



The Novice Master

Kathy Cecala

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Evan Claver gives Ellis Barlowe his last chance at redemption, seeking him out as his mentor, or ‘novice master’: As a naïve college freshman boarding at the history professor’s house, he unravels Barlowe’s secret past as a saint, decades spent as a devout monk ministering to the sick and dying at a monastery hospice before renouncing his faith and rejoining the world. Yet Barlowe runs his household like the abbey he left behind, treating his boarder-student like one of his lowly novices, endeavoring to teach him about the realities of life, a role-play complicated by their mutual passion for the same woman. As their roles blur and finally dissolve, the men form a crucial bond which ultimately changes the course of both their lives.

The Novice Master Details

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Garrett says

I can say with certainty you're either going to like the main protagonist or dislike him strongly. This is an interesting exploration of what it means to follow one's dreams when you have happened to make a saint out of a person who is not much of one.

I enjoyed this book, and I think the author did a good job developing the characters and creating a story that holds together quite well. None of the characters feel one-dimensional and all have their own concerns, troubles and hopes.

For anyone who has put another on a pedestal only to find out that their idol is actually quite tarnished might find this book to be a reminder of why that usually is the case.

Kme_17 says

I received this as a first read. This was a good read, however a weird one. I really like Evan and his struggles with things going in his life. The author weaves in His story with brother Theo's well. I like the end result. It was just an unusual path to get there. However was a really enjoyable read.

Mg says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It would appeal to anyone who has ever entertained the idea of becoming a monk or a mystic. But it isn't just about that. It speaks to youthful idealism and the clash with human imperfections. It's about a wonderful relationship between a young man and the older man he idealizes only to find he is just human, like all of us, with flaws. Any believer can connect with the feelings Evan experiences. I felt Evan's search for God in everything he did.

I received a free copy of this e-book from netgalley.com

Avephoenix says

Quite different and very refresing. The storyline is well-writting and captivating. The characters are likeable and believable, and of course, the setting and timeline of the book are just amazing.

This was a very enjoyable read.

I received a copy from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for my honest review.

Calvin Habig says

Progressively impactful

I began the book as a good coming of age story, but the deeper I got into it the more it became much more meaningful for me. It ended by prompting a good deal of self reflection within me. Only negative were the gratuitous sex scenes. Seemed unnecessarily graphic. Really the only thing that kept me from giving it a 5 star.

Jeremy Reppy says

This was a somewhat odd, but interesting book. At fifteen and facing a brain tumor, Evan comes across a book by a monk named Theophanes (Theo) which changes his life. He credits the writings of Theo with saving his life and he commits himself to becoming a monk and studying under Theo. After graduating high school three years later, he sets off to join the monastery only to learn that the monastery is now a spiritual retreat and Theo has disappeared. However, he was able to find out enough information to track down Theo, whose real name was Ellis, who was now a history professor at a third rate college in podunk New York.

Evan enrolls in the college (and a class taught by Ellis) determined to meet Theo/Ellis and figure out why he left the monastery and hopefully learn from him. However, Ellis bears little resemblance to Theo except that he continues to live in an austere/monastic lifestyle. While the goodness that was Theo is still evident in Ellis' care for his grandchildren and his charitable activity, in general he seems cold, dark, and bitter. As Evan tries to figure out Ellis and reconcile the person he is with the person he wanted him to be, he realizes that Ellis, as Ellis, has things he can teach Evan. Evan obtains the novice-master relationship he wanted, just not the way he expected.

The author has created interesting and complex characters, especially the naivety of Evan, especially about sex. Being sexually inexperienced at eighteen is not surprising. However, he has no concept of how a woman might obtain pleasure from sex. He also appears to have never heard of oral sex; which is hard to believe of anyone who has not only been through high school but had access to cable tv and the Internet. Being squeamish about it, yes; but having no concept of it, no. Evan's sexual naivety plays a big role in the story, as he learns from both Ellis and a graduate student/teacher; conceptually and physically respectfully.

As others have described the book, it is a coming of age story for Evan, who is forced to reframe his worldview. However, the story is also a redemption of sorts for Ellis, who is burdened his past choices. The presence of Evan forces Ellis to confront his past and rethink his future. I will warn the reader, for a book that focuses so much on the novice-master relationship, it is actually fairly far into the book before Ellis learns why Evan has sought him out.

I received a copy of the ebook from Net Galley in exchange for a review.

Andrea Stoeckel says

[I received this book free from the publisherthrough NetGalley. I thank them for their generosity. In exchange, I was simply asked to write an honest review, and post it. The opinions I have expressed are my

own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255 "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising]

"We will live in the minds of each other."

Evan Carver has survived great odds thanks in part, he believes, to a Monk named Theophane Benetto. After graduating High School he travels to the monastery, now morphed into a retreat house, and is disappointed to find the Order has literally died off. A last clue from an old monk leads him to College in NY 's Southern Tier and smack dab into his larger than life "saint", as Theo has morphed back into an old grey haired human professor.

Ellis Barlow's story is almost as strange. He lives in a rundown painted lady near the college, with no TV, no internet, and surrounded by books. Evan becomes Ellis' border, learning to adjust to a hodgepodge life with grandchildren, a housekeeper and ataching assistant.

This book is about the ebb and flow of a year in the life of two men who become a bit like family to each other. It is a well written coming-of-age novel that will challenge a lot of ideas and ideals held by average people who will come out the other side profoundly humbled. I recommend it to all.

Pauline Evanosky says

"The Novice Master" by Kathy Cecala was an interesting young adult coming of age book. It showed the conflict between an immature young man, Evan, with a burning desire for spiritual study and a jaded monk, Theo, who had left Catholic orders to become, in his senior years, a professor at an obscure Eastern university. It was almost painful for me to live through the angst of youth and the disillusionment of old age. It was heartwarming to see these two people bond and begin to work on the next stages of their lives. I enjoyed reading this book.

Janet says

Meh. That first word was my original review of this self-published work. I think my reaction is colored by the knowledge that it is self-published. Generally, everyone needs a professional editor, even those who have made a living as an editor themselves. This work is no different. I am indifferent toward this work in general, yet I did finish it. Meh, it is.

Shay Williams says

NOVICE MASTER has to be one of the more interesting coming of age stories that I have had the pleasure of reading. It shows both a young man accepting that his idol can be only human while the idol learns to become more human.

Evan discovered Brother Theo while he was undergoing treatment for a brain tumor and he promised God that if he made it through that he would join a monastery and dedicate his life to God. When Evan leaves home and goes to Brother Theo's monastery however he discovers that it has been changed into a retreat. He also discovers that Brother Theo has left the order. Evan manages to track the ex Brother Theo down and he is now a college professor named Ellis Barlowe. He decides to attend that college and starts his journey towards adulthood.

I really enjoyed the story but there were some instances that really had me scratching my head. Evan has graduated from a public high school yet he is extremely naive about sex. To the point that it is almost unbelievable. What red blooded teenage hasn't heard about oral sex? Other than this curiosity, I found NOVICE MASTER to be well written and I would recommend it to any of my readers who enjoy coming of age stories.

*** I received this book at no charge from NetGalley in exchange for a fair and honest review. All opinions expressed within are my own.
