



Happy Hour In Hell: Volume Two of Bobby Dollar

Tad Williams

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I've been told to go to Hell more times than I can count. But this time I'm actually going.

My name's Bobby Dollar, sometimes known as Doloriel, and of course, Hell isn't a great place for someone like me—I'm an angel. They don't like my kind down there, not even the slightly fallen variety. But they have my girlfriend, who happens to be a beautiful demon named Casimira, Countess of Cold Hands. Why does an angel have a demon girlfriend? Well, certainly not because it helps my career.

She's being held hostage by one of the nastiest, most powerful demons in all of the netherworld—Eligor, Grand Duke of Hell. He already hates me, and he'd like nothing better than to get his hands on me and rip my immortal soul right out of my borrowed but oh-so-mortal body.

But wait, it gets better! Not only do I have to sneak into Hell, make my way across thousands of miles of terror and suffering to reach Pan- demonium, capital of the fiery depths, but then I have to steal Caz right out from under Eligor's burning eyes and smuggle her out again, past demon soldiers, hellhounds, and all the murderous creatures imprisoned there for eternity. And even if I somehow manage to escape Hell, I'm also being stalked by an undead psychopath named Smyler who's been following me for weeks. Oh, and did I mention that he can't be killed?

So if I somehow survive Hell, elude the Grand Duke and all his hideous minions and make it back to the real world, I'll still be the most hunted soul in Creation. But at least I'll have Caz. Gotta have something to look forward to, right?

So just pour me that damn drink, will you? I've got somewhere to go.

Happy Hour In Hell: Volume Two of Bobby Dollar Details

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Dylan says

This book was really 3.5 stars and I might change it to a four star rating...I'm incredibly torn. I really did enjoy this book and I love Tad Williams' writing in any of the books of his that I've read. However, while there was plenty of action and Bobby Dollar snark in this novel, there was just not a lot of progress. When I really sat down and thought about it, this book did not have a whole lot of overall plot progression for the series, just a lot of Bobby getting into situations and getting out of them (which was sometimes a bit unbelievable). Now, I still really enjoyed this book and I feel like a lot of the little nuggets in this book that were laid down will play off big to make the third one in the series the best one, but overall this book just didn't completely satisfy me. But, what really dropped this book from 4 stars to 3.5 was the fact that I called the plot twist at the end ahead of time.

Kathy Sebesta says

OK, I made it a third of the way thru and I'm just fed up reading descriptions after descriptions of the indescribable torments of hell. The premise of the first book (and hence series in general) is intriguing: why would anyone want an eternity of mindless bliss in heaven? Alternatively, who truly deserves an eternity of damnation and uber-suffering in hell? Shouldn't there be a third place where you can grow and become better and really exist? However, in this the second book of the series, our hero angel has fallen in love with one of the top demons of hell, and has gone to hell to rescue her - and there he witnesses all this horrific stuff. There's way way way too much of it, and to be honest it's more than boring. Enough. I'm done.

Rhonda says

Not as intriguing or clever as the first entry -- **The Dirty Streets of Heaven**. I would guess more than half of the pages are literally descriptions of various horrors of hell. While inventive, it was over the top and after a while, either disturbing by the domination of the horrific or boring because of numbness to being disturbed. I wanted more about the mysterious Third Way and the various machinations of the parties. Bobby Dollar remains a noir smart-ass with a self-deprecating sense of humor. That is pretty much what kept me going -- that and the fact I was on planes and needed something to read. I don't know if I'm going seek out whatever comes next.

Craig Meyer says

HAPPY HOUR IN HELL is the second book in the series about the war between heaven and hell. I have not read many of Tad Williams's books but the concept of the first book brought me into the series. The book has a lot of interesting qualities to it. It also has a few negatives. Let me start with the negatives. A good story for me involves a lot of character interaction. Large portions of the book tend to drag out. Tad Williams spends a lot of time telling the story from the author's point of view as opposed to hearing the story

from a lot of character interaction and dialogue. The story at times does not seem to flow correctly. It jumps too much. Sometimes I found it hard to follow it.

What I found fantastic about the book where the surprises, and the detective story qualities.

If God ever needs to redesign hell, Tad Williams would be a perfect candidate for that job. His vision of what hell looks like and what the main character goes through in Hell just blew my mind away. The hell described by the author so violent, so evil, so depressing that I pondered my own life's dealings making sure that I was on the correct path to the other place.

