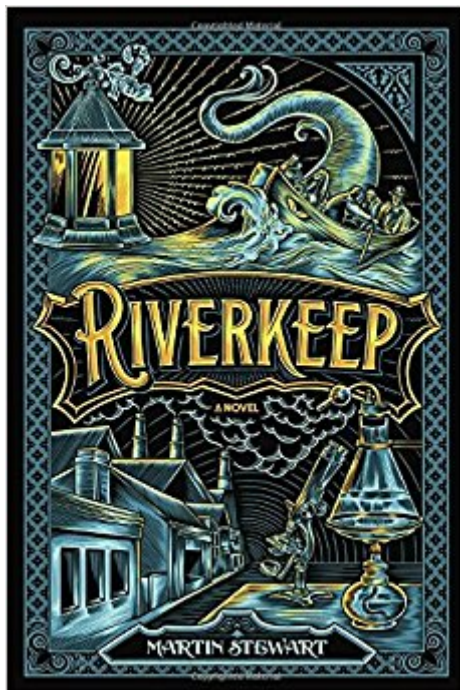


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# Riverkeep



## Synopsis

A stunning debut perfect for fans of Patrick Ness and Neil Gaiman! The Dan-Åk is a wild, treacherous river, and the Fobisher family has tended it for generations—clearing it of ice and weed, making sure boats can get through, and fishing corpses from its bleak depths.

William's father, the current Riverkeep, is proud of this work. Wull dreads it. And in one week, when he comes of age, he will have to take over.

Then the unthinkable happens. While recovering a drowned man, Wull's father is pulled under and when he emerges, he is no longer himself. A dark spirit possesses him, devouring him from the inside. In an instant, Wull is Riverkeep. And he must care for his father, too.

When he hears that a cure for his father lurks in the belly of a great sea-dwelling beast known as the mormorach, he embarks on an epic journey down the river that his family has so long protected—but never explored. Along the way, he faces death in any number of ways, meets people and creatures touched by magic and madness and alchemy, and finds courage he never knew he possessed.

Martin Stewart's debut novel is an astonishing blend of the literary, the comedic, and the emotionally resonant. In a sentence, it's *The Wizard of Oz* as told by Patrick Ness. It marks the beginning of a remarkable career.

## Book Information

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Fantasy &gt; Sword &amp; Sorcery

## Customer Reviews

Gr 6-10 • Wull is approaching his 16th birthday, the date on which he will take over the grim, hereditary position of Riverkeep from his father. When Wull's father is possessed by a demon that will consume him from the inside out, the only way to save him is to journey to the mouth of the river to slay the Mormorach, a sea monster with healing properties. Along the way, Wull collects a motley assortment of traveling companions: Homunculus Tillinghast, stowaway Mix, Remedie Cantrell and her resurrected wooden baby, and Rushworth the Bootmunch. Some very bad men are chasing Tillinghast, who has stolen a valuable mandrake for reasons of his own, and everyone is trying to slay the Mormorach while Capt. Gilt Murdagh looks on, learning from every failed attempt. With a humorous, light touch and an excellent feel for dialogue, Stewart has created a first-rate fantasy. Unfortunately, in order for the plot to work, the river has to flow both ways, an impossible feat in a world where magic doesn't govern river current. While casual readers won't notice, fantasy lovers, the title's target audience, will. Tillinghast's ribald wit will go over the heads of younger readers and guarantees the comedic elements of the book will be best appreciated in the teen section. VERDICT Otherwise excellently written quest fantasy, marred by a significant world-building error. In spite of this, an author to watch. — Kristin Anderson, Columbus Metropolitan Library System, OH

- Kirkus Reviews Best Book of the Year 2016- Publishers Weekly Fall 2016 Flying Start- A BCCB 2016 Blue Ribbons pick "[Stewart's] descriptions of Wull's world gripped in winter are brutal and beautiful, his monsters are terrifyingly plausible, and there are striking moments." — The New York Times Book Review "Stewart shows a dab hand at crafting memorable characters and thoroughly frightening opponents for them to face . . . A rich debut: Huck Finn meets Moby-Dick." — Kirkus Reviews, starred review "Filled with wild adventure and hilarious dialogue . . . this vivid, engrossing fantasy will delight readers." — Publishers Weekly, starred review "There isn't a single forgettable person, monster, or creature in the whole adventure; it's impossible to not be deeply invested in all of their successes. This is a rare work that feels like a sophisticated, gritty folktale, full of impossibilities and dramatic tension, and it is both hilarious and tragic in equal measure." — BCCB, starred review "A unique and distinctive fantasy world, ably conveyed through very readable dialect and buoyed by near-constant action . . . [a] riveting read." — Booklist "With a humorous, light touch and an excellent feel for dialogue, Stewart has created a first-rate fantasy. . . Excellently written." — School Library Journal "Woven

of threads and snippets of fantasy and myth, Riverkeep presents something entirely unique and innovative. The constant interjection of humor forms an odd juxtaposition with the seriousness of Wulliam's quest. Add to that black humor, weird characters and graphic violence, and it is compelling in the same quirky way that Monty Python is. The narrative is both harsh and beautiful." **VOYA**"The fast-paced action is compelling. Students who appreciate well written horror fiction will thoroughly enjoy this novel. This gripping supernatural tale includes adventure, monsters, love and loss, and thought-provoking issues." **School Library Connection**"Martin Stewart's atmospheric debut blends fantasy and horror into a rollicking Scottish adventure about fathers and sons, monsters and magic, and the choices that make us human . . . A dark delight, Stewart's riverboat ride should impress teen horror fans and anyone seeking a YA novel with no romance but plenty of heart." **Shelf Awareness**

