



## Jherereg

*Steven Brust*

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# Jhereg

*Steven Brust*

## **Jhereg** Steven Brust

The first to be published, this is actually the fourth novel in the timeline of the VLAD TALTOS series. The books recount the adventures of the wisecracking hired killer Vlad, a human on a planet mainly inhabited by the long-lived, extremely tall sorcerers known as the Dragaerans. One of the most powerful bosses in the Jhereg--Dragaera's premier criminal organization--hires Vlad, one of their guild members, to assassinate Mellar, who stole millions from the Jhereg leadership and fled. Unfortunately, this thief turns out to be protected in a way that makes it difficult for Vlad to do his job without gaining the permanent enmity of a friend. The reader also learns more about Vlad's past in this, and in other, lives.

## **Jhereg Details**

Date : Published November 1987 by Ace (first published January 1st 1983)

ISBN : 9780441385546

Author : Steven Brust

Format : Paperback 239 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, High Fantasy, Dragons

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## From Reader Review Jhereg for online ebook

### Brad says

I refuse to look at what I said about this book the last time I read it for fear of influencing what I have to say this time around, but I will certainly do so once I have posted my thoughts.

My thoughts: total bafflement that my second time through *Jhereg* was like the first time through. The only two things I remembered about the story were Vlad Taltos, our first-person narrating criminal mastermind/assassin and his Lockheed-like dragon, Loiosh. Other than that I didn't remember a thing. It was like reading it for the first time, and I have to say the experience was a touch off-putting.

It is rare for me to reread a book without the entire plot, most of the characterization and even some of the dialogue flooding back, but so little of *Jhereg* stuck with me that it all felt new. It makes me wonder about the authorial skill of Steven Brust. I have introduced countless friends to his work, specifically his collaboration *Freedom and Necessity*, but to the Taltos books too, yet I found myself wondering all the way through this if he is as sustaining as a bowl of fried rice at an MSG-laden Chinese Food restaurant. Is he just hollow calories? Perhaps.

But I can't help thinking, "Who cares?" I love fried rice at bad Chinese food restaurants. Sure it isn't real Chinese food. It doesn't stick with me. But I fucking love it while I am eating it, and I find myself craving it again and again. The same holds true for me with Vlad Taltos and his machinations in *Adrilankha*.

I am going to go out on a limb here, though, and say something potentially inciting to super-Brust-fans: I get a feeling good old Steve writes his Taltos books as hollow reading calories on purpose. I think he wants us to forget what happened beyond our fondness for the books so we can read them fresh every time. I think his *hack-i-ness*, for want of a better term, is absolutely intentional. So he isn't an author of hollow calories, but a Chef who knows when to make an airy special for the night in the hopes of packing the booths with bums.

Be offended if you like, but keep this in mind: if what I have said is true I love him for it even more than I already did. And if you read *Freedom and Necessity* you'll see where that true love comes from.

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### Navessa says

[killed and resurrected (hide spoiler)]

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### Eon ?Windrunner? says

An old school type fantasy that I enjoyed, but it didn't convince me that I need to read any more of the series.

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### Stephen says

5.0 stars. The Vlad Taltos series is one that I strongly recommend to anyone who likes good fantasy. I would classify it as "noir" fantasy with a good sense of humor. Great world-building, great characters and well-

written, tight plots that do not drag and are never boring. As good as all that is, it is the main character of Vlad Taltos (assassin, witch and rogue) and his "jhereg" familiar that make the series so special. Highly recommended.

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## **Brad says**

*Immediate Reaction:* This was a blast. A little fantasy-noir fun for anyone who likes bad men behaving with honour. Vlad Taltos is an anti-hero extraordinaire, and all the minor characters and relationships he's surrounded with are equally cool.

*Later:* This is only the second book I've read by Steven Brust, and the first I've read that he wrote alone. I read his collaboration with Emma Bull, *Freedom and Necessity* a couple of months ago, and loved their book so much I knew I had to hunt down their other works and give them a go. What *Jhereg* delivered was totally unexpected.

*F and N* was a beautiful literary work that obviously suffers in its readership by being written by a pair of Sci-Fi/Fantasy authors. And I expected more of the same with *Jhereg*. But there is little "literary" in the first of the Vlad Taltos books, but that doesn't make it any less readable. In fact, it might actually make it much more of an addiction inducing habit.