M Tat says

The storytelling is quite decent, yet when you reach the end and discover how much has not been accomplished, it feels like reading this volume was entirely anticlimactic (read: worthless).

It is rare when I feel that an author should have _shortened_ their work into something more concise, and Happy Hour in Hell is one of those instances. Williams clearly enjoys his storytelling, and his style has become far, far more focused compared to when he wrapped up his Otherland series.

However, HHinH is a rather blase' journey through hell. . .but left with rather minimal substance. Williams demonstrated in River of Blue Fire that he can take us through some deftly imaginative worlds. When it came to mentally illustrating these components of hell, it's as though we fast-forwarded through these deftly imaginative worlds, which severely weakened the storytelling.

What would have strengthened this novel would be to cut the number of pages in half. Use those pages to vividly illustrate this imaginative and hellish realm. Then use the rest of the book to take us in search of _the real_ ending (not this 'oh look, here's Sam and Clarence _just conveniently showing up when we want them to appear' crap).

In other praise, Williams is decisively producing very adult-oriented material. This is _definitely_ a strength and there is more erotic detail here that clearly establishes we are exploring an adult world. It would be great if Williams could act as decisively relative to crafting that same level of detail to embellish and develop the worlds he takes us to.

Connie Jasperson says

Okay, now we are talking deep. Happy Hour In Hell (Bobby Dollar 2), by Tad Williams takes us from the bowels of Heaven to the heart of Hell, and its a rough ride, and a heck of a good story.

But first, may I just say how refreshing it is to find a book by a big publisher (DAW) with such a great Blurb? This is a great innovation—they should keep up the good work!

The Blurb:

I've been told to go to Hell more times than I can count. But this time I'm actually going.

My name's Bobby Dollar, sometimes known as Doloriel, and of course, Hell isn't a great place for someone like me—I'm an angel. They don't like my kind down there, not even the slightly fallen variety. But they have my girlfriend, who happens to be a beautiful demon named Casimira, Countess of Cold Hands. Why does an angel have a demon girlfriend? Well, certainly not because it helps my career.

She's being held hostage by one of the nastiest, most powerful demons in all of the netherworld—Eligor, Grand Duke of Hell. He already hates me, and he'd like nothing better than to get his hands on me and rip my immortal soul right out of my borrowed but oh-so-mortal body.

But wait, it gets better! Not only do I have to sneak into Hell, make my way across thousands of miles of terror and suffering to reach Pan- demonium, capital of the fiery depths, but then I have to steal Caz right out from under Eligor's burning eyes and smuggle her out again, past demon soldiers, hellhounds, and all the murderous creatures imprisoned there for eternity. And even if I somehow manage to escape Hell, I'm also being stalked by an undead psychopath named Smyler who's been following me for weeks. Oh, and did I mention that he can't be killed?

So if I somehow survive Hell, elude the Grand Duke and all his hideous minions and make it back to the real world, I'll still be the most hunted soul in Creation. But at least I'll have Caz. Gotta have something to look forward to, right?

So just pour me that damn drink, will you? I've got somewhere to go.

My Review:

First off, I'm not going to give you the play-by-play of the book. Instead, I am going to give you my impressions.

If you like your angels as painted by Michelangelo, you are in the wrong place. Bobby isn't that sort of an angel. Bobby gets in and does Heaven's dirty work with his bare hands. He's a hard-boiled detective, a bad-boy, and he's the sort of angel my mother warned me about. But he's also just the sort of angel you want on your side when you suddenly find yourself dead, and your soul is being judged.

The action starts on page one and it just keep on going all the way through the book. Even the places where a less-skilled author would be giving you an info dump are well-plotted and the momentum of Bobby's adventures keeps you moving while you absorb the atmosphere.

And let's talk atmosphere: if I die today, I don't wanna go to this version of Hell. It is everything Hell should be—lurid, sadistic, brutal, horrifying, disgusting and evil. It's no place for an angel, and the things that happen to Bobby are violent and beyond horrible. In every situation, and all the way through the never-ending string of torments Bobby is put through, he is still focused on his one obsession, that of getting Caz back.

It's hard to say which place is more malevolent, Heaven or Hell. Hell is more obviously evil, but Heaven is not a fun place either. Bobby's superiors are not a nice bunch. Of course, you have to realize that Demons are just Fallen Angels, so the capacity for cold, hard justice was always there. The Smyler is one of the creepiest villains I've ever seen. Not the sort of villain to read about before bed! And he's just the tip of the iceberg.

