



# Dragon Coast

*Greg Van Eekhout*

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## **Dragon Coast** Greg Van Eekhout

Dragon Coast: the sequel to Greg Van Eekhout's *California Bones* and *Pacific Fire*, in which Daniel Blackland must pull off the most improbable theft of all.

Daniel's adopted son Sam, made from the magical essence of the tyrannical Hierarch of Southern California whom Daniel overthrew and killed, is lost-consumed by the great Pacific firedrake secretly assembled by Daniel's half-brother, Paul.

But Sam is still alive and aware, in magical form, trapped inside the dragon as it rampages around Los Angeles, periodically torching a neighborhood or two.

Daniel has a plan to rescue Sam. It will involve the rarest of substances, *axis mundi*, pieces of the bones of the great dragon at the center of the Earth. Daniel will have to go to the kingdom of Northern California, boldly posing as his half-brother, come to claim his place in the competition to be appointed Lord High Osteomancer of the Northern Kingdom. Only when the Northern Hierarch, in her throne room at Golden Gate Park, raises her scepter to confirm Daniel in his position will he have an opportunity to steal the *axis mundi*-under the gaze of the Hierarch herself.

And that's just the first obstacle.

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## **Dragon Coast Details**

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## From Reader Review Dragon Coast for online ebook

### Sunil says

With *Dragon Coast*, Greg van Eekhout brings the Daniel Blackland trilogy in for a smooth landing. *California Bones* was a great book in its own right, but in a way it feels like it was there to set the stage for the next two books. *Pacific Fire* introduced the titular dragon, but no one's coasting in this book: they're going to have to fight for victory, and prices will be paid.

The dragon is loose—uh, spoilers, there is a dragon on the cover and the word dragon is in the title, this book is about a dragon—and Daniel Blackland and Gabriel Argent must again form a hazy alliance to...capture it? Save it? Control it? What *will* be done with the only dragon in the world? The dragon's fate hangs over the book as two teams engage in two separate adventures and find a whole host of danger. Water mage Gabriel Argent and his hound, Max, team up with Cassandra, master thief, to discover the location of the dragon, while Daniel and his practically immortal best friend Moth infiltrate the Northern Kingdom to steal a magical artifact. Meanwhile the dragon is undergoing some very complicated internal struggles.

The tripartite narrative means the pacing suffers somewhat; this book doesn't feel like it's *moving forward constantly* like the previous two books. Funnily enough, even though Daniel is my least favorite of the three main characters, his story is the most compelling, plotwise. The dragon story is mostly spinning wheels, and it's more of a character-centric story, but I love the character so I enjoyed the weirdo things van Eekhout was doing in terms of exploring identity, and specifically how it might work in this world. When I look back at Gabriel's story, I don't think I can actually see a clear mission trajectory even though I liked it, again because of all the character interaction.

I'll say this about Greg van Eekhout: that motherfucker can write a climax. Part of the reason the three narratives don't move all at the same pace is because he needs them to converge at the same time, and when they do, *hoo boy*. You should have heard my sharp intakes of breath every page or so. The climax is powerful because of all the strengths of the book: well-drawn characters you're invested in; sharp, cutting, often beautiful prose that gets under your skin and tugs at your emotions; confidence in a magic system and the reader's willingness to accept how it works. And, of course, a healthy sense of humor to lighten the mood every now and then.

*Dragon Coast* is a ride, and I like how each book in the trilogy feels like a different sort of beast, though they are all recognizably part of the same series. Although this book is a satisfactory conclusion, van Eekhout leaves room open for further stories to be told in this very fascinating world.

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### Molly Mortensen says

Small spoilers for book two were unavoidable. (Really only one spoiler and more is revealed in the official summary than I tell.)

Warning: People eat people to gain powers.

When starting this novel I immediately remembered how much I enjoy the author's writing. He has a great voice, especially in the way he describes things.