*Jhereg* is a bit like a fantasy detective story, or a "fantasy noir" (as I called it earlier), with assassin/crime boss/information collector Vlad Taltos taking the role of obligatory hardbitte detective from the works of Dashiell Hammett or Mickey Spillane. And it's as good as the former and better than the latter.

Vlad is surrounded by an original and exotic fantasy world, killer allies (his pseudo-cousin Alera is a personal favourite), a smart ass familiar named Loiosh, a seamy underworld, nasty enemies (including one who calls himself "Demon"), witchcraft and sorcery (which are nothing alike), genetic engineering (for the slightest touch of Sci-Fi) and the most mundane of domestic lives. Even better, he is one of the most likable antiheroes in all of Fantasy.

I understand from some of my goodreads friends that the depth of this series -- as it goes on, and it goes on for a long time -- is impressive. I've already started *Yendi*, so it's a good bet that I am going to experience this depth first hand. Having read *F and N*, I believe that depth is possible. Now I just need to track down *War for the Oaks*, so I can experience how the other half of *F and N* writes when out of collaboration.

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## **Mike (the Paladin) says**

I've had this (and I believe 2 of the novels that follow it) on my shelves waiting to be read for years. I think I picked them up after I read *Phoenix Guard*...but, whatever prompted me to buy them they, like *Dracula* when he's staked but still a whole skeleton in his coffin, they were there... condemned to endless waiting. Happily this one was selected as the subject of a group read here on Goodreads, and I had a reason (excuse ?) to move it ahead of the huge pile of library books that are always demanding my attention, waiting to be read...with a deadline date by which they must be returned.

Now, bottom line? I liked it. This book is definitely what I'd call brain-candy...but that's okay. Novels are after all fiction and the vast majority are written and read simply for enjoyment, and this one is enjoyable.

If you want the negatives I'd say that there are a few scenes where the book gets a little "wordy", some scenes that go on a bit too much in some description. But that's a small gripe.

I will say that I was a bit surprised to find myself able to read at least somewhat sympathetically the character who is an assassin. But it held my interest and the character is written well. I found the world to be a bit "straining" in the suspension of reality department in maybe one point, but it is fantasy and again, in the end this is no big deal. On the whole the book works, the world works, and it all hangs together within the story.

So again, I liked this book. Rating it, as I do especially in the case of light fiction or "brain-candy" books on enjoyment factor and how it held my interest...4 stars. I'd say I was going to run down and get the next book, but I already have it on my shelf...waiting.

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## **Bookwraiths says**

Originally reviewed at Bookwraiths.

I read this novel when it was initially published in the mid-80s. It was a favorite of mine at the time, and I have always recalled it fondly. However, after completing a re-read, it has become painfully obvious that the enjoyment I received from this book must have been one of those teenage fads because . . . it has disappeared right along with my desire to keep solving a Rubik's Cube.

The tour guide in *Jhereg* is Vlad Taltos. The world he guides us through is a standard one from 80s fantasy. Here a huge Empire controls most of the world, inhabited and ruled by the Dragaerans, who are basically LoTR-like elves. Indeed, the few humans in this world often refer to the Dragaerans as "elves," though to "confuse" the reader a bit the author has the Dragaerans refer to themselves as "human." Other than this one quirk, there is nothing to set it apart from other fantasy worlds from this period of the 80s.

Vlad is one of the human minority of the Dragaeran Empire, labeled by his "elvish" overlords as an "Easterner" and born into the lowest class of society. However, thanks to a social-climbing father, Vlad is actually a citizen of the Empire and a noble of one of the lesser Dragaeran houses. (There are 17 Great Houses in Dragaeran; each named after an animal of the world.) Of course, the house Vlad is a noble of just happens to be one huge criminal organization, which greatly resembles the modern day Mafia. Our protagonist's role in this elvish "mafia" is as a minor crime lord, supervising certain criminal interests of the "house," and as an accomplished assassin. To throw in a little "fantastical," the author also makes him a minor sorcerer.

The novel itself starts out with Brust focusing on Vlad's childhood, especially the story of how he acquires a live Jhereg egg, which later hatches out into his "familiar" Loiosh. (The golden reptile on the front cover of the paperback edition is Loiosh.) The two of them share a telepathic "link;" their constant bantering being the main comedic point of the book, though it does grow tiresome after a while.