But even in Hell there is the occasional flash of kindness, things that get Bobby asking questions. While in Hell, Bobby's eyes are opened to the possibility that the gray area between good and evil may be wider than he thought, and he begins to wonder about his former partner, a renegade angel, and the mysterious third way. If that sub-plot will take Bobby anywhere, I don't know, but I am intrigued.

It is a stand-alone book, in that you don't have to have read book 1 to understand exactly what is going on, and there is a satisfying conclusion, even if it's not the one you expect. That makes it even better! I am now eagerly waiting for the next installment in this madcap mountain of mayhem!

Lukuoli says

Happy Hour in Hell was like Otherland all over again. Williams forgot all about (or just chose to put aside) the rather interesting plot he started in the first Bobby Dollar book and spent the whole novel merely running Bobby Dollar pointlessly around in an imaginary world. It was like a 1998 video game without being in control yourself.

The plot started in the first Bobby Dollar book didn't nudge forward until the very end of the book, and even there only for a paragraph or two. So, in order to "get" the plot of the Bobby Dollar trilogy, it's totally unnecessary to read the number two in the series.

Raghunandan Purushothaman says

I was more than a little disappointed with this book. I had started reading this book with rather high expectations given that Dirty Streets in Heaven had such a fascinating setting. There is no doubt that the description of Hell is vivid and nauseatingly horrifying (like any description of hell should be). And that's about the only positive point I can think of. Now let me cover the negatives:

1. Plot: The whole plot of the book is that Bobby the angel enters hell to rescue his demoness girlfriend Cas. Nothing else happens really. The whole book is just one long description of hell's horrors.
2. Character building: Character? What character? Unless you count a long line of mutilated, oozing, slimy, tentacled monsters who reel of various cliched phrases as characters.....no wait....what about Bobby? I don't know about others but I don't consider love sick angel being subjected to countless horrors as character building.
3. Ending: Don't ask. It's too spoilery and quite frankly not worth knowing.

Well, should you read this book? If you are the kind of reader who can be satisfied with a rich and vividly described setting, then you should give this book a try. If you expect an actual plot with decent characters in them, well you are going to be disappointed.

Tom says

Well, that was a waste of time. TAD could have summed this up in 100 pages or less. Bobby is not what I would call an engaging character and as angels go, not very convincing. Actually, he's a jerk who is in lust for Cas, not in love with Cas. And would you really go to Hell for lusting after someone? The description of hell was disappointing and very superficial...it was in your face, one thing after another and I was numb to it

after the first 30 pages. So many characters that could have really been explored. Why was Walter there? I guess we'll see Walter again in book 3.

I really enjoyed the first book and thought it was interesting with twists and turns that kept me turning the page. This book just plain bombed and didn't really offer anything except reinforcing how much of a jerk Bobby is. I did not grow to like Bobby more, just the opposite. Why would his friends want to help him??? He treats them horribly and uses them. The "love" scenes with Cas were prepubescent "lust" scenes and not a compelling reason to venture to hell and back for someone. Cas was just an object, nothing more...too bad too, she could be so much more and there is a lot there to explore. TAD chose not to do that though and instead we are left with an object, not a person.

I'm sure I'll read the 3rd just to finish the series, hoping that there will be some redeeming qualities but I have my doubts. We'll see...

Ambrosia says

Arguably one of the most disappointing sequels I've read.

What makes it frustrating is that it's not bad, by any means. Williams' writing is still solid, his characters interesting, his worldbuilding stellar. Bobby Dollar, hardbitten noir hero origins aside, still feels like a real person (well, angel), and still makes for an interesting protagonist, and his perennial snark still makes me laugh with regularity. The first third or so of the book, which mostly takes place on Earth, is just as much fun as the first book. (G-man remains one of my all-time favorite supporting characters from any series ever.)

Then we get to the centerpiece of the story, and, well...it all goes to Hell. (Sorry.)

Well, that's not quite fair. Williams appears to have wanted to play at being Hieronymous Bosch, and he does a pretty damn fine job at it. The depth, variety, and sheer inventiveness of his Inferno is impressive as hell. (Sorry again.) But (appropriately, if not enjoyably) the story suffers, and eventually so do the readers. I get that an author's job is to put his protagonist through hell (sorry) in order that he might come out changed (and sometimes, redeemed) by the experience, but about two-thirds of the way through our hero's journey, this reader was beginning to suspect that Mr. Williams was just plain getting off on the cruelty. I mean, there's forging and shaping and hardening the iron, and then there's just heating it and pounding on it over and over again with the hammer because you like seeing it twist, you know?