The Good:

I wasn't sure how he would do the whole Sam is a Dragon thing, but he impressed me. Rather than being the dragon, it's more like Sam's trapped inside it. As much as he tries to control it, with a cockpit and controls he fashioned out of bones, it proves stubborn and only occasionally listens.

Daniel's been working for months on a plan to get Sam back. His old friend Moth and Em, (one of the many golem Emmas.) who's friends with Sam are helping him. I liked them both and I'm glad they're back. Cassandra's in it too. My ship hasn't sunk yet! I still think she belongs with Daniel. Jo's even back! (The shape shifter) though not for very long.

I enjoyed all of the new characters. Annabel was my favorite. (I can't tell you who she is without spoilers. Sorry. But she was one of the best parts of the book!) All of the people at the Northern court were interesting as well, even though Daniel couldn't trust anyone.

Gabriel and Max's joking, demeaning, friendship is as great as ever. Cassandra was a good addition to their group. (The three teamed up to locate the dragon while Daniel and Moth went undercover.) Water magic is as complex and interesting as everything else in these books. It's nice that the author didn't just do it mentally like most magics. I liked the pipe contraptions Gabriel used to manipulate water.

The pacing was steady until the end when it got a bit intense. (I may have lost some sleep.) The plot, while mostly what I expected, was done well. There wasn't much thievery in this book, but I didn't mind.

I hate it when a series ends! I didn't want this one to end and I was afraid it wouldn't end well, but I'm very satisfied. And happy. There could so be more books though!

The Bad:

It's over!

There were a couple small continuity issues. Daniel explained his plan to steal the stone to Moth after he already knew about it. (I'm probably the only one who noticed.) And a stuffed duck momentarily turned into a rabbit. (It makes sense when you read the book.)

Point of View: Third (Daniel, Sam, Gabriel, & Cassandra)

Predictability: 4 out of 5 (Where 1 is totally unpredictable and 5 is I knew what was going to happen way ahead of time.)

Source: Review request.

My Summary:

Sam is now a Dragon, or trapped inside a Dragon. Daniel's doing everything he can to get Sam back. He had a perfect plan, but then the Northern kingdom kidnapped the Dragon. So now Daniel has to go undercover in the North to get Sam back.

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## **carol. says**

There's so much here I could have loved... water magic, firebrakes, a L.A. that resembles Venice, San Francisco, a kick-ass woman. So perhaps you can understand my sadness when I say it failed to gestalt into

something remarkable for me.

*Dragon Coast* is the continuation of the story began in *California Bones* (my review) and continued in *Pacific Fire*. It most directly connects to events in *Fire*, so much so that I'd consider the two a duology. One can see how the success of the first book likely gestated contracts for more storytelling in that world. At any rate, consider my summary to have spoilers for *Fire*.

Daniel is a powerful osteomancer, or bone-mage, seeking a way to free his adopted son, Sam who disappeared during a conflict with a magically-constructed firedrake, and Daniel's hoping he's alive inside the creature. He's right—Sam is alive, although it's a schizophrenic sort of reality where he feels as if he has a discrete physical body inside the firedrake, although logic tells him he doesn't. Unfortunately, he's unable to operate the controls guiding the creature. Daniel has a plan to magically transfer Sam out of the drake and brings a couple of valuable friends to help—the unkillable Moth, and one of the Emmas who has developed a special relationship with Sam. In the midst of capturing the drake, the mission goes sideways: now the beast is missing and the critical and extremely rare ingredient to transfer Sam to a new body was destroyed. The only solution will take them north to the hostile country of Northern California.

The world was well-developed over the previous two books, so the author wisely avoids detailed explanations and history. Previously, I was fascinated by the canal riddled L.A., but unfortunately it appears that in this world, Northern California looks about the same as the real one. Details on the setting are largely sacrificed in favor of plotting and character.