After this boyhood tale, Brust time warps ahead approximately seven years to the main action of the novel. (This fast forward effectively leapfrogging three of the subsequently books in the series, making this the fourth in chronological sequence I believe.) Here another "mob" boss hires Vlad to kill one of the Jhereg's higher-ups, who has disappeared with some money that doesn't belong to him. The job has to be done quickly before word of this theft can get out and make the Jhereg look "weak."

Since Vlad is a skilled assassin, the job doesn't seem like a big deal until he discovers that his target has

taken refuge in Castle Black, as a guest of Morrolan the Dragon lord. Morrolan is a heavy-weight Dragon with bad mojo magic. Word is that this Dragon lord is such a tickler for honor that once he has taken someone into his home as a welcomed guest that they are under his protection, no matter what. Plus, Vlad has a professional relationship with Morrolan (a strange friendship even), which complicates everything.

So now, the easy job has gotten complicated, and Vlad spends many pages planning the perfect assassination scheme. Ultimately, the plan boils down to this convoluted scheme to get the target out of Morrolan's house without using magic and without actually killing him inside the actual castle. (It is much more complicated and cumbersome than that; I'm just trying to make it easier to understand here.) Naturally, things fall apart, people have to improvise, the incident turns into a full blown political situation between the Jhereg and the Dragon houses, and then things get cleared up at the end.

### **PROS:**

There are several nice things about this book, which many reads will no doubt enjoy.

- 1) It is fast paced - mainly because it is very short - and is written in a flowing style that keeps the pace moving, never bogging down in descriptions or tiresome wordiness.
- 2) It is also very modern in tone. The magic and other "fantasy" elements here are very straight forward, accepted by everyone in the story as part of every day life and never really discussed. Indeed, Jhereg is so modern in tone that it can just as readily be enjoyed as a contemporary mafia story rather than a fantasy; if the "fantasy" elements bore you, all one must do is just imagine it is all taking place in New York City as opposed to another world.
- 3) *Jhereg* is a fantasy detective or mafia story during a time when Tolkien clones were all the rage. So, at least in the early 80s, it was different. Not so much now but still good variety I suppose.
- 4) The interaction between the men and women of the book is very business-like with a post-feminism flavor. No sexual discrimination here. Hell, no sex here. Lol! Nope, no sexist remarks about females in general or anything like that; everyone appears equal without any distinction between male or female.

### **CONS:**

- 1) While this book is a fantasy, it has only a thin veneer of it. Sure, there is a bit of magic thrown around here or there, but if not for the strange names and "sorcery," it is a contemporary story about a mafia hitman.

I read somewhere (I believe it was Ursula K. Le Guin's book on writing) that in order for a novel to be a "fantasy" she felt it should have such a "fantastical" feel that a reader knew this could not take place down the street. Le Guin even gave an example of this, using an excerpt from a popular 80s fantasy novel. She quoted an entire passage from said "fantasy," changed the kings to senators, holy priests to representatives and illustrated how this "fantasy" work read like a story about Washington, D.C.. I'm going to try to do the same, but I'm no Le Guin so bear with me.

*We ate the meal in silence, enjoying each other's company, feeling no need to talk. As we were finishing, Cathy said, "So, you get work, while I stay home and wither away from boredom."*

*"You don't look withered to me," I said, checking. "And I don't remember your asking me for help with that little matter last month."*

*"Hmmpmph," she said. "I didn't need any help with that, but this looks like something big. I recognized the target. I hope you are getting a reasonable price for him."*

*I told her what I was getting for him.*

*She raised her eyebrows. "Nice! Who wants him?"*

*I looked around the restaurant, which was almost deserted. I didn't like taking chances, but Cathy deserved an answer. "The whole bloody Gambino family wants him, or will if and when they find out."*

*"What did he do?" She asked. "He didn't start talking, did he?"*

*I shuddered. "No, not that, thank the Virgin Mary. He ran off with nine million dollars in family operating funds."*

I changed only 5 words in that passage. Now, instead of Vlad Taltos the human assassin in an elvish empire, we have Vlad the local hitman, trying to take down a mob boss who has taken off with the family's cash. And this is only one example and can basically be done throughout the whole book. Naturally, some spots take more than 5 words to transform the story, but you see the point.