All this might have been forgivable if good ol' Bobby had come out of it a better angel for the experience, but one of the most frustrating aspects is that by the end, he seems to have basically regressed to where he was at the beginning of the first book - booze-soaked, hangdog, and frustratingly passive. Sure, a bad breakup will do that to anyone temporarily, but as a place to end an installment, it just makes me ask "Why should I bother reading the third book?" Admittedly, Williams softens a bit and throws him (and us) a hook just before the end, but it's practically the definition of "far too little, far too late".

Oh, and Casimira, who in the first book gets at least a semblance of her own agency and personhood and generally shows a lot of promise as a character, is here reduced to the very definition of "damsel in distress", with a good healthy dose of "MacGuffin" as well. Feh.

Frankly, I was tempted to dismiss this installment entirely, but I can't quite in good conscience do that - there

are some interesting bits, including some progression in the Intrigues-of-Heaven storyline. But given that this is a middle novel, even these don't reach any real conclusion, and I strongly suspect that aside from one or two excellent zingers (including a truly amazing and hilarious one from Dollar towards the end), there won't be much reason to actually read this book when the third one is available.

Lloyd Duske says

I picked up this book without realizing that it was part of a trilogy but as it was, I found that it works as a stand-alone fairly well. Previous events are alluded to but the narrator grumbles enough to himself that you get a good sense of what happened (and how the protagonist feels about it) anyway.

Seeing as how the book is about an angel that sneaks into Hell, you already get the sense of how fun (for the reader and probably not at all for the protagonist) it's going to be. All in all, a pretty comedic read that is fast-paced, but there are definitely some moments that threaten to pluck at your heart-strings (though the protagonist moves on quickly to avoid any blubbing). It's a fairly long book and I feel like it could be a little more compact but I suppose that could also be the point - where you follow the protagonist and stagger along as he's subjected to horror after horror after torture, which give you such a sense of exhaustion. I was so relieved when I realized the book was ending and that all this running-through-Hell-in-a-state-of-panic that had been going on since the beginning was going to end soon. Then I realized it was part of a trilogy. I suppose it's time to go grab the last book then!

Eduardo Schimitt says

4.5 Stars

review in portuguese

(Não é sempre que eu paro para escrever um review, mas os livros da Tad Williams são uns dos poucos em que eu me vejo obrigado a escrever).

"Love. Tired old jokes aside, a real, powerful love does have one thing in common with Hell itself: it burns everything else out of you."

Happy Hour in Hell começa algumas semanas após o final de The Dirty Streets of Heaven, e Bobby Dollar - o anjo favorito de 11 a cada 10 bebuns - está literalmente pirando após os eventos do primeiro livro. Não só ele ainda está envolvido nas investigações do céu após todo o incidente do "Terceiro Caminho" (o que certamente pode levar à destruição da sua alma imortal), como o Grão-Duque do Inferno ainda mantém a namorada de Bobby, Cazimira a Condessa das mãos frias (que obviamente sendo uma das infelizes habitantes do inferno certamente levará à destruição da alma do pobre Bobby caso isso venha a ser descoberto pelos chefões do céu) e para piorar as coisas um maniaco assassino que Bobby tem certeza que fora destruído muitos anos antes da as caras para livrar o mundo do anjo favorito de todos.

Tempos desesperados pedem medidas desesperadas, então Bobby resolve fazer algo simplesmente monumentalmente estúpido; ir até o inferno, conseguir respostas (e enquanto estiver por lá conseguir a

namorada dele de volta).

"But Hell isn't on ordinary Earth and this pit wasn't bottomless—oh, no. See, at the bottom, impossible miles and miles below me in the darkness, the really bad shit was going on. I could tell that because of the faint sounds of screaming. I couldn't help wondering how hard those folks had to be screaming to be heard that far. Also, what exactly was being done to them to make them scream like that? Already I was asking questions with answers I didn't want to know."

É interessante a forma que Tad Williams retrata o inferno, muitas coisas são reinterpretações da Divina Comédia de Dante - e até o próprio Bobby fala que Dante acertou em algumas coisas, mas as imaginou-as de forma mais leve do que o inferno realmente é - outras coisas mostram que o Tad realmente tem uma mente brilhante na hora de inventar novas formas de tortura. É nesses momentos com o Bobby no inferno que o Bobby - apesar do que ele próprio diz - não é um anjo tão ruim assim, varios momentos a situação dele piora muito devido a empatia dele e a vontade de querer ajudar aqueles que estão sofrendo.

