



The Darkness That Comes Before

R. Scott Bakker

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"This edition first published in paperback in the United States in 2005 by The Overlook Press, Peter Mayer Publishers, Inc."--Verso.

The Darkness That Comes Before Details

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From Reader Review The Darkness That Comes Before for online ebook

Evgeny says

This is a fantasy tale of epic proportions: it starts with events taken place 2,000 years ago and continues all the way to "present". As the events of the past were described in 2 pages and the rest 600+ pages took place "now" I will ignore the former.

We are talking about lands with multitude of people with different languages, cultures, religions, etc. A long time ago practically everybody was obliterated by so-called First Apocalypse (or great war, to put it in simple terms). These days a charismatic leader appeared from nowhere and decided it would be a good idea to get things moving by declaring a Holy War. Everybody and their brother realized it would be fun to have one, so the world kept its breath waiting for the Big Boss to say *against whom* the war will be. Finally a victim was chosen and the preparations began.

Obviously every single ruler of the every single nation began looking for their own advantages, thus intrigues were plenty. Add to this a mysterious all-powerful guy (I always envisioned him as Yoda on steroids)

whose purpose was unclear even to himself, a barbarian who made Conan look like a kindergarten bully,

a sorcerer spy looking for an ancient enemy everybody forgot about - the only guy smart enough to ask himself whether The Holy War would be The Second Apocalypse,

a couple of broken prostitutes - and you have The Darkness That Comes Before.

I finished the book - all 600+ pages of it. This means it is not completely hopeless. I was not exactly bored, but there was not a single moment that made me even mildly excited. Reading it reminded me of eating oats: it is nutritious, filling, will not let you starve, but it is completely **bland** killing all the joys coming from the process of having a meal. Come to this of this I know people that like oats; I suspect they are also closeted hardcore masochists.

This lack of excitement completely killed the series for me. Everything else that a great fantasy work needs is present: world-building, interesting characters (males only; I could not find any remotely interesting non-broken or non-pervert female), Big Bad Guys,

intriguing magic system, epic-ness, etc. In one of me earlier reviews I mentioned that 3 stars sometimes mean "Nice, but I am not reading the next book" and also "I am mildly curious what comes next". Please note that I shamelessly copy/pasted myself here. In any way, this time it is the former case. I found enough motivation to finish the book, but I cannot find any motivation whatsoever to continue with the series.

Elsbeth says

I never finished this book, actually I never finished the first chapter.

I couldn't read this book it was like the author grabbed a thesaurus and picked out vocabulary that would have even made Jerome Shostak have to look it up!
It made me hate the author...it felt arrogant, high handed and pissed me off.

shivers

Nick T. Borrelli says

Maybe one of the most compelling and complex fantasy reads I have ever had the pleasure of reading. I was turned away from this series on a number of different occasions because I had read so many reviews that trashed it as self-serving pseudo-intellectual drivel. Well, I'm glad I finally put all of that aside and gave it a go because in my opinion, nothing could be further from the truth. It does require a great deal of patience and fortitude because Bakker does you no favors as far as holding your hand and info-dumping you to death. You as the reader are kind of just dropped into an already developed story on page 1 with various factions vying for dominance of the continent they inhabit. But that is also part of the brilliance of this book, nothing is spelled out, yet you have enough understanding to piece together what is going on and what will eventually take place. I sincerely hope that the next two books are this good because if so, I will absolutely fly through them like I did with this first installment. Bravo Mr. Bakker, what a wondrous world you have created filled with deep characters and a history that makes you want to constantly find out more about it. I simply adored this book and can't say enough good things about it.

?Luna? says

4.5/5

“The thoughts of all men arise from the darkness. If you are the movement of your soul, and the cause of that movement precedes you, then how could you ever call your thoughts your own? How could you be anything other than a slave to the darkness that comes before?”

Jason Deem's re-imagery of the series covers.. Which I prefer to the original covers which is half a face in a circle..

This novel is one of those novels that are basically impossible to review. So excuse the word vomit. Like a Malazan book, this series goes in its own category of badassery and uniqueness. It can't be compared to just your standard fantasy due to the complexity and HUGE plot and backstory. This whole entire world is new, unique and fascinating and you will not find another story like it, this is the reason why I'm literally urging every grimdark fan to go read this now. Seriously, you will thank me later..

”Some events marks us so deeply that they find more force of presence in their aftermath than in their occurrence. They are moments that rankle at becoming past, and so remain contemporaries of our beating hearts.”

The Darkness That Comes Before is Richard Scott Bakkers debut novel. It was published in 2004 so obviously I am 13 years late to the fandom; I was 12 years old when this book was first published so I'm kind of glad I didn't read it then. However it's never too late to become a mega fan of something so wonderful... right? Anyway I have had this series on my radar for over a year now but was a bit nervous to start it due to the things I've heard from a few friends say in regards to how complex the system used in the story is, Bakker has basically created a whole entire vivid world, he has made his own special unique magic system, characters, names and religions. There is a lot of descriptions (*cough* BORING!!) and half the book is actually just info dump. The story dives a lot into the religion Bakker has created, so I can understand why a lot of people find this book confusing and boring which brings me to my next point. I see a lot of DNF (did not finish) reviews for The Darkness That Comes Before stating that it was "boring" and "too slow", I totally get these points.. the start was freaking boring and so slow, I thought I was going to turn 90 before it got exciting, however it did get extremely interesting and I'm so glad I continued on with the story, I actually think I loved it by the end. The thing that annoys most people is the story starts in the middle of the story with no background information given, so you're basically thrown in the deep end and its either sink or swim. I personally found it super confusing and had to read some pages three times and it still didn't make sense, but yeah, cool shit happened so I stayed interested until the end, I was actually fascinated and couldn't stop reading which doesn't happen often. I actually just really enjoyed reading it, it did have a few issues which I will talk about later and those issues did prevent me from giving this novel a full five stars. However there were so many new and wonderful ideas presented in this novel and I absolutely love new stuff.

Drusas Ahamian fanart by Quinthane

“Faith is the truth of passion. Since no passion is more true than another, faith is the truth of nothing.”