Speaking of plotting, for a caper/heist set-up, it felt disjointed. There's an arc regarding Sam and his experiences inside the drake, as well as Gabriel's attempts to oppose the drake due to the destruction it has wrought on L.A.. There's Daniel's attempt to capture the drake. Those both come to an end with Sam's capture, but then new conflicts arise. Gabriel and Daniel combine forces, with Gabriel and the team attempting to find Sam, and Daniel attempting to steal the ingredient needed to save Sam through an extremely complicated scam that involves impersonating his half-brother. I was reminded of *The Likeness* when I had to consciously accept implausibility, but it was a bit much when Daniel remained undiscovered around two childhood friends and a former lover. Coherency is further challenged with narratives shifting between Daniel, Sam, Gabriel and Cassandra.

Sam's personal struggle is about controlling and then exploring the drake—and yes, in that order—while Daniel's is about rescuing Sam, the deaths of families (sometimes literally) and innocence. For me, it was hard to connect with either of them. By the end, both Sam and Daniel appeared to have failed to learn any lesson until it was tied up and handed to them on a silver platter by the women in their lives. More enjoyable were the indefatigable best friend, Moth, and skilled thief Cassandra. Their abilities to decide and execute were in stark contrast to Daniel's static 'research' and self-immolation.

Also interesting was Gabriel, one of the chief powers in L.A. because of his water magic. and learning more about his view of the world and watching him put his magic into action was one of the enjoyable aspects of world-building. The relationship between him and his right-hand-man, Max was one of the more complex interactions. Layered with overtones from the second book, they've transformed the prior owner-servant relationship into something approaching friendship, and possibly love. Now that would have been a fascinating primary story.

**“It occurred to him that he could simply bring down the dam and create a cataclysmic flood that would rip sequoias from the ground, push over buildings and send them smashing into bridges... and Gabriel could arrive behind the flood, like a general walking through the gates of a conquered city.**

**But he didn't want to be that kind of water mage, so he continued to slip and struggle down the cliff**

side.”

Language is serviceable, but again, coming off of City of Blades, I can't help but think that with more polish, it would elevated Daniel's modus operandi into the truly tragic instead of annoying and pointlessly self-defeating. There was a lovely bit or two where it was able to get at the emotion of a moment:

**“But right now, at this moment, I don't have time to care. You are not the most important thing to me. My pain is not the most important thing to me. I have a job to do, and all I care about is how your presence complicates it.”**

Writing shone in the humorous bits of dialogue between the team:

**“That's a Rothko. It's worth millions.”**

**‘How do you know?’**

**‘What's that thing when the little inky bugs go into your eyes and make brain knowledge? Reading.’**

**‘Art books are mostly pictures, aren't they?’**

**‘Don't insult me when I'm busy insulting you.’”**

I suspect I am so harsh on this third book because the first book was so absolutely fun, full of creative world-building around a fast-moving plot. While there are a few great moments—crawling through pipes and eavesdropping at lunch come to mind—it lacks both the planning and the madcap rush of a true heist. Yet, it can't quite manage the complexity of a redemption arc either. I'll be giving this one another read through, unless the library comes knocking for their copy, but won't be adding it to my own library.

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## **Mogsy (MMOGC) says**

4 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <http://bibliosanctum.com/2015/09/22/b...>

It's really interesting to me how the Daniel Blackland trilogy has evolved over the three books, and reading Dragon Coast made me want to cheer because we were going back to the series' heist story beginnings. I am a total sucker for caper stories, so not surprisingly I loved the first book California Bones. On the other hand, the second book Pacific Fire took a different direction, and was more like a coming-of-age tale that explored the characters' histories and relationships. To me, what's great is that this third book felt like a combination of both, tying up loose ends to bring it all home. Throw in a fire-breathing dragon, and I really can't ask for more than that.

Right away, Dragon Coast resolves a few questions left open at the end of the last book, so if you haven't read Pacific Fire yet, you probably should first. This review won't be revealing spoilers beyond what's available in the publisher description, but they might be unavoidable anyway because each book builds on the previous one, and I would not recommend reading either of the sequels as stand alones. The focus returns to Daniel in this book, though Sam still plays a big role. A golem made from the magical essence of the late Hierarch, Sam was taken in by Daniel as an adopted son. Together they've been on the run for a long time, until things came to a head with a Pacific fire Drake, a magical creature constructed by Daniel's half-brother Paul.