"“Even worse, though, I could feel something else now, something that enwrapped and increased the other bad feelings like a crushing, ice-cold fist. I can't explain it—I'll never be able to. Although it came on slowly, when I finally could pick it out from the other kinds of horror, it was the worst thing I've ever felt. Freezing cold, but I'm not talking about temperature, like ice and snow. This was the cold of the absolute dark, the cold in which nothing could live, the point at which even the play of atoms slowed to a stop. Empty. Nothing. The end. But what was most terrifying about it, what blasted even the horrors of all Hell's pain and suffering out of my head, was that this bleak void at the bottom of everything was alive. I don't know how I knew, but I did. It was alive, and it thought, and even though it was still tremendously far away, its presence sent my own thoughts shrieking in all directions like chickens trapped in a henhouse by a bloody-mouthed wolf."

No quesito de personagens secundários o livro também está bem servido, Riprash e Gob - mesmo aparecendo durante pouco tempo - são personagens muito bem construídos. Gob é um menino que literalmente nasceu no inferno - sua mãe estava grávida quando cometeu suicídio - e que inicialmente agia como um animal assustado (o que é compreensível, é o fucking inferno!) e os momentos de interação entre ele e Bobby são muito bem construídos.

"Hell must be a lot like being born in the middle of a war, I decided: there was no chance for anything better to develop."

Já Riprash é um missionário da fé dos Lifters, um culto que acredita que mesmo no inferno há chance de salvação e, no final da história, ele toma uma decisão que pode literalmente trazer muito caos no terceiro livro.

E, para finalizar, é um livro de Tad Williams, então a escrita é realmente sólida e, apesar de ter uma cena de tortura que podem não agradar algumas pessoas, eu recomendo fortemente a leitura da trilogia do Bobby Dollar.

Brid-Aine says

There seems to be no element of genre fiction that Tad Williams doesn't want to try his hand at. Having already covered epic fantasy with the Memory, Sorrow and Thorn trilogy and sci-fi with the excellent

Otherland tetralogy (what a great word), Williams has turned his hand to urban fantasy with the Bobby Dollar books. Dollar, or the angel Doloriel as he's also known, is an Earthbound celestial litigator, here to help the recently departed argue their way into Heaven and out of a one-way ticket to endless suffering in Hell. Or at least, that's how things started out in the previous novel, *The Dirty Streets of Heaven*, though Dollar has quickly become tangled up in politics, conspiracies, murder, blackmail, betrayal, rebellion and few other weighty matters. Having started with a simple enough case in book one, Williams has taken his angel advocate and turned him into a character from the 1930s - a wise-cracking, blues-loving, leap-before-looking kind of a guy that's caught up in circumstances beyond his control - think Richard Hannay in *The 39 Steps* or Hitchcock's other famous thrillers *The Man Who Knew Too Much* or *North by Northwest*. In Dollar's case though, he knows just enough to avoid being a total chump and has just enough modernity polishing off his edges to avoid being too much of a caricature.

By the end of book one (SPOILERS if you haven't read it), Dollar was firmly at the centre of a number of mysteries that can basically be summed up by asking what on Earth is everyone in Heaven and Hell really up to? Added to that, he's suspended from soul-defending duties and kicking around at home pining for his demon girlfriend, Caz, who was snatched back by her high-muckity-muck demon lord ex Eligor. Book two, *Happy Hour in Hell*, kicks off well, introducing a vicious and fascinating new bad guy for Dollar to face off against and a wealth of new questions around the central mystery of what various shady characters from Heaven and Hell are plotting. As the title suggests, however, the main action of the book is Dollar's decision to head to Hell to try to rescue Caz from Eligor's demonic clutches and that's where the novel skids off the beaten track somewhat.

The first book rattled along at a nice pace that played well with the whole noir thriller feel as Dollar ricocheted from one disaster to another, escaping sticky situations by the skin of his teeth and generally taking the reader on a fun-filled ride. But Williams likes the idea of Hell far too much and spends too long in describing it in all its torturous detail. Rather than having situations and new information fly at him from all directions, Dollar plods through Hell spending an awful lot of time talking about the scenery. It's not that Williams' vision of Hell isn't fascinating and fun, because it is, or that there isn't the occasional clue that's bound to come in useful in the next stage of the adventure, because there is, but the whole section is too long. This is perhaps exacerbated by the fact that the well-drawn supporting cast from the first novel are left behind and the ones we meet down below aren't given the same amount of time to flourish. Fantastic characters like Riprash and Gob come along, but don't get to hang out for quite long enough.