The Darkness That Comes Before is Bakkers first novel in a three part series, the books are about an unfolding religious war which brings the world to the brink of an impending apocalypse. The story is told from multiple POVs from a cast of characters who are all on different sides of the war. The thing that made me love the story the most is the fact that all the characters are grey. No one is good and mostly everyone is an evil arsehole, what more could you ask for? Oh and the fact that the magic system is basically the COOLEST FREAKING MAGIC SYSTEM EVER, however it is so complex, hard to explain and weird, it is basically based on abstractions – powerful sorcerers can create lines and curves out of energy, weak sorcerers must rely on meagre resources like conjuring a dragons head to create flame and burn down a whole entire army...

Cnauir fanart by Quinthane

Well anyway I'm struggling to explain this story and write my own mini blurb so here's the actual blurb; *A score of centuries has passed since the First Apocalypse. The No-God has been vanquished and the thoughts of men have turned, inevitably, to more worldly concerns...Drusas Ahamian, tormented by 2,000 year old nightmares, is a sorcerer and a spy, constantly seeking news of an ancient enemy that few believe still exists. Ikurei Conphas, nephew to the Nansur Emperor, is the Exalt-General of the Imperial Army and a military genius. He plots to conquer the known world for his Emperor and dreams of the throne for himself. Maithanet, mysterious and charismatic, is spiritual leader of the Thousand Temples. He seeks a Holy War to cleanse the land of the infidel. Cnauir, Chieftain of the Utemot, is a Scylvendi barbarian. Rejected by his*

people, he seeks vengeance against the former slave who slew his father, and disgraced him in the eyes of his tribe. Into this world steps Anasurimbor Kellhus, the product of two thousand years of breeding and a lifetime of training in the ways of thought, limb, and face. Steering souls through the subtleties of word and expression, he slowly binds all - man and woman, emperor and slave - to his own mysterious ends. But the fate of men - even great men - means little when the world itself may soon be torn asunder. Behind the politics, beneath the imperialist expansion, amongst the religious fervour, a dark and ancient evil is reawakening. After two thousand years, the No-God is returning. The Second Apocalypse is nigh. And one cannot raise walls against what has been forgotten...

This novel is basically a huge Prelude for the other books in the series, so if you do decide to read it please remember to be patient and keep on reading because you are truly in for a treat.

BUT in saying that there was a few things that I didn't like about this book, firstly I'm going to talk about the pacing, yes I have crapped on about how good this novel is and how patient you must be blah blah but honestly, the pacing is freaking terrible I was so bored and confused for majority of the book, everything is all over the place and I guarantee you will not have a clue what is going on until the end, even then I'll bet you'll still be mildly confused. Secondly, a lot of effort has been put into the world building and the characterization is truly amazing (some of the best I've ever seen) but I just can't get past how SHOCKINGLY SHIT the names of the characters are. I could not pronounce most of the names so ended up calling the characters nicknames. Thirdly, when going into this novel I heard it came across as extremely sexist, I wanted to call bullshit but half way through I got sick of every male character stating how women were "weak" or teasing someone and comparing their weakness to a women, I also didn't appreciate the fact that every man in this book EXCEPT ONE, thought all women were whores.. Yeah. DA FUQ. You think women are weak? Fight me and I'll kick your arse mother fucker.. (jokes) but seriously, I'm not a feminist but I got sick of hearing this bullshit, YES I understand these views are not the authors and are the asshole characters he has created and YES I understand it is a cruel harsh world, however sometimes you get sick of reading that bullshit. So yes if you are a feminist and easily offended by these themes you should definitely steer clear of this series. It stinks of masculinity. Oh and I nearly forgot to mention that the only two female characters were a whore and a concubine and both were weak as. Lastly... I feel like he just wrote violent scenes for the sake of being violent and I feel like he was just sitting at his writing desk and got bored and thought "hey I'm going to just add a torture scene here for fun and shock value". (I love violence and I'm actually complaining that this was a tad too violent..)

One thing I absolutely adored was Kell *insert hearteyes and all the praise in the entire universe* he is an enigmatic, beautiful MONK, devoid of emotion and driven by purpose and stubbornness. He exploits and kills everyone who gets in his way, master of manipulation and full time badass. What is Kells true purpose? Who knows... is he evil or will he be a hero? (secretly hope he is a villain and will conjure himself into a real person and marry hers truly). I'm certainly excited to find out everything about him. Such an intriguing character and a perfect example of grey.

Kellhus fanart by Quinthane

"The world has long ceased to be the author of your anguish."

So all in all a satisfying read. Bakker has a unique way of writing and I recently found out he is also a philosopher which totally shows through his writing. Some of his dialogue is dense and definitely hard to digest especially for a simpleton like me, I had googled open the entire time while reading and also found some of his sentences forced. There is a shit ton of sex scenes and they are extremely graphic just like the violence so if your made of rainbows, stay away... this novel will literally rain on your parade and crush your

optimistic view on life. But in all honestly it did produce some of my favourite book battles ever (yeah I just went there) and it was full of politics and court intrigue.

Recommended to fans of GRRM A Song of Fire and Ice Series and also fans of Steve Eriksons Malazan Series.

Ps. I haven't stopped thinking about this book for a whole entire month.

Pss. Literally can't wait to keep reading this series because it's mind blowing good.

You can find this review and my other reviews at Booksprens.

J.G. Keely says

In my ongoing exploration of Worldbuilding on my blog, I've found the observations and thoughts of many different authors to be of use, including LeGuin and Moorcock--but it's been M. John Harrison's approach that I find most intriguing, because he begins the work of setting up a working theory for what worldbuilding is, how it operates, and why certain writers and fans may be attracted to it.

Of course, his views on worldbuilding are not very flattering, and as such, they have inspired a massive backlash from those fans and writers. While they have tried to defend worldbuilding as a valid and unique tool for writers to take advantage of, I have unfortunately never seen a response to Harrison that actually refutes his interpretation, or that provide any alternative theory for how worldbuilding operates, or what might make it a useful approach.

Many fans have pointed to Bakker as a great defender of worldbuilding, and they are fond of quoting his response to Harrison (buried in this interview). The quotes seemed to show a writer who was lucid and intelligent, and so I was excited by the prospect of finally seeing an actual attempt to defend worldbuilding, refute Harrison, and provide some alternative view of what authors can achieve with this technique.

Disappointingly, instead of addressing Harrison's thoughts and words, Bakker sidetracks into impugning his motives--though as an off-the-cuff response in an interview, I don't blame him for failing to present a complete defense (I analyze the exchange more fully in this post). After that post, Mr. Bakker was kind enough to show up on my blog to address my concerns.