Everyone thought Sam was lost when he was consumed by the fire Drake, but it turns out the boy's consciousness is still alive and aware inside the dragon, albeit in magical form. This leaves Daniel and his friends with a bit of a dilemma. They cannot kill the fire Drake without losing Sam, even while the huge creature rampages across Southern California turning huge swathes of it into fiery ruin. Daniel comes up

with a plan: he will find a way to subdue the dragon, then use a magical substance called the axis mundi to draw out Sam's essence, before replacing it in a new constructed golem body. Great plan, except for one problem – axis mundi is one of the rarest substances on earth. To get it, Daniel will have to pose as Paul—whom he killed—to sneak into the kingdom of Northern California, win a promotion to become the Lord High Osteomancer, then steal a piece of axis mundi on the ceremonial jeweled scepter of the Northern Hierarch herself as she uses it to confirm his position.

It's like stealing the crown jewels...meets Face/Off. I love it.

I'll also say this about Daniel: the man never does anything by halves, even when it comes to planning the riskiest, most impossible of heists. However, this time he's going into the enemy's lair without the usual caper crew, with only Moth by his side as his bodyguard. He sends his Cassandra, his go-to safe-cracker, with Gabriel the water mage and Max the hound to track down the fire Drake. Meanwhile, Sam is stuck in the belly of the beast, so to speak. We as readers are treated to a somewhat abstract concept of the boy's consciousness trapped within the half-organic, half-mechanical insides of the dragon. The team is split into those three main threads that make up the story.

For obvious reasons, the most compelling of these was Daniel's sections. It's intense and exciting watching him pose as Paul, working against the clock to achieve his goals while also struggling to familiarize himself with all the intricate customs of the Northern Kingdom in order to pass as his dead half-brother. Of all the supporting characters, Moth also shines in Dragon Coast as the muscle and the brains of this operation, taking over some of Daniel's duties as mastermind to gather intelligence. Next up was Cassandra, Gabriel, and Max's sections, which featured a bit of sleuthing and espionage, adding intrigue to the equation. Finally, even though Sam is my favorite character, unfortunately his sections were the weakest in my eyes. This has a lot to do with my own preferences; I just don't do well with abstract conceptualizations and I also felt those bizarre glimpses inside the dragon were less relevant to the story and seemed more like dream-like interludes.

This isn't a very long book, which means there's a lot happening in a relatively small number of pages. It's great because there is absolutely no slowing down, and Greg Van Eekhout's writing has a very cinematic quality that helps the story drive you ever forward between these three separate plot threads, so one thing you can count on is snappy pacing and a quick read.

On the flip side though, this also means there's little opportunity to delve deeper into anything else. Our time with Daniel in Northern California feels far too brief and there's not much to his challenge to become Lord High Osteomancer. Remember in Face/Off, when John Travolta's character with Nic Cage's face finds himself in his nemesis' hideout, meets his lover and his child, and realizes then that even the bad guys have their lives, their loves, and their families? I sense this book going for the same kind of deep, heartfelt revelation but it never quite manages, simply because there was so little time to know everyone in Daniel's — or rather, Paul's — life. Dragon Coast should have been a more emotional story, exploring the painful side of one's self and past, but realistically, the novel was just too short to be effective with that.

Still, this series has long established itself to be more fun and adventurous than weighty and profound, though it has a deep and very complex magic system and some pretty dark themes, what with osteomancers cannibalizing each other for their powers and all that. The world-building remains one of my favorite aspects, and I love how each book has given us more osteomancy as well as the author's strange and dystopian version of a flooded and divided California. If you've enjoyed the previous books, Dragon Coast is not to be missed. It wraps up the series with a bang, and gives satisfying answers to a lot of character conflicts and plot questions besides. And if you've always been curious about these books, now is the best time to check out the whole completed trilogy. It's one I highly recommend.