This sort of thing doesn't bother some people. If that is you, so be it. But if I wanted to read a novel about the mafia, I'd rather do so without the strange names and sorcery thrown in. Like I said however, it is a personal choice.

2) *Jhereg* is written in first-person narrative by the author. Nothing wrong with that in and of itself (Mark Lawrence pulled this off brilliantly in *Prince of Thorns*), but it does not seem to work here after a while. Quickly, Vlad's constant descriptions of his actions like "*I had my back to the door*" or "*I approached slowly, sizing him up, reaching for my daggers even though my palms were slick with sweat*" began to read like a shopping list. It did not sound natural, and it really limited what I actually saw in the fight scenes, making me feel disconnected with everything else that was going on. Nope, instead of actually reading about Alera doing something awesome, I have to wait for someone to describe it to Vlad.

Also, I felt that the first-person narrative made the scene transitions awkward throughout the book and slowed down the general pacing of the story.

Perhaps these complaints are merely personal preference, but as I alluded to, I've read other books that pulled off first-person narrative without making me complain. Maybe it is just me, but it seems that Brust doesn't do as good of a job with it as other authors - at least in this book.

3) No romance of any kind. I mean, even though Vlad and Cawti are married, they act like business acquaintances. Sure, they talk about work or make dinner for one another, but other than that sort of "friendly" type of relationship, nothing is going on here. Now, I know that might not bother some of you, but I mean relationships, sex, and all that sort of thing is part of normal human existence. The fact that it was totally ignored for the whole mafia hitman thing really struck me as odd.

Yet again, maybe it's a personal preference. But I thought I'd mention it for those of you who like to see some romance or some hot sex, because you are not going to see either in *Jhereg*. And before anyone mentions it, I know this was written in the 80s, but my God, Tolkien wrote more smoldering, sexual tension in *LoTR* than Brust does here.

4) Lastly, if you are one of those people that loves reading about some grand, new world and its magic or history (What we now label world building) *Jhereg* is going to disappoint you: the world building is at the bare minimum. Brust only includes the details necessary to remind you this is not happening in New York City and Vlad is not really a hitman, but an assassin in another world. Sure, we have weapons that destroy souls and talk about ancient Dragaeran Houses or the Orb, but they are fleeting, can easily be omitted without impacting the "hitman" plot and leaves one intrigued, but unsatisfied, with his/her knowledge about the "world" Vlad exists in.

To sum up, *Jhereg* is a decent book. It is entertaining and quickly read, which is why I gave it a 2 star rating. When I was a teenager, I loved the book and would have rated it 3.5 or 4 stars. Unfortunately, some things

do not age “well,” and this book is one of those things in my opinion. It just pales in comparison to the type of fantasy novels we have all grown accustomed to these days. But if you are needing to waste a couple of hours and don’t want to read another “detective” novel, pick this one up. It might make you \*YAWN\* in its simplicity, but it probably will keep you awake long enough to finish it.

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## Mimi says

Satisfyingly good. The kind of good that makes you anxious to get to the next book. The kind of good that makes you glad there are over ten books in the series. The kind of good that makes *me* not care about book orders. Maybe it's a good thing these books are written out of order?--is a thing I never thought I'd say. But I have a good feeling about Steven Brust and I trust he'll deliver.

It's been awhile since high fantasy has been this good for me, and it's been even longer since I liked a POV main character in high fantasy enough to know that I'll like whatever trials and tribulations he's put through. And I like Vlad Taltos. Thus far, he's already shown himself to be a multifaceted character full of nuance, and I can only imagine he'll get more complex with each book.

Plus, there are dragons everywhere.

Full review to come... when I get through the series.

\* \* \* \* \*

Trying to figure out the order of this series is giving me a serious case of involuntary twitching. So far from what I've gleaned on various forums and reviews, the publication order is completely different from the chronological order.

*\*more twitching\**

But the order in which you read these books does not matter. At all. Because they were purposely written out of order.

*\*bangs head on desk\**

Why.

(I have a thing for publication order)

\* \* \* \* \*

Publication order goes like this:

**Jhereg**  
Yendi  
Teckla  
Taltos  
Phoenix  
Athyra  
Orca  
Dragon

Issola  
Dzur  
Jhegaala  
Iorich  
Tiassa  
Hawk

But chronological order goes like this:

Taltos  
Dragon  
Yendi  
**Jhereg**  
Teckla  
Phoenix  
Jhegaala  
Athyra  
Orca  
Issola  
Dzur  
Iorich  
Tiassa  
Hawk

The only book I have is Jhereg, so I'm gonna start there.