The main motivator for the whole mission - Dollar's love for Caz - feels a bit off as well. The first book showed us a dynamic, demonic woman, who had been sentenced to her eternal torment somewhat unjustly but was still running around as an active minion of Hell doing some evil stuff. There was lots to be unpacked there. In the second, perhaps because she mostly exists in flashbacks in Dollar's memory, she loses some of her dimension. He focuses ad nauseum on how beautiful she is - fair enough, he's in love - but the only thing he really seems to think about her is how he wants to save her, how she's ever so vulnerable and tender and how many times they had sex. It's a bit reductive and makes the idea of Dollar falling in love so fiercely in such a short space of time harder to swallow when the object of his affections seems more like a sexy plot motivation than an actual character.

Where *Happy Hour in Hell* best succeeds is in keeping the reader intrigued in the central mystery and throwing just enough oil on that fire to spark a few theories and a burning desire to find out more. Although clues don't come along as hard and fast as in book one, there's plenty to chew over and a sense that Dollar is skating over depths he can't even begin to fathom. The fact that Hell's minions and Heaven's agents are as devious as each other isn't a new idea, but it is nicely handled and even more interesting is their bewilderment at their place in the greater puzzle of life. Just like humans, neither the demons nor the angels

have any clue what God is up to, whether they're doing the right thing, what the meaning of life is or any of that jazz. This is particularly effective in Hell, where it gives a haunting futility to the suffering of even the most guilty of its tormented, while simultaneously making you feel sorry for the tormentors, who are often no more comfortable in their enforced evil personas than the angels are trying to be good all the time. It's a setup ripe with possibility for the final book in the trilogy, *Sleeping Late on Judgement Day*, when the hapless Dollar is likely to be at the messily violent centre of some of these questions being answered.

While *Happy Hour in Hell* is a different book to its predecessor, anyone who wanted a fully surround-sound 3D tour of Hell will be pleased and for everyone else, the mystery and our wisecracking hero are both still sharp enough to keep the pages turning. The hope is that the third novel will lean more towards the tone and pace of the first and finish this trilogy off in style, putting a firm tick in Williams' urban fantasy column.

Jason says

5 Stars

I really had fun reading the further adventures of Bobby Dollar, and I cannot wait for more. I really seem to take great pleasures in reading about angels and demons, and Heaven and Hell, as long as they are not sappy romance stories. Tad Williams has created a series about an advocate angel named Bobby Dollar. The plot and themes lie somewhere between the satire Mercury series by Robert Kroese, and The Demon Squad series by Tim Marquitz, and The Sandman Slim series by Richard Kadrey.

“Love. Tired old jokes aside, a real, powerful love does have one thing in common with Hell itself: it burns everything else out of you.”

This book takes our angel to Hell for nearly the entire read. Williams does an amazing job at world building and detailing pain and suffering. I loved the unique settings and the cool Damned. Bobby was great and Gob and Riprash made for good side kicks. I loved the politics, the mysteries, and the awesome underlying theme about the state of Heaven and Hell.

Did I mention that this is a Tad Williams book which means the writing is sublime and the fantasy is top notch....

“Even worse, though, I could feel something else now, something that enwrapped and increased the other bad feelings like a crushing, ice-cold fist. I can't explain it—I'll never be able to. Although it came on slowly, when I finally could pick it out from the other kinds of horror, it was the worst thing I've ever felt. Freezing cold, but I'm not talking about temperature, like ice and snow. This was the cold of the absolute dark, the cold in which nothing could live, the point at which even the play of atoms slowed to a stop. Empty. Nothing. The end. But what was most terrifying about it, what blasted even the horrors of all Hell's pain and suffering out of my head, was that this bleak void at the bottom of everything was alive. I don't know how I knew, but I did. It was alive, and it thought, and even though it was still tremendously far away, its presence sent my own thoughts shrieking in all directions like chickens trapped in a henhouse by a bloody-mouthed wolf.”

I loved this book and love where the series is headed...highly recommended!

Sasha says

Meh.

That is the short version of my review.

Just meh.

But yeah, I'm gonna elaborate, don't you worry!

