeck, the author, was completely invisible. And that's the biggest compliment I can give to any author. I was totally hooked on the story and characters.

Bryce Perry says

Perfect blend of fantasy and noir. Great world building without being boring. I'll definitely be picking up the rest of this series.

Robert H says

Set in a fantasy world which Matt Forbeck had originally developed as a role playing game in 2000, shelved, and then returned to this year as a great setting for a trilogy of books. While set in a world that includes both magic and guns, the book is almost a detective novel as the main character, Max Gibson, works to find the perpetrator of a heinous crime involving the family of a former adventuring companion.

Filling out the story are a series of characters familiar from any detective story - the cop (in this case an elven member of city watch), the love interest (a former adventuring companion), the tavern owner, the bad guy, and other former companions. So while the scenario may be somewhat unfamiliar, the characters are. Forbeck does a great job with the story though, keeping the pace fast - though scenes were separated into chapters, which meant many were just a couple of pages long.

Purchased this story as part of the Kickstarter where Forbeck is planning on writing 12 books in 12 months. Haven't read all of the books he's written so far, but based on this story I'm certainly looking forward to the next Shotguns and Sorcery book!