Cross-posted at <https://covers2covers.wordpress.com/2...>

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### **Melissa McShane says**

Re-read 9/18/17, as audiobook. The year I was thirteen, I read and re-read obsessively the same, perhaps, thirty books. Keep in mind I had almost nothing but free time and I read three to four books a day. That is a lot of times to re-read anything. I've since learned that this is not an uncommon phenomenon among children and young teens, and it does not indicate any problems with their overall reading habit. For me, it was a matter of falling into comfortable grooves, revisiting powerful experiences, like going to a restaurant and repeatedly ordering some signature dish even when other foods are available. Yes, there are good foods, and yes, someday you'll try them, but why not eat the thing that you love best, particularly when it is perfectly prepared every time?

*Jhereg* was one of those thirty books. It was recommended to me by a friend who no longer loves fantasy literature, so re-reading it is bittersweet, as it brings back memories of the imaginative worlds we used to build that centered on these masterpieces of fantasy. And *Jhereg* is definitely one of those. Looking at it from the perspective of far too many years' distance from my thirteen-year-old self, I can see how deceptively simple it is, and yet how skilled Brust was, even that early in his career. The characterization is deftly handled, the worldbuilding is subtle and yet suggests depths he would later plumb in the rest of the series, and Vlad's rage at being human in a world of elves--and at being accepted neither by the humans nor the Dragaerans--is hidden in plain sight. I know I didn't get the complexity of his relationship with his Dragaeran friends; I only saw that they were friends, something that this most recent re-read in internal chronological order makes even more complex.

And reading in that order blows my mind. I have no idea how Brust managed to build whole novels around the hints and throwaway lines he tosses out *and still keep everything straight*. The closest he comes to making a mistake is in the references to the events that eight books later would become *Dragon*, and even then it's a "mistake" within acceptable parameters for the book he ultimately wrote. Brilliant.

Having read it out of order, I was startled when Loiosh didn't sound like Peter Lorre. Apparently the narrator's performance evolved over time, which is nice. Now it's on to *Teckla*, which I dread.

Read 10/6/14: How many times have I read this book? I have no idea. I love Vlad's voice and the world he lives in, and I love all the other characters, especially Loiosh, and the puzzle Vlad has to figure out is both clever and serves as an excellent introduction to Dragaeran society and the Houses that define it. Fun, exciting, and a great beginning to the series (despite not being chronologically the first, but Brust is better than just about anyone at prequels).

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### Chris says

This was a delightful beginning to a series that I am sure to be addicted to very soon. In fact, I've already jumped into the second volume.

But on this. Jhereg is a first person narrative of an assassin and a particular job he undertook. A huge amount of money offered showed that if something seemed too good to be true, it probably was.

Mischief and mayhem ensue. What I thought of as a combination of a crime caper and an epic fantasy turned out to be a quickly paced and often humorous adventure. Vlad Taltos has a familiar which happens to be a jhereg, a miniature dragon-like creature. And, no surprise with Brust characters, Loiosh is quite the smartass. Witty banter between familiar and master, along with a great cast of hirelings and allies makes this a book to keep the reader guessing, on the edge of his/her seat, and occasionally laughing.

The fight scenes were great, I wasn't surprised to later read that Brust took lessons in fencing, as he was able to describe the swordfights in quite a vivid manner. Add a touch of *The Three Musketeers* to that adventure/heist/fantasy description.

On to more Vlad adventures!

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### Kat Hooper says

3.5 s stars

Originally posted (with links) at FanLit.

<http://www.fantasyliterature.com/revi...>

Audio readers, rejoice! Finally, Steven Brust's VLAD TALTOS novels have been produced in audio by Audible Frontiers. For years I've been planning to read this long series and have only been waiting for this moment.

The VLAD TALTOS novels follow Vlad Taltos, a well-known and highly successful human assassin living on the planet Dragaera. The native species, the Dragaerans, are a tall long-lived race created by sorcerers who cross-bred humans and certain animals. The characteristics of the animals give each clan, or "House,"

its name, physical features, and personality traits. The exception is the house of Jhereg (named after a small dragon-like creature) which is a low-class conglomerate of outcasts from other clans and also any true humans who can buy their way in, which is what Vlad Taltos' father did. Each of Brust's novels in this series is named after one of the Dragaeran houses.