## **Laura says**

The conclusion-for-now of the adventures of Daniel Blackland, the man who walked away from the job of Hierarch of the Southern Realm of California, Daniel's adopted son Sam, and their friends and allies. Daniel has just a little problem: Sam has been absorbed into a Pacific Fire Drake and Daniel needs to save him. What follows is a heist caper of the grandest dimensions occurring in a wildly imaginative and brutal world of magic. A very fun read, and hopefully there will be more to come in this world from Van Eekhout.

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## **Michael says**

This is the third book in the Daniel Blackland series by Greg Van Eekhout. This book is an Urban Fantasy/Alternative History novel . It is set in a world where California is no longer a part of the United States. California is divided into two Kingdoms, The Kingdom Of Northern California and The Kingdom of Southern California. Both Kingdoms are ruled by powerful mages whose magic derives from eating the bones of ancient magical animals. Magic can also be gained from eating the bones of other powerful mages. In this one Sam's essence has become part of the Pacific Firedrake. Daniel will do anything to rescue Sam from this fate. Even if this means going to the Kingdom of Northern California and impersonating his dead brother and stealing the axis mundi, a bone fragment with which he can retrieve Sam's essence and restore it to a new golem body he has had constructed from one of Sam's hairs. With the help of former friends and some new friends Daniel will make the attempt to save Sam and stop the Firedrake from it's path of destruction. This book is a very good read in a unique fantasy world. I recommend it.

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## **Nilchance says**

A satisfying end to the trilogy, although I thought the storyline in the northern hierarch's court was rushed and probably should have been a book in its own right. This may be because I wanted a whole trilogy about Paul's daughter being sad and terrifying and awesome.

Another trilogy I wish we could read: Gabriel and Max snarking at each other. There doesn't have to be a plot. It could be an extended argument about what to watch on Netflix. I'm not picky. They were just my favorite part of the series.

Looking forward to whatever van Eekhout chooses to write next.

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## **E.A. says**

Throughout the Daniel Blackland series, van Eekhout explores interesting angles of familiar heist story tropes. Heist stories often build up the crew as a found family, and also often have a protagonist who eschews their blood family for the one they created, leading to a confrontation between these two groups to resolve the action or emotional plot (or both). There is often, but not always, a romance between the protagonist and another member of their found family.

Daniel Blackland was orphaned and abandoned. He built a family from other orphaned and abandoned children. He briefly had a romance with a member of his found family. His found family and his blood

family come into conflict to resolve both *Pacific Fire* and *Dragon Coast*, but not in the ways you might expect. None of these things are the emotional core of the story, for Daniel or his foil Gabriel.

I was consistently pleased throughout the series, and especially in *Dragon Coast*, with van Eekhout's exploration of responsibility and consequences, particularly those that characters willingly embrace. When Daniel rescued Sam at the end of *California Bones*, he knew what he was taking on—a life on the run, the fight to protect Sam from power-hungry enemies. When he killed his golem brother, Paul, at the end of *Pacific Fire*, he did it to protect Sam, even though he knew the immediate consequence was the destruction of his blood family and the potential to ever repair those bonds. He did not know the long-reaching consequences, and he faces them in *Dragon Coast*. Not only must he pretend to be his doppelganger in enemy territory to acquire a rare bone he needs to rescue Sam from the fire Drake, Daniel is confronted with the legacy of his actions that will follow him for the rest of his life. And he chooses to take it on, because he just can't stop himself from being a strangely honest thief. When he has stolen something he didn't mean to, he owns up to it, even when, by doing so, he creates a trap he can't escape.

Heist stories often contain themes of consequences, but rarely are they so nuanced as what I found in these novels. Where Daniel shrugs off the consequences of messing with the powerful, he is willingly ensnared in the consequences of his responsibilities to his own family. Gabriel is such a well-crafted foil, as he grapples with the yoke of responsibility and consequences he willingly took on and then unexpectedly finds himself chafing under. He, too, creates a found family with Max, and also faces the responsibility he owes to that bond.

