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Fall 2024

## Rogue Community College, by David R. Slayton. Reviewed by Phillip Fitzsimmons.

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### Recommended Citation

Fitzsimmons, Phillip, "Rogue Community College, by David R. Slayton. Reviewed by Phillip Fitzsimmons." (2024). *Mythprint Book Reviews*. 29.  
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This book review has been accepted by the editor of *Mythprint* and will appear in the Fall issue, #410, that will be released in October 2024. *Mythprint* is published by the Mythopoeic Society.

ROGUE COMMUNITY COLLEGE (The Liberty House Series, volume one). David R. Slayton. Ashland, OR: Blackstone Publishing, 2024. 330 p. 9798200966776. \$25.20.

Review by Phillip Fitzsimmons

*Rogue Community College* is another exciting novel by David R. Slayton that manifests the same craftsmanship found in his previous four books. It is common for a new author to falter while moving from project to project, becoming accustomed to the demands of being a professional writer, and crafting a unique voice. Faltering is not what I see as I read Slayton's first five novels that include a trilogy and the first volumes of two other series. I see high standards in world building, character development, multiple themes juggled per volume, as well as solid fiction writing skills. If his books were a meal, then Slayton would be feeding the reader a nutritious diet that is good for the body. I believe his work has the potential to nurture readers in emotional, social, and spiritual development as well. The attributes of his books that make them nourishing are the same ones that make them mythopoeic literature.

*Rogue Community College* is the first volume of the Liberty House series, which is a spinoff of the world of the Adam Binder trilogy. The book is self-supporting enough that it can be read alone without having to read the Adam Binder trilogy first. With that written, the world and some characters are first introduced in the volumes of the Adam Binder trilogy that consists of *White Trash Warlock* (2020), *Trailer Park Trickster* (2021) and *Deadbeat Druid* (2022). Reading the earlier books will explain the setting of the school and background information on two characters: Vran, who is a student, and Argent the Queen of Swords who oversees and protects the school and leads the students in missions on behalf of the King of the sea elves. FYI, the *Adam Binder* trilogy was a 2024 Finalist for the Mythopoeic Fiction Award for Adult Literature.

Our primary hero in *Rogue Community College* is Isaac, a young adult and trained assassin who hasn't killed anyone yet. He is sent by his boss, The Undertaker, to commit a violent mission against the school and its students and teachers. As the story plays out, Isaac discovers that he likes being in school, becomes attached to the students and teachers, and falls in love. He is in a no-win situation because he doesn't want to complete his mission. Yet, he must meet regularly with his boss, who pressures him to complete the job or be replaced with a different assassin.

To picture the school, imagine something like Dr. Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters in the X-Men stories. Our hero Isaac is a Phage. If he tastes a drop of any other creature's blood, then he has that creature's memories. If he swallows it, then he briefly has the physical attributes and skills of the other creature. For example, swallowing a drop of Goblin blood makes him as strong as a Goblin. Swallowing a drop of Elf blood makes him faster than usual, able to perform amazing fighting moves, and to act in coordination with the Elf. I don't want to give away anymore about the characters or the story than is necessary in this review. However, like with Dr. Xavier's school, the students are there because the qualities that make them magical beings would put them in danger in the human world. Yet, *Rogue Community College* is far from being an X-Men rip off. I see evidence in many places that the author has a deep mastery of pop

culture, and he is able to turn similarities to Dr. Xavier's school to his own original purposes in the series.

Besides telling an entertaining story, Slayton does not skimp on the world-building details that take a plot from ho-hum to enthralling. Woven into the unfolding drama are specifics about the school, a magical entity with links to other times, places, and worlds; the magic of the students; the competing culture of The Undertaker; and the political realities that led to the school's creation and sponsorship by the King of the sea elves and his sister the Queen of Swords. Like Slayton's previous books, "*Rogue*" has plenty of nuggets for the reader to unpack while absorbing the story.

Finally, the emotional and social development of the cast of characters is a major characteristic of this novel. "It's complicated" is a common theme that Slayton explores in describing his characters' relationships that are messy, fluid, and mostly worthwhile. He also shows that sometimes poisonous and demanding ones need severing. Partly what makes the world of Slayton's fiction so believable is the way it unflinchingly mirrors the actual world; we see betrayal, neglect, and child abuse but also experience unity, loyalty, love, and self-sacrifice for others. From mess to maturity, Slayton's depiction of relationships is one of the things that gives his novels depth.

I am thrilled to be able to read and review this book that will be released October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Once again, I strongly recommend this book to lovers of fantasy and especially of mythopoeic literature. I recommend the book to all public libraries and universities and college libraries with education programs. More than anything, I recommend this book to anyone wanting to read a truly satisfying urban fantasy. Those of you who are acquainted with me know I am a re-reader of books. Thumbing through and writing about *Rogue Community College* by David R. Slayton makes me want to read it again, right now.

To see two earlier *Mythprint* reviews about Slayton's other works use the following links, [https://dc.swosu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1022&context=mpr\\_rev](https://dc.swosu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1022&context=mpr_rev) and [https://dc.swosu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1018&context=mpr\\_rev](https://dc.swosu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1018&context=mpr_rev)