So. This is the second installment of a trilogy (I think) dealing with all the wonderful misunderstandings of Heaven and Hell, the two H's humanity has always loved to discuss.

More than ever, movies, shows, books and comics have been twisting the tales of angels and demons and taken what we know from the Bible to another dimension. Angels aren't always as good as they seem, demons understandable and nearly human in their evildoing. The book doesn't really come up with all that much new stuff, than rehashing what we know from some place or another (granted, there are some scenes and things you might never have heard of, but that doesn't really help the book too much).

Patrick Rothfuss, another author I thoroughly admire, has his praise added on the back of this edition of the book. It reads "Snarky, fast-paced, and above all, original". It really, really pains me to say that I have to disagree. Quite strongly even.

1) Snarky: Yes, it is snarky. But that annoyed me more than ever. Bobby's voice is a frigging pain to read after so many pages. I already mentioned in my first (and rather favorable) review of the first book, that sometimes it just gets to be *too much*. At some point he just becomes a whiny douchebag whom I could care less about. He pretty much gets into this mess because of his own stupidity, so no, I don't really feel too badly for him.

2) Fast-paced: Oh gods, no. NO. IT IS NOT FAST-PACED. NOT AT ALL. I read about a third of the book when I was well and ready to drop it. And I have only done that with one book so far, and that was because of a personal experience I did not want to read about on a character. So you see, I don't drop books easily. And I am a HUGE fan of Williams's works (You might have noticed that I own a copy of pretty much everything he's written). It is actually that fact that got me reading it again. I read, I think, about ten books in between that third, where I just couldn't care about the story and the end. I know it seems harsh, but this book just starts so slowly and annoyingly, that I'm surprised I made it to the end. It does pick up after the second half, but yeah, that's it. Fast-paced to me is a book that gets you reading a book in a day, even when you have no time. Having read all those books in between, I sure as heck had the time.

3) Original: Somewhat. Not really. I mean, most of the intriguing questions were already posed in the first book. He mostly just chews on stuff he already knew and then some more towards the end of the book after experiencing lotsa pain and lotsa feels in hell. As for the world building, I just don't know. Maybe I've seen so many versions of Urban Fantasy Heaven and Hell, maybe the tropes have been used one time too often, but for the most part it was just like playing a game where you had to get character A from hell city B to city C. Then again, writing about heaven and hell might be a tad bit hard to come off original when there's already so much out there. The underlying story that drove the main character though, was nothing else than a fucking "Damsel in Distress" story. Really. Of course, there is this whole conspiracy going on in the background, but you barely notice that because the only thing Bobby Dollar thinks about is his D that should go into the V of a certain Demon Lady. For that, he needs to be the hero and rescue the princess from the big bad dragon in hell. Really, it doesn't get any more simple than that. So: Original? Nuh-uh.

I think the problem about this book is that it was WAY TOO LONG, which has been mentioned by other reviewers as well. So many things were obsolete. Looking at Williams's former books, it would have paid off to just make two volumes (he certainly has never been afraid to pack a lot of pages into one tome). The first third was really a repetition of the first book, explaining stuff we already know and preparing us for Bobby's new genius idea: Let's go to hell and free the love of my heart, Caz the demon. Caz, the possession of one of the most powerful demon lords in the history of ever. Easy, eh? The middle and last part could've done with less chapters that got repetitive really soon and thus assimilated within book one and two respectively. But that is often the curse of the second book, so I'll let that slide for now.

But let's have a look at the actual story:

We have Bobby, who's up to some frying in hell - quite literally. He gets into hell through a very secret door and meets many creatures, low and high, that will either want to eat him alive, do him some other harm or, believe it or not, help him. The concept of hell seems to be much more tangible than heaven. Whereas heaven was this murky bubble of happiness that no one quite remembers, hell is hands-on and feisty. Bobby notices that about two seconds in, as pretty much everything and anything tries to make his life as miserable as possible. He arrives in one of the lower layers of hell, not at all where he wants to be, but there's the only place he can enter. You'll hear a lot of familiar names and places like Abbadon, Erebus and Pandaemonium. Some references to literature, too. Some imaginative place names in the middle spice things up a bit. The ecosystem of hell is very diverse, so each level is not necessarily connected (other than through the rivers of hell). And even though Bobby says time and again that the physics are different in hell, just as they are in heaven, I think most of what he describes is not that far off in terms of imagination. Sure, some things are weird and out of this world, but come on, we're in hell. You'd expect it to be magical (in gruesome ways) and to not quite play along our rules. As such, the place itself seems pretty straightforward: The lower you get, the closer you get to the devil and his very unpleasant fiery bits. The higher you get, the more civilized, while still crazy, things seem to get. So yeah, that's not all that complicated. I think where Williams does show his talents in world building, is the respective levels themselves. Also a few choice characters are quite imaginative. But the hell-system as a whole does not really bring any surprises. He also seems to not quite understand that hell himself. At one point it is just this unchanging thing that has a few changes in the middle to get everyone in despair but at the end it is the ever-changing that makes hell so hellish. So, which is it? It's probably safe to say that it depends on which level you are and how high you are on the demon-status-level. Something which is also never quite clearly explained, but yeah, no details. (Something Bobby does often, too: "...but that is a story for another day". And you wonder, when that day will be - not that I necessarily want to hear all those stories he omits)