I love the development of these characters. Daniel grows in each book, as he gets older, and becomes a father, and confronts what's left of his blood family from behind the safety of his brother's face, which is really no safety at all. He sees a life that could have been, is tempted by many possibilities for a life that could be, and in the end makes the same choice he always does: sacrifice. Not every character needs to fundamentally shift personality to show change and growth. There's also something satisfying about the capacity to stay true to yourself through increasingly difficult circumstances, and to make peace with who you are in your bones.

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## Maddalena says

It's been a while since I read the previous book in the Daniel Blackland series, and although it ended with an amazing cliffhanger that simply begged to be brought to a conclusion, I kept procrastinating the reading of *Dragon Coast* for no other reason that I did not want to close the door on this series, whose peculiar brand of Urban Fantasy was one of my best discoveries in recent times.

But since all good things come to an end, here I am with the third and final (?) novel in the series. A spoiler warning for the events of the two previous books applies here, so read at your own peril...

Full Review here: [SPACE](#) and [SORCERY BLOG](#)

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## Elisa says

Good stuff, crazy and quite a roller coaster. Read these in order as things go off the rails often, and this world's magic is wild.

## Nicole (Read Eat Sleep Repeat) says

Dragon Coast, the third and final book in the Daniel Blackland trilogy, was a quick, easy, entertaining read.

“I love it when wizards die ironically. Please lead the way.”

Picking up where Pacific Fire left off, this follows the perspectives of a few of the main characters on their exploits and adventures. While it ultimately wraps the story up nicely, both the plot and the characters lacked some focus, making for a few head scratching moments. The pacing was perfectly on point, though, pulling me past these moments with a shrug and a need to know what happens next. And the ending was an excellent conclusion to this trilogy while leaving some strands open for possible future additions or spin-offs.

Van Eekhout’s writing style not only works well for this genre, but it really hits home for me. Sharp and snappy with bits of humor mixed in, he doesn’t mince words, which makes for a fast pace that is easy to breeze through. Because of this, however, along with the fact that the world was well built out in the first couple books, not much is added to the world building in Dragon Coast. Which is unfortunate as the scope is expanded from the southern kingdom of Los Angeles to the northern kingdom of San Francisco. As the two are naturally quite different to begin with, I would have loved to see some more detail on this new setting to bring it more alive.

“We’re what we do, and what we sacrifice, and what we love. And if we choose right more often than we choose wrong, we become who we want to be.”

Although Dragon Coast didn’t quite live up to California Bones, this was ultimately an enjoyable read with a good moral. I’d still recommend this trilogy to anyone looking for a unique young adult fantasy with an alternate history.

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## Ariadne says

Dragon Coast was the third installation in the Daniel Blackland series, and it brought the trilogy to a satisfying conclusion. The story the second and third books focused on was wrapped up, but the book was left open ended enough that I wouldn't mind returning to this world and these characters again in the future. High points remain setting, voice, and character - all consistently engaging throughout the series. I also enjoyed the continued themes of fatherhood, which have run through all three books and seem to come to a head within this one. We also get some fun action and a return to some of the more heist roots established earlier in the series.

The downside of this book was that some portions were far more interesting than others. Without giving out spoilers I can say this: with the cast of characters split into groups I found myself far more invested in some of the story lines than others, and I got the feeling Van Eekhout felt similarly since a few of them seemed to resolve themselves very simply or failed to really coalesce. (Max and Gabriel remain far more compelling than they have any right to be. Sam significantly less so.) There are some interesting and shining moments to be found, but the connective tissue is somewhat lacking in this one. I forgive it because the former two books did so much heavy lifting, but I can't help but feel this book needed more time on Van Eekhout's desk percolating and revising. Simply put: it was good, but not great. Don't let this dissuade you from reading though. This is by far one of the better series I've discovered in recent years, and Van Eekhout has earned my

loyalty for future releases, whether set in this world or another.

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## **Gem says**

Note: Obtained an ARC through first-reads on Goodreads. My first time winning. Yay! Thank you Goodreads!