I would expect that a great proponent of worldbuilding in his own books would have put suitable thought into the technique to have some good insights into it, but as the exchange went on and gradually petered out, Bakker didn't seem to have much to say on the subject. There was nothing to indicate that he possessed an approach to well-written, worldbuilding-focused fantasy, and as such, I'm afraid it's back to the drawing board for me. Perhaps someday, I will find that great defense of worldbuilding, a refutation of Harrison's theory, the presentation of an alternative view, or even a book which uses the technique to great effect--but today is not that day, and Bakker does not seem to be that author.

My Suggested Readings in Fantasy

Curtis says

This trilogy is really crazy interesting. My friends and I have a category of literature that I enjoy, basically calling it "Lit grad student masturbation" (e.g. Cloud Atlas, Infinte Jest). Although it's mainly used in the perjorative, it also describes incredibly accurately the writing style, very heady, involved, and vocab intense.

This is the first time I've encountered Philosophy grad student automanipulation, and it's enthralling, especially in the fantasy genre, where various philisophical schools manifest as types of magic, religion, and rulers.

This is also an intense read. There is a ton of information unleashed on you, it's better to just set aside some real time to read it in depth and try to assimilate all of the aspects of the world, political factions, and characters involved.

Mark Lawrence says

Found this in the parents' room at the hospital.

So I've seen a lot of Bakker-talk online and you'd think to read it that the man was either the devil incarnate or a seven-fold genius come to show the true way. A phrase I'm used to hearing is 'marmite book', another is 'you'll either love it or hate it - there's no in between'. All as much bollocks here of course as when applied to my own work. A simple click of the ratings button shows a vast number of in betweens. In fact most people are in between the 5* and the 1* on this book (as on mine). Most people give it 4*, 1* is the least popular rating.

There are plenty of good things to say about the book.

I've heard it comprises 'dense philosophy'. To my mind that would make an awful work of fiction. I've read philosophy text-books, and the fiction of Satre, De Beauvoir, and others. This is nothing like that. This is a fantasy story with a complex plot and plenty of action. Yes there's a little more introspection than typical for the genre. But philosophy? Very little. Bakker wisely opts for aphorisms and a measure of psychology to scatter around and create the ambiance.

The prose is powerful (can be long winded in places), there's an abundance of cleverness and insight on offer, the much talked of darkness of the book didn't strike me as particularly dark at all.

At the end of the book the threads converge and a pretty decent 'climax' is delivered, ending without a cliff hanger and with a (for me) mild impetus to continue.

The intricacy of the many part plot ... well, I admired it but I can't say it really did it for me. I guess it's a ton of material for the epic side of epic fantasy to play with over the course of the next however many books. I perhaps wanted more focus and more character-time.

There's great imagination here and Khellus' methods are a fresh and entertaining idea. All that really pushed this a touch below 4* for me was the fact that the whole book lacked the emotional content I enjoy. I don't need nice characters. I don't need to cheer their every move. And Bakker's character list certainly includes interesting characters - which is great. But I never really felt emotionally involved and that blunted my enjoyment.

The Mandate Schoolman was the most involving character for me, then Esmenet.

In short then, a book with depth, complexity, written with skill, and well worth a look. Personally I wasn't as swept up and held by it as I had hoped to be, but your mileage may well vary!

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Heinleinfan says

This was a disappointment. I generally like epic fantasy, but this author is convinced that having absolutely no exposition is perfectly okay when creating a world. It's not. If there are 8 different countries and nationalities, a few nobles, a few peasants, 12 different factions within each nationality, 5 different schools of magic, 3 different major religious beliefs, some humans, some not humans (maybe?) and all these things are named with the most un-familiar sounding tripe names you can imagine (even for fantasy) then you gotta give the reader *something* to serve as a guide to what the fuck is going on.

Tammy says

The book grips you. A page turner. Complex world with complex characters. Schemes upon schemes, epic battles mixed with political intrigue. Bakker writes mature characters, mature themes for the thinking audience. His world, Earwa is well defined and has an exotic feel to it. The Darkness That Comes Before lays the foundation for the main event of the series: The Holy War.

Notable characters: Achamian (spy/sorcerer),

Cnair (you do not wanna offend this guy),

Kellhus (more than a man, moves strings of all around him like puppets) ,

Xerius (crazy, insane, suspicious, witty Emperor),

Conphas(Nephew to Xerius, the Lion of Kiyuth as he came to be known, when it comes to battles tactics, second to none)

Proyas (a prince, former student of Achamian. Really love this character)

Esmenet

Serwe (a concubine. companion to Kellhus and Cnair)

Gamma Mouse says

There are very few books that are as ambitious as R. Scott Bakker's "The Darkness That Comes Before". Most authors would never attempt to create such a vast world with a deeply encompassing and vital intellectual history, and disparate races that have varying philosophical viewpoints and ways of perceiving the world. This novel, while a putative fantasy, is so remarkably well-conceived and executed that it feels more like a historical recollection of a lost world. In fact, Bakker liberally uses real Western civilization history and philosophy (with some aspects of Middle Eastern thought) and reshapes it especially for his world. The result is an absolutely brilliant fantasy novel that elevates the entire genre to a new level.

First, I will admit to being bias toward Bakker's novel. I studied philosophy both as an undergraduate and graduate student, so there is much here I recognize and appreciate from my studies. Let's just say, the complexity of Bakker's work is suited to my kind of academic geek, one who is deeply fascinated in the "why" of things, events and history. One who may be interested in Bakker's concept of the darkness that comes before, and what events result from that state of pre-rationality.

The novel is segmented into parts, each one following a different character and setting the scene for the second volume in the trilogy. Drusas Achamian is a Mandate sorcerer, plagued by the terrible and bloody dreams of his long dead predecessor. It is the Mandate school's mission to fight against the mysterious Consult, an organization whose existence has not been seen in decades. Achamian is commanded to uncover information about the plans of Maithanet, the Shriah of The Thousand Temples, the major religion of the region. Maithanet has recently declared the formation of a Holy War, a war that will take back the holy land of Shimeh. What Achamian discovers is a mystery that is potentially at the heart of this newly-declared Holy War.

Cnaiur is a Scylvendi barbarian, a survivor of the tremendous military defeat of his people at the hands of the martial prodigy, Ikurei Conphas. Soon, he meets Anasurimbor Kellhus, the son of Anasurimbor Moenghus, a man who, in the past, lead Cnaiur to terrible actions against his father that still torture his soul. Cnaiur and Kellhus make their way to Momemn to join the forces gathering for the Holy War, both with the agenda of finding Anasurimbor Moenghus.