In this first installment, *Jhereg*, we meet Vlad Taltos and his familiar, Loioosh, the jhereg who can communicate with him through mind-speech. Vlad has been hired to kill a councilman named Mellar who has embezzled a huge sum of money from the Jhereg council. When Vlad catches up with Mellar, he discovers him hiding out in Castle Black, the floating mansion of Vlad's friend, the Dragonlord Morrolan. Castle Black's rule of hospitality is that anyone who has been invited to stay at the castle cannot be touched and nobody wants to violate this law because it would ignite another Dragon-Jhereg war. The last war devastated both houses. Vlad and Loioosh must flush out Mellar without offending a Dragonlord or starting a war. This is not an easy task and Vlad will need to solve a mystery and get a little help from his friends.

Jhereg is appealing for several reasons. Vlad Taltos is a great character — the sort of honorable criminal that you can't help but like. It helps that in Brust's world, an assassination isn't necessarily permanent. People can be revived if their body is still mostly intact and they haven't had their soul destroyed by a Morganti weapon (somewhat like Elric's sword). Vlad is clever and must use his brain, not just his weapons or witchcraft, to solve his dilemma (though I thought he solved the convoluted mystery a little too easily). Vlad's friends are also likeable, especially Loioosh the familiar, Vlad's wife (who he met when she tried to kill him), and a female Dragonlord. Brust's female characters are strong, smart, and competent.

Steven Brust's writing style, sense of humor, and dialogue are also pleasant, and the story moves quickly. There's a lot to learn in the first novel of a huge epic, but Brust does this so well. We learn a little about Vlad's childhood, the planet of Dragaera, the origin and structure of the houses (this was fascinating), and anything else we need to know. Brust gives us just enough extra to make us curious about his world, but not enough to make the plot slow down while we learn the entire history of Dragaera and its residents. (Yet, Brust's world is so complex and detailed that some readers may wish for an online resource such as this helpful Wikipedia entry, and several fan-made Dragaera sites that you can easily find with a Google search.)

Audible Frontiers' version was narrated by Bernard Setaro Clark. He was terrific, speaking with a lively manner and giving each character a pleasant and distinct voice. As usual, I had to speed up the narration a bit (I'm beginning to suspect that Audible has purposely slowed down their narrators). I'm pleased to see that Bernard Setaro Clark has also narrated the sequels and I'll be picking up book 2, *Yendi*, which is actually a prequel to *Jhereg*, very soon. I look forward to spending more time with Vlad Taltos.

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## Jason says

4 Stars

This was a really good beginning to the first book in the Vlad Taltos series. This was my first time reading a Steven Brust novel even though he has been in my queue for as long as I can remember. This is a novel that was first published nearly 30 years ago. It is written in a fashion that keeps it fresh and relative to today's fantasy scene.

The combination of magic (sorcery) and witchcraft is very unique. The book gives some creative back story that explains the difference between the two schools of magic. The interaction of the Eastern humans and the western Dragaera (a large reptilian race) adds to the depth of the society and colors our story. Like many current fantasy novels, the Dragaera are organized into different houses, each named after an animal. The

Jhereg house, the house of the mongrels is named after the snake like serpent called the Jhereg.

Our protagonist name is Vladmir Taltos. He is a human that belongs to the Dragaera house of Jhereg because his father bought them their title with all of his earnings.

Vlad is very likable and his diverse background of being raised in the west in the house Jhereg, while also being trained in the Eastern ways by his grandfather, make him a formidable force. Vlad is an assassin, plain and simple...Does that make him a bad guy...well.

Vlad practices his witchcraft and has a jhereg familiar named Looish. They communicate with each other telepathically. There is a lot of humor and clever banter between the two. Their relationship is really a center piece that make this book special.

This short story in the end, is a story about revenge. There is a mystery to unravel, and the sides are not always clear. It takes a while for the pieces of the story to come together, but when they do the payoff is great.

I really enjoyed this first book and now am a fan of Steven Brust...Bring on more Vlad... Highly recommended.

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### **Niki Hawkes - The Obsessive Bookseller says**

Via Book Reviews by Niki Hawkes at [www.nikihawkes.com