I tried reaaaaally hard to read this slowly. I loved book 1 and 2 and I wanted to savor the world and the characters in it, but alas, curse Van Eekhout for making such an addicting, final read.

Here there be possible spoilers, so the rest is on my blog.

But the verdict? Read and savor.

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## **Jacqie says**

While I enjoyed the entire Daniel Blackland series, this seemed to me to be the weakest of the books. There are two main story threads. In one, Daniel is trying to procure a magical MacGuffin that will allow him to get his adopted son, Sam out of a dragon's body. In the other thread, Sam is exploring the body of the dragon in which he's trapped himself in an effort to control the thing.

In the last book, Sam cast himself into the vat where the dragon was being grown, becoming part of it. In this book, he conceives of himself as a person in a giant mechanism that he's trying to figure out. This is just a convenient way for Sam ( and the author) to portray his actions. Sam isn't really turning valves that control fire or trying to fly the dragon in a cockpit- it's all a metaphor. And when he talks about walking down to the dragon's stomach or up into its brain, that's all metaphor too. But the action is all so literal. I didn't really enjoy the way that the author was trying to show Sam's struggles, and would have been happy with something a little less easy to describe, but more accurate in what Sam is really doing as part of the dragon. In short, I'm not sure we needed any of it, and wasn't happy with the author's idea of the dragon as essentially a big out-of-control plane.

As for Daniel, he is working on getting another golem body for Sam, but needs a very rare magic item allows for transfer of consciousness. Once again, he's working with Moth, Cassandra, Jo (very briefly) and Emma, or a new version of Emma. Daniel also enlists the help of Gabriel Argent, but he doesn't trust the water wizard, so he assigns Cassie to go along and keep an eye on him.

There's some sneaking, there's a bit of magic, and a bit of fighting on Gabriel and Cassie's part. The item is in the Northern Kingdom of California, in the area of San Francisco. This city doesn't feel quite as well-described or as "lived-in" as LA did in the previous books. Part of this is because Daniel is in the very well-heeled part of town, impersonating his dead twin brother, who perished during the fight over the dragon. Word hasn't come to the Northern Kingdom about Daniel's brother's fate, so Daniel decides to make the most of it.

You'd think that the idea of pretending to be someone with no idea of their lifestyle, enemies, habits, etc, would generate some tension. The imposter is a classic heist movie trope. However, here it just never seems that tense. The Northern Hierarch is built up to be quite the bad-ass, but she, along with all the other most powerful magicians in the land, who've known Daniel's brother for decades, all are totally taken in. It's just

no fun. Moth has a good time pretending to be Daniel's new majordomo who then orders all the other servants around and eats very well, but none of the servants twig to the deception either. In the end, Daniel just pulls a sleight of hand trick, magic not even necessary, to get his bit of magic rock. Chekov's gun never gets fired.

In the end, there's a bit of double-crossing. I like Gabriel Argent, but even he can be tempted by the power of a dragon. We're left with Sam safe, and everybody moving on. The whole thing felt like more of a fizzle than a climax.

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## **Bruce says**

This is the third book in the "Daniel Blackland" trilogy in which Daniel searches for Sam who has been assimilated into the reanimated Pacific Fire Drake (which, as it turns out, is not the most powerful dragon on earth).

The "Team" is back together: Daniel, Cassandra, Moth, and Jo with Em and Sam added to it. It's almost like they're ready for yet another adventure in this world. Gabriel Argent and Max weren't invited to the party at the conclusion of the book.

We finally get to see Northern California, the kingdom that is in opposition to Southern California. It has its own Hierarchy and culture. We also get to see more hydromancy in this book thanks to Gabriel.

Many landmarks in our world spill over into this alternate history. Hearst Castle, San Francisco, North Beach, and Treasure Island.

Did I mention that there are momentary views of airships in this book? Armored airships.

A character named Gloria Bai was mentioned then promptly discarded. I'm glad that Annabel Stokes got more screen time.

+1 for use of the term "henchminions".

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