Bakker writes with a depth to his characterization that is staggering. His characters are as complete intellectually, emotionally, and philosophically as you could possibly imagine. The world-building is unbelievable, as each region and race have their own history, reasoning, and stance to the events that unfold during the course of the novel. It is rather overwhelming and requires a great effort from the reader, but in the end, the effort pays off with a truly amazing fantasy experience.

It should be pointed out the majority of the novel is centered on setting the scene for the rest of the trilogy, to situate the reader in this finely imagined world. This setting up is, in a sense, the darkness that comes before, a pre-history that will be necessary to fully comprehend that which follows in the next two volumes. If R. Scott Bakker's "The Darkness That Comes Before" is any indication, what follows may be the greatest fantasy trilogy ever.

Last Word:

An amazing experience that will challenge for one of the greatest fantasy novels ever released. Bakker creates an incredible world, and populates it full of characters with such reality and intellectual history as to be staggeringly fascinating. This is absolutely must read fantasy literature.

Mike says

Observational aside: I will rarely reread books. Once I finish a book it is usually off to the next one, with few exceptions. In this case the sixth book in the series, The Great Ordeal, is coming out soon, a book I have waited nearly five years for, and I wanted to give myself a refresher on the entire series before it was released. I don't recall the first time I read "The Prince of Nothing" trilogy but Goodreads assures me it was before I joined this website. Since then I have read literally hundreds of books and grown as a reader thanks to those books as well as thinking through those books when I write reviews. Over that time my sensibilities and critical eye has changed as well (I'd like to think for the better) so it was a rather enlightening exercise this return to a time in my reading life from before Goodreads (BGR?). With that rambling out of the way on to the review.

On its surface this book shares many traits with your typical fantasy epic: sprawling world, epic stakes, magic, mayhem, mysteries, otherworldly monsters, ancient evil, etc. etc. But I think this series really stands out among the crowded Epic Fantasy field for several significant reasons.

World Building: While very much based on the Mediterranean world on the cusp of the First Crusade (so much so it made me want to read *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* again) Bakker merely uses this historical period as a starting point. He populates the Three Seas area of his world with delightfully unique nations, people, and beliefs. While there are obvious historical parallels between some nations and institutions (Catholic Church, Byzantine Empire, People's Crusade to name a few) it is not blatant and they are a very naturally part of Bakker's fantastical world.

On top of the excellent contemporary cultures and societies Bakker's world has a deep history that informs the present. It stretches back thousands of years but revisits some characters nightly (more on that below) and is truly original. In this case the ancient evil is actually aliens who crash landed on the planet ages ago and made war with the dominant non-human civilization at the time. Their conflict is literally a thing of legends spanning hundreds of years but sufficed to say they are truly alien and utterly chilling in their goals.

Magic: Some worlds have whimsical magic, or utilitarian magic, or healing magic. Not Bakker. His magic can basically set at one or eleven with nothing in between. You have your low level alarm cants (as spells are called) and limited communication cants and then you have the everything in the local vicinity burns/blows up, there is no in between Sorcerers sings God's song and burn the world with it.

But Bakker balances this raw power with Choraes, items from that ancient war that render the bearer immune to sorcery and will turn any sorcerer it touches into salt (talk about biblical). In that way a sort of balance exists between Sorcery Schools and secular powers (it doesn't do the Schoolmen much good that they are condemned as abominations by the prevalent religion of the region). Magic is both destructive but also limited and checked. This balance creates a fascinating dynamic in the political balance of the world.

Writing decisions: While a bit more personal as a criteria, there are multiple things Bakker does that really appeal to me and I think lends themselves to effective Epic Fantasy writing.

The first are the little passages that start off every chapter. They might be an in-world proverb or a passage from an in-world piece of literature but they are a nice flourish that effectively add to this vibrant, realistic world the read finds themselves in.

There is also a glossary in the back. Man, I love me some fantasy glossaries, it helps explain concepts and really flesh out the history of the world that isn't explicitly explained in the book. I don't know what every epic fantasy doesn't have them, they're great!

Bakker isn't afraid to shift from a character's POV to a high level view and description of events. Given the scope of the events Bakker is writing about this is a much more effective and efficient way of communicating major events to the reader that the characters don't necessarily have an ideal viewpoint into. It avoids conversations that are shoehorned in to convey the same information which would break up the flow of the story. The confidence that Bakker delivers these (usually) short sections and their effectiveness of advancing the story is an excellent quality in my opinion.

Bakker also isn't afraid to dwell in the mind and thoughts of the characters. This is crucial because for as much as this series is about an epic war, the story is driven by the main characters: Khellus the Dûnyain monk, Drasas Achamian (Aka), a Mandate Schoolman who dreams of the first Apocalypse every night, Cnaiür urs Skiötha, a steppe barbarian on the hunt for vengeance, and Esmenet, Drasas former lover and a whore (plenty more on THAT later). Let's take each of them separately and explore what makes them so

fascinating.

Khellus hails from a monastery of very secretive monks (for lack of a better word). He was sent into the world he has been isolated from his entire life to hunt down his father who had left decades before but has recently sent dreams to Khellus calling him to a far off city. And, to put it simply, he is a sociopath. He doesn't see others as people, merely tools to be used to further his end (more on the Dûnyain in subsequent reviews). And thanks to two thousand years of dedicated training and breeding the Dûnyain come packing some serious abilities. It is fascinating to see him navigate the social currents of the Holy War and his perception the Three Seas culture as an outsider.

Cnaiür urs Skiötha hails from a race of warlike steppe people but had crossed paths with Khellus's father decades before the events of the book (it didn't go so well for him). His people are very traditional but he has always found himself somehow outside their culture no matter how hard he tries to adhere to its norms. He falls in with Khellus as a means to enact vengeance on Khellus's father. From his perspective we see the torment of being somewhat freed of the restrictive cultural norms of his people while still trying to live up to them. He is also the most violent of all men and the breaker of horses, not the kind of guy you'd want to meet in a dark alley at night.