As for Bobby himself, his story doesn't really get all that interesting, either. He just tries to get his boss's (Tamuel or what's his face) job done and then go fetch his girl and get outta hell. Needless to say, things get a bit hard very soon. Adaption to hell takes his toll on our snarky feather-boy and he feels losing himself more and more.

(view spoiler)

You'll see lots of bits of hell along the way but the really interesting part is probably towards the end where he finally gets to where he needs to be, in his opinion (view spoiler)

...but of course not everything quite works out the way he wants and thus we are left with a VERY anticlimactic end:

(view spoiler)

I'm just so not happy with this book because it is really just a story about trying to get his girl. And I'm not saying I don't enjoy someone risking their life for love, or their very soul, but this is just ugh. Every now and then you have these intermezzos where he remembers his wonderful sexy times with her (view spoiler). And Bobby in the whole of this thing just gets nothing done, other than get himself beaten and defiled.

So yeah, that's the reason for my two stars. I just couldn't enjoy it. For the most part, I think this one person

POV of one person and one person only goes against Williams's strength in writing. I just genuinely don't like Bobby. In his other stories you often have someone you can relate to, but this time around I just don't feel any connection with Bobby. If anything, I feel a bit for Caz, since Bobby just won't bloody listen to her. I even feel more for Eligor, since he at least shows some cunning and interesting aspects of hell power. Even Riprash, Bobby's unlikely friend in hell, is more intriguing than Bobby.

Another thing that annoyed me to no end were the references he made. Maybe it's because I'm not American, maybe it's because I just don't seem to be on the same wavelength as Bobby, but I only about understood half of his references. First of all, just like in the first book, Bobby HAS to make some kind of metaphor. He talks about thing A in a very roundabout complex way - which is usually just fine - and then has to make some kind of metaphor or find some other kind of association to explain things. About the best thing I found is that he used the word *decollete* and then saying it means cleavage just to use another French word somewhere later and not explaining it (I don't care since I understand French). Yet, there are a gazillion references to places and things in the States which I don't understand at all, but well, usually you got the picture by the first description anyway, so it wasn't too bad. But that's what I mean, it's just *too bloody much of it*. Booby's remarks can be funny at times, snarky at their best, but annoying at their worst. And as I said, that gets annoying really soon.

At this point I'm not sure if I want to try the last book or not. These books are expensive and if I read another word about his internal yearning for Caz I'm not sure I'm not gonna throw the whole trilogy into the fire. It reminds me a lot of the Maze Runner series, where it started so well, so promising and then just plummeted to this catastrophic anticlimactic blob. I am, however, curious what new stupid ways Bobby will find to piss off the universe and get what he wants. So, I might give the third book a shot, even if I'm not really eager to (I might wait for the cheap version of the paperback to come out...). As you can see, I personally did not really enjoy the book and can't really give it more than two stars. Again, it pains me dearly to say this, but in this installment Williams's storytelling just diverged so much from what I look for in a book, that I could not quite recommend it. I might change my mind after reading the third book, but that being said, I still consider this one of the least enjoyable books of his. And I'm not trying to say that he shouldn't change and develop his writing: it's totally in his right to want to venture into more adult-themed places, which is extremely facilitated when you go into urban fantasy. However, urban fantasy doesn't only need to be trashy and edgy, it can still have meaning. And even though he tries to have this in the underlying current of questioning heaven and hell, the big elephant in the room - Bobby basically having a case of blue balls for Caz - deviates from the truly enthralling part of the story, which is a shame.