Way too chopped up of a story. It jumps around from here to there constantly and has way too many characters with a voice. I find I prefer books with one point of view, two at the most. When you get this many it's just too distracting. I also didn't feel connected with the characters and didn't find myself really wanting to find out what happens or wanting to see them succeed. The world building is great though and very interesting, and the book cover is good, probably the reason I purchased the book.

Very interesting book - oddly different Really liked it.

Riverkeep looked like a unique epic fantasy: magic, monsters, a hero's journey which takes place on the water. While the book is loaded with the fantastical, it has its ups and downs. On the freezing waters of the Danek river, Wulliam and his pappa, the Riverkeep, keep the river clear for travelers. When his father is overtaken by a parasitic creature, Wulliam, who's never left home and had no other human contact besides his father and the local mortician, decides to go on a quest to save him. The cure may lie in the body of a mythical sea beast. Crazy as it may sound, this idea had me, hook, line, and sinker. (Pun intended.) The world building is cinematic. From the ice-thick river to the grimy, dangerous towns in the world of Oracco, I couldn't help wondering what Riverkeep would look like as a movie. It's broad in scope, tackling several plots and weaving them into a truly epic story. Usually I shy away from comparisons to other authors, but I could feel the Neil Gaiman and Patrick Ness vibes from the book's blurb. Martin Stewart's writing is fluid

and poetic. His take on how magic works in Riverkeep is fascinating; the details were well thought out. There's also an overall humor in the story in spite of its not-for-the-faint-of-heart imagery of gore and violence. We are even given glimpses of the sea beast's point of view. While on his quest, Wull reluctantly helps an eclectic cast of characters: a stowaway called Mix, a young woman named Remedie who has a strange baby, and the standout being a man called Tillinghast. He has a strange past, and he's strange himself, but he's bawdy and funny. Wull, while a sympathetic character, could get whiny, BUT when he had to fight, he was ready and capable of doing so. His relationship with his father was very touching, and seeing the lengths he would go to help him were admirable. As much as I enjoyed Riverkeep, it suffers from pacing issues. I mentioned before that the overall story is broad. It establishes characters and settings, and then jumps around from location to person, which unfortunately slows everything down. Just when I started getting into Wull's story, off we go to another subplot. Some of the characters didn't have a concrete reason to be there, and several subplots are left open to interpretation. It seemed to take forever to get anywhere, but is more than made up for in the climax. I had my critiques of Riverkeep, but I still enjoyed it. Due to some of its themes, I recommend it for more mature YA readers or those looking for a well constructed fantasy. \*\*Thank you to the publisher for providing an eARC in exchange for an honest review.\*\*

Riverkeep – What can seem like a ponderous pace for me, paid off with great character development. Answers to questions of who various characters really are, are deliciously revealed, leaving open-ended possibilities for the fates of at least a couple. Wulliam places all his hope and faith in one thing that he believes will save his father and then he never wavers. It's satisfying to see him grow to accept and even embrace his destiny – becoming the next Riverkeep – an occupation that in the beginning, he was determined to leave behind and break the heritage handed down through generations. There is world-building, but I kept feeling like – though I know little of the history – this was ancient civilization in the Scotland region – Gaelic? As if old legends were dredged up to create a world. Words like "kent", "banshee", "duckets", "blaggart" gave me this sense. Great language. An interesting view of what makes us truly human. A caution giving it to your teenager, as sexual innuendo is interspersed, as characters are built out and possession a theme which constructs the conflict.

3.5 StarsRiverkeep is a dark and gritty surprise.Intense, it drags you down into its dark depths and introduces you to unlikely monsters that can be found within ourselves and our surroundings. Full of lore, an unconventional protagonist, and sweeping imagery, it will hold you captive until the last page.A little slow to start, it takes a bit to get into the story, but once you do, it's a continuous adventure.Wull is bumbling, uncertain, and makes mistakes. Despite his intriguing and slightly disturbing profession, he's surprisingly normal and easy to relate to. Everyone can recognize that primal need to impress their parents and the fierce love you have for them despite their flaws (though in Wull's case, it's way more intense and complicated than that). No matter how hard he tries, it seems like he's destined for failure and can't live up to his father's image. It's funny and a little heartbreaking, but Wull finds his own strengths and takes risks when he needs to.The self-discovery is poignant.The Scottish lore creatures. Wow. Crazy violent and oh so interesting. At first, it's hard to know what they are and what exactly is being referred to. The preludes to each chapter introduce the creatures but initially you're grasping for straws to figure out just what these beasts are and where they came from.The atmosphere and mood are immense and consuming. The world building intricate and extensive. The story is a coming of age in a way that honors epic tales like Gilgamesh and Beowulf without the politics.

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Riverkeep

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