Drasas Achamian (Aka to his friends) is very much a tortured soul. A spy for the Mandate School of Sorcery (not an actual school like Hogwarts, that is just what sorcerers are called, schoolmen) he finds himself swept up in the Holy War and falling into company with Khellus and Cnaiür. His school is the only one that possess the Gnostic sorcery of the Ancient North (much more powerful than their contemporary Anagogic sorcerers and have a Mandate from the great sorcerer of the First Apocalypse to be ever vigilant of the Consult, the great ancient enemy. While their magic is much more powerful than other schools they are a bit of a laughing stock as no one believes the Consult still exists, yet every night they re-live their founders horrors from the First Apocalypse. Aka is a somewhat broken man, having lost students and faith in his school's mission.

Through Esmenet we see how terrible this world is to women. It is pretty much as terrible as you would expect in a world roughly modeled after 11th century Europe. Together with two other female characters of less importance they comprise the sum of the female characters in the book (yeah, not exactly brimming with female voices). While Esmenet is pretty strong (you have to be to survive as a whore in these conditions) and whip smart her society doesn't allow her many avenues of opportunity. She does develop into quite the formidable character throughout the series but is perpetually at risk of becoming the victim of some violence of another.

While the argument could be made that Bakker was trying to stay true to the conditions he was basing the story on, the fact that there are sorcerers and ancient evil space aliens and monks that can read emotions and intent based on facial muscles could give him plenty of room to develop female characters with more agency. I think Bakker somewhat intended this (as he treats the female characters he does introduce with the same workmanship as the male ones) and instead wanted to use Esmenet as a window for the reader into one of the main themes I pulled out of this series: control (but more on that bit of philosophical rambling in a later review).

All these characters (along with other, more minor ones) have fascinating inner thoughts and observations that really enrich them and lend further depth to the world they populate. For the most part they are all horribly flawed in some way, but that just makes them even more interesting.

(I will say, however, that this absence of significant female characters and the role female characters did play did dim my enthusiasm for this book a bit, knocking it down from the BGR rating of five stars to four stars. Just a sign of my evolving sensibilities I suppose)

So when you mix all these really strong characteristics together you end up with a very engaging and ambitious book. It is just as much about political maneuvering as it is about fighting (Arguably more so in this book as there is really only one major battle). There are a lot of other themes in this book that I plan on expanding upon in subsequent reviews but I found the ideas the book brings up very fascinating and engrossing.

And of course the writing was pretty nifty as well:

Sounds like my kind of place: *The place was invariably crowded, filled with shadowy, sometimes dangerous men, but the wine and hashish were just expensive enough to prevent those who could not afford to bathe from rubbing shoulders with those who could.*

Peoples is peoples: *But when one became a spy, the world had the curious habit of collapsing into a single dimension. High-born men, even emperors and kings, had a habit of seeming as base and as petty as the most vulgar fisherman.*

We've all had these happen to us: *Some events mark us so deeply that they find more force of presence in their aftermath than in their occurrence. They are moments that rankle at becoming past, and so remain co temporaries of our beating hearts. Some events are not remembered - they are relived.*

True in the real world, and not just kings: *Kings never lie. They demand the world be mistaken. -Conriyan Proverb*

Also true in the real world, to a somewhat disconcerting degree: *But is this not the very enigma of history? When one peers deep enough, one always finds that catastrophe and triumph, the proper objects of the historian's scrutiny, inevitably turn upon the small, the trivial, the nightmarishly accidental.*

Sherman was a bit more succinct, but would probably agree: *"You know nothing of war. War is dark. Black as pitch. It is not a God. It does not laugh or weep. It rewards neither skill nor daring. It is not a trial of souls, not the measure of wills. Even less is it a tool, a means to some womanish end. It is merely the place where iron bones of the earth meet hollow bones of men and break them."*

The Virtue of Doubt: *"There's faith that knows itself as faith and there's faith that confuses itself for knowledge. The first embraces uncertainty, acknowledges the mysteriousness of God. It begets compassion and tolerance. Who can entirely condemn when they are not certain they are in the right? But the second embraces certainty and only pays lips service to the God's mystery. It begets intolerance, hatred, violence..."*

The Paradox of living in the world: *Politics: one bartered principle and piety to accomplish what principle and piety demanded. One sullied himself in order to be cleansed.*

This series is a bit darker than most other ones out there not to mention more sexually explicit. But these themes fold into the larger thrust of the narrative and aren't thrown in their to solely titillate. I am still enjoying this series a lot even if I am approaching it from a new, more refined perspective.

Lee says

This book, more than any other book seems to polarize my GR buddies. I don't know many people who sit on the fence with this book. At one end of the scale you have "my favourite series, this is amazing" and at the other end; "you'll remember your time having gastro more favourably than this book".

Me, I am going to come down off the fence on the side of the like-sters.

I am not sure where the bad rep comes from, I have read far far worse than this, I have also read far better, but for a first in the series, I think that it has set a pretty good scene for the next two books.

The world building is ok, pretty generic world, nothing really any different from most fantasy books. Kind of an old empire style with walled towns, horse travel, deserts, seas and your standard earth gravity.

The characters are numerous and have difficult to remember and pronounce names, sometimes I think Bakker just made them weird to add spice to the story, but after reading the entire book I found a pronunciation guide at the back. Which meant i had to review the way i had a name in my head. The characters themselves are pretty good, there is a lot of familiarity in them, I feel like I have read them before, in previous lives they might have been in First Law or Mistborn etc but overall they are developing along nicely. There are a couple of them that are very good and I have really enjoyed the interaction between certain people. It seems the more bizarre the character the better Bakker writes them. Unless the character is female. So far the female characters amount to nothing. We only have one major-ish female role and whilst it focuses a lot on her thoughts and feelings, she is about as predictable at me not being able to spell the name of the next tribe we will meet.

There a lot of factions, tribes, leaders, languages, religions, sourceres and none of them are Smith from Jonesville. I think this does cause a lot of problems with some readers as it does take a bit of work putting it all together. I also think that if you have read big epics with many cahracters and lands you are probably in a better place to accept that and stick with the story.

Overall I am pretty happy with what I have read so far, I do feel this is a set up book and I am expecting a lot more from book two. The potential is certainly there and I'll be going to book two very soon.

Twerving To Beethoven says

I've gone through some reviews and it seems to me "The Darkness That Comes Before" isn't everybody's cup of tea. There are a lot of one-star reviews and heaps of dnf's. Well, now that I've read it, I guess i know why.

I reckon this book is not a walk in the park, Bakker's prose gets a bit cryptical here and there. It's really not the easiest text to get into... and it might get a tad frustrating, alright. I mean, sometimes the reader finds himself wondering what is going on... I, for one, had to stop and go back at least a couple of times in order to string everything together. Also, there are quite a few slow bits and plenty of political tangle **BUT**, when you finally get the hang of it, TDTCB is highly rewarding in a Malazan-ish sort of way.

Aye, imho The Malazan Book of The Fallen is the closest thing to "The Prince of Nothing". Bakker, just like Erickson, throws everything at you without bothering to explain, so the learning curve is **extremely** steep. It's kind of a messy patchwork with several story-lines but, again, I think it's a tremendous mess.

Favourite character: Esmenet. Poor girl, I really felt for her.

At the end of the day...

Gavin says

This is my second read of Bakker's compelling dark fantasy *The Darkness That Comes Before*. My first read was around the original publication date. I recall this being one of the best dark fantasy books I'd read to that point. I remember thinking the writing was engaging, the plot was interesting, the world building was fantastic, and that the characters were memorable. The only flaws I had identified was that the sheer complex nature of the world and characters meant that it took me about 100 pages or so to get to grips with the world and the characters. I thought this was a sure 5 star read and one of the best dark fantasy books I'd ever read!

So how did this hold up more than a decade later with the added experience of having read a ton of other dark fantasy stories in the wake of the boom of the grimdark fantasy subgenre? It held up really well! This still ranks as one of my all time favourite dark fantasy books. I still find Bakker's writing to be very engaging and I still feel like the depth to the world building and plot are excellent. Bakker's characters might be tough to like but I was always sucked into their various story arcs. This second time around I felt like the story was a bit easier to get into in the early stages.

This is complicated multi-POV fantasy set in the brutal world of Eärwa. For the first time in a long time The Thousand Temples is unified behind a powerful, and mysterious, new leader. That leader is threatening to call the faithful to arms for a Holy War. The Inrithi nations are a fractured bunch and more used to squabbling amongst themselves to secure their own share of power than anything else but the leaders of various nations all see a chance for glory and gain in the Holy War. Agents across the Inrithi nations and from multiple other various factions in Eärwa scramble to learn whether the Holy War's target will be the unclean sorcerers of the various lands or if it will be the powerful heathen nation of Kian. To complicate matters even further it seems agents of the long forgotten No-God might also be taking an interest in the happenings! The story was complex and compelling and packed with action and intrigue as the various factions all sought to seize the Holy War and turn it to their own profit.

The other big win for this book was the characters. None of them were particularly likeable but all of them were interesting and had fascinating stories. Kellhus was one of the more memorable and unique characters I've come across in all my years of reading. The Dûnyain monk's ability to twist any situation to his advantage was as horrifying as it was compelling!

This was a dark story. No surprise given that a lot of the main characters were pretty awful people and that the story and world was reminiscent of the Crusades in the medieval period. Only with a bunch of fun magic and supernatural creatures thrown in to complicate matters and make them even more exciting! That said, I did not feel like this was over the top grim, as I feel is an issue with a lot of modern grimdark stories, and that Bakker managed to mitigate a lot of the real horrors of his brutal world by not revelling in that brutality and horror. A lot of it got described in a distant way that made it more palatable for the reader.

This rates up there with Gardens of the Moon and Game of Thrones for me.

All in all I loved this one and it remains one of the best dark fantasy stories I've read.

Rating: 5 stars.

Audio Note: I felt like David DeVries did a good job with the audios. His character voices were decent and he seemed to handle the voice acting as well.

Katie says

Ugh. I really wanted to like this book. I'm pretty much the target audience for this - I like my fantasy books on the more serious side, I like them to have a fixation with history, and I like them to be pretty detailed in their development. And since I study medieval history, I got to pick out all the allusions to the real Crusades. But I can't say I'd really recommend it - for all its good attributes it winds up getting a bit too caught up in trying to maintain its own self-importance for it to succeed as a story.

Let's start with the good: Bakker is a very good worldbuilder. He's taken the time to craft loads of religions, philosophies, and political factions in his world, and he's assembled them in a way where they all mostly make sense in relation to each other. Even better, he doesn't info-dump all this information into a prologue (which would have made for a startlingly boring 50 pages) but introduces in a way that's mostly natural and trusts its readers to keep up (or, if they can't, to be able to take a quick look at the handy appendices in the back). It's refreshing that he assumes his readers can follow his narrative without any handholding. Bakker also handles his world's history well: not only is it well developed, interesting, and rather unique, but the different characters' varying responses to its history make the world feel *old*, in an effortless and authentic way. By the end, I was enjoying Bakker's fake excerpts from his world's history books and philosophical treatises more than I was enjoying his story itself. He's also (with the exception of some clunky dialogue and some occasionally overwrought prose) a pretty good writer with a good gift for surprising word choice.

Unfortunately, *The Darkness that Comes Before* never quite makes the leap from being a good idea to a good story. I think there are two central problems holding it back. The first is an issue that is starting to become problematic in the world of post-George R.R. Martin fantasy: the idea that increased "grittiness" equates with increased "reality." I honestly think that that's a kind of terrible assumption to make as an author, and a kind of perplexing one. Martin's world isn't realistic because it's gritty, it's realistic because characters who can commit acts of cruelty or cowardice are frequently also capable of immense kindness, and because scenes of violence bump up against scenes that are heart-warming or funny. It's a realistic world because it covers a wide range of emotions and acknowledges that they can manifest themselves in the same places and same people, even if they're contradictory.

That's where Bakker's book fails. His characters are gritty, sure, but they're also really flat. With the possible exceptions of Achamain and Cnäiur, everyone fits pretty neatly into the categories of sociopath, people verging on the brink of insanity, single-minded religious zealots, and a vast horde of people who aren't clever enough to avoid being manipulated by them. (view spoiler) It's probably the most relentlessly dour book that I have ever read, to the point where Bakker's world starts to feel fundamentally unrealistic. No one is ever happy or kind, they just brood ominously, hysterically lash out and other people, or attempt to move others around like chess pieces. It's the polar opposite of a fantasy novel where everyone is flawlessly noble and heroic, but that doesn't make it innovative or original – it just makes it a different flavor of one-dimensional. It makes the whole book and whole world feel tinny, and it's a flaw that no number of linguistic trees in the appendices can really overcome.

The other issue is one that's been noted by other people already: the book has a bit of a women problem. I get that the women in Bakker's universe are forced into a socially inferior position and most of their powerlessness stems from there. There's nothing inherently sexist about that, and you can tell a very interesting and ultimately empowering story from that perspective. The ease with which Kellhus manipulates Selwë isn't inherently sexist either – she's been horribly abused, and it's understandable that she'd latch on to the nearest person to show any sort of interest in her. The problem is that he hasn't created compelling storylines for these women, or written them in an interesting way. And without that, it just becomes of endless slog of rape, self-loathing, and abuse. Nearly all the scenes involving women in Bakker's book are upsetting and voyeuristic and fail to establish either women as unique or compelling characters. They're just victims. This problem gets compounded in a pretty ugly way when it's revealed that the single woman with

any kind of power in this universe (and therefore a good opportunity to go beyond the victim trope) turns out to routinely use her sexuality to manipulate everyone around her and (view spoiler) Yikes.

In the end, it all comes back to Bakker's central problem: he equates grittiness and cruelty with narrative realism and weight, but in the end it only results in the opposite effect.

Terry says

3.5 stars

After finishing *The White Luck Warrior*, the most recent volume in R. Scott Bakker's fantasy novels set in the world of Eärwa, and realizing that I had many months to wait for the next book, and somehow feeling like I didn't yet want to leave this dark and twisted world I decided to go back to the first series and give it a re-read. Eärwa is an interesting secondary world: one in which the metaphysics of its religions are objectively true, as are the consequences of not adhering to their byzantine moral codes. It seems as though the entire world is damned, certainly those who practice sorcery (the ultimate mark of human folly and pride and the greatest sin against the gods and their act of creation) and nearly every character in the novel seems to suffer under the weight of this condemnation. There seems to be a lot of damnation to go around, but very little in the way of atonement, forgiveness, or mercy. As I said...pretty dark and as I have mentioned elsewhere, when not in the right mood for it, this can be an obstacle when reading Bakker. At the moment, however, I was on a role with Eärwa and decided to extend my stay for a bit...it is at least as fascinating as it is dark. These days "dark fantasy" is nothing new, indeed it's almost become something of a commonplace in the genre, but I think Bakker may have been one of the earliest writers to explore this paradigm. "Dark and gritty fantasy" this may be, though I don't think Bakker strays as far thematically from the high fantasy tropes and idioms of Tolkien as do many of his confrères; in fact I think he may be one of the few writers in the field who has not only made use of them, but done so in truly novel and interesting ways.

This first volume in Bakker's magnum opus, which currently consists of five books (with, as I noted above, a sixth on the horizon and, I think at least, the possibility of at least one more trilogy to fully flesh out many of the ideas and stories that Bakker is working with), is an impressive first novel, though I did notice a few infelicities on my re-read that I think ultimately show how Bakker has improved as a wordsmith. One thing that stood out to me was Bakker's occasional tendency to over-explain things, though I must admit that some of this may have been more the result of the fact that I already knew many of the details he reveals than any real fault in Bakker's prose. Still, show don't tell, right? I also found myself occasionally weighed down by political and logistical details that admittedly are understandably necessary if one is going to tell a tale about a mass crusade of nations against an ancient foe. It's not the kind of thing you can rush through if you're going to do it right, and many integral pieces need to be set up before anything can be set in motion unless you choose to start in medias res, which was not Bakker's choice here. So, again not exactly a complaint, more just an acknowledgment that my favourite elements of the book were not those centring on the larger ramifications and details of the Holy War, but instead those that centred on the characters, especially, I must admit, the savage yet cunning barbarian chieftain Cnaiür urs Skiötha and his godlike yet enigmatic companion Anasûrimbor Kellhus, the titular Prince of Nothing.

I won't go into too much detail on these characters so you can enjoy the revelations about them yourselves, but I recall being struck upon my first reading of the initial trilogy (and this feeling has certainly remained) with the way in which these two figures seemed to embody one of the main ideas that I think Bakker was working through in the initial trilogy: the concept of the Übermensch. It always struck me that in Cnaiür we saw something along the lines of a 'true' nietzschean superman, a man with superior physical and mental skills driven by an overpowering will to overcome all obstacles and enforce this will upon the world. In

Kellhus we have something slightly different, a man who is the product of both a genetic breeding program and a highly sophisticated training process (shades of the Bene Gesserit and their search for the kiwisatz haderach here) both of which are designed to produce a human 'conditioned' to be able to "set himself before" the myriad influences and deterministic elements of the world such that he is both "truly free", able to make decisions that are not merely the unthinking by-product of unperceived influences, and can as a result perceive the hidden motivations of others, thus wielding an almost inhuman influence upon them. Following these two characters as they meet, come to realize how they fit into each other's lives and plans, and watch them play off not only each other, but the world at large (and the Holy War that is the ultimate backdrop for the whole story) is a lot of fun.

Besides these two supermen, the story is rounded out by a very large cast of characters, both high and low, who range from the dysfunctional, one might even say psychotic, Ikurei family that rule the Nansur Empire and hope to use the Holy War as a tool for their own ends, and the contingent of Nersei Proyas an idealistic young King who hopes to retain the 'purity' of the crusade, to Sërwe and Esmenet, two women whose low-caste standing belies the roles they have to play in the greater story. Perhaps central to them all is the somewhat schmuck-like sorcerer Drusas Achamanian, a man of great eldritch power plagued by insecurity and uncertainty who is driven by dark dreams of an ancient apocalypse to search for an enemy who may not exist, but who might also be the hidden authors of the end of the world. These mysterious figures, the Consult, are perhaps Bakker's most interesting development throughout his entire series: a play on the "ultimate evil" trope common to high fantasy (there's even a fabled 'evil overlord' in the form of the enigmatic "No-god" Mog-Pharau), Bakker is able to make them into perhaps the most terrifying embodiment of evil I have come across in the realms of fantasy. Their origins, certainly in the context of fantasy, are novel and their methods are both insidious and far-reaching. We see only glimpses of them as they attempt to remain in the shadows and act as the unseen instigators behind all that occurs, but those glimpses are both tantalizing and fascinating.

I know in many circles that "world building" is a dirty word, but I think it is absolutely necessary to the genre and, when done well, doesn't intrude upon the story, but rather complements it and allows for the reader to more easily suspend their disbelief. I think Bakker does an exceptional job in this regard (the already noted slight tendency to over-explain in some place notwithstanding) and he only gets better as one progresses through his books. I don't want to say too much more, since if you have the stomach for truly dark fantasy (explicit violence and sex are pervasive elements of the story) you're in for a treat and you ought to experience the revelations as they are brought forth in the narrative. All in all this is a commendable first volume upon which much will be built, and if you are a lover of fantasy with the stamina to persevere through a high page count across not only multiple books, but multiple series, then I highly recommend it.

KJ says

I can't decide how I feel about this book. Well-written, engaging characters, a fantasy world with enough differences from the norm that I felt like I was discovering something new and interesting. I picked it up from the shelf in the bookstore because the recommendation card said "Fans of George R.R. Martin and Guy Gavriel Kay will love it!", and I certainly see where they're coming from with that. This is the first book in a (complete! hooray!) trilogy, and I'm sufficiently engaged that I'm wondering how it will all end.

But I can't get over how the book portrays women. There are two women in the main cast, and both are prostitutes (one is a concubine, the other is this world's version of a call girl). The "call girl" is clever and sympathetic but the other is a blithering idiot. They're set against a backdrop that is almost all men -- very few women are side characters, among a cast of literally thousands, and none are sympathetic. And the way the male characters talk about, think about, and observe women is almost universally demeaning. Any one of

these things I could decide not to let bother me in a book I was otherwise enjoying; all of them together is getting a bit much. It's one thing to say "it's the characters' view, not necessarily the author", but when it's this pervasive I start to wonder.

Still not sure whether I will continue reading the series.

Justin Evans says

Ha! I love the reviews for this book. If you're older than 14, and have ever read anything the cover of which does *not* feature embossed gold lettering and a fire-breathing dragon Goddess, you love it. People who don't understand the 'show' vs 'tell' distinction but use it anyway, people who have the vocabulary of a 12 year old, and people who are unwilling to put in any effort whatsoever hate it. I don't read much fantasy, just because I can't take much description in prose, let alone the stilted, turgid style that seems to dominate the genre. But that's not a problem here.

Simply put, this is beautifully written, very intelligent and suitably imaginative. Reading it is a pleasure thanks to Bakker's style; it's engrossing thanks to the characters and the story; and it's funny if you can train-spot all the historical references. They range from the first Crusade (Xerius = Alexius I; Maithenet = Urban II) through a whole range of philosophical schools from the Eastern and Western traditions.

Most of the book is written in varying degrees of free indirect style, and occasionally Bakker's need to stuff information into a scene is a bit too noticeable. But given how much information the reader needs in order to understand the world she's being thrown into, it's not too outrageous. Sometimes Bakker has too many fragments, but they weren't too obtrusive. The real problem here was pointed out by another reviewer: the women are all whores or shrews. I don't mean 'in general.' I mean there are three women in the book, and they are whores or shrews. I'll give Bakker the benefit of the doubt, and assume that he's trying to point out a fact about our world's (deplorable) treatment of women by highlighting how badly they're treated in the world of the novel - the narrator is definitely sympathetic to Esmenet, at least. I hope he's writing those characters with something clever in mind; it's more than a little obnoxious otherwise.

Harold Ogle says

Its jacket covered with hyperbolic praise, this book intrigued me enough that I borrowed it from our local library. Reviewers compare it, ecstatically, to both the Song of Ice and Fire and the Lord of the Rings, though in some measure surpassing both of them. Well, comparisons to LotR are de rigeur for any fantasy novel wanting to be taken seriously. But why compare this to GRR Martin's series? For the first hundred pages, the comparison seems nonsensical. But then it starts to make a twisted sense. "The Darkness that Comes Before" tries to take aspects of "The Song of Ice and Fire" - in large part, many of the more unpleasant aspects - and surpass them. The book follows multiple characters, but it doesn't follow the clear delineation by chapter break that GRRM does - it's like an MTV jump-cut version of character POV, as Bakker switches without warning between characters from one section to the next. Thankfully, much of the time which character is speaking can be inferred by the context of the location/setting. Sadly, each of the characters is reprehensible, as if "The Song of Ice and Fire" had been rewritten with only Lannister characters (excluding Tyrion - he's too sympathetic).

Worst of all is the series' titular character, Anasurimbor Kellhus, later jokingly called "the Prince of Nothing", who is such an unabashed villain that I spent most of the novel building up a crazy hope that the

author was going to kill off the character in a suitably nasty way. As a result, the most sympathetic, relatable character is the insane barbarian Cnaiur, who, while being a horrible piece of work himself, earns the gratitude of the readers by being the only character to recognize what an inhuman monster Kellhus is. By the end of the novel, if you're like me you'll be rooting for Cnaiur to get the better of Kellhus and save the world from his madness.

The setting is an interesting one: magic is a taint that manifests itself in random individuals, who are then found and trained by one of the many Schools of magic. Such sorcerers are tremendously feared by everyone else, for their completely out-of-reason powers to destroy multitudes. Between the Schools there exists great rivalry and political machination. Getting the least respect is the Mandate School, so called because their first grandmaster, at the end of his life of fighting the inhuman monsters called the Consult, cast a spell on his deathbed so that everyone indoctrinated to the School would dream the grandmaster's life at night as if it were his own. When the story begins, more than 2,000 years after the death of the grandmaster, the threat of the Consult is real and present to everyone in the Mandate, but to everyone else the sorcerers are cranks and lunatics (though still possessed of dread arcane powers), fearing what they believe to be the imaginary "threat" of the Consult. All pretty compelling, but the problem lies in the main character, who is a monk descendant of the grandmaster's first liege lord. The monks have isolated themselves for the last few millennia in the far north, studying the Logos. The Logos is a logic based on the premise that everyone's actions are predetermined by what has happened previously (hence, the "darkness that comes before"), and that by completely owning and occupying one's powerlessness over events one actually gains the ability to effortlessly predict and manipulate events. For the whole novel we see Kellhus wandering the earth, manipulating and charming everyone to his own inscrutable ends, with a contempt for everyone else's lack of awareness of Reality. He's like an evil robot, undefeatable in battle, wits, love and hate. It may be that we are meant to like the character, but I doubt it, as he has no endearing qualities.

The quality of the writing - the syntax, word choice, how phrases are formed - is good, but the characters are all so base this is a hard book to read. I will likely read the second book, though, just for the chance that someone, somewhere, will enact revenge on Kellhus for his crimes against, well, everyone.

Bookwraiths says

I've tried to read this for three years in a row and never been able to get interested in it. Glad others enjoy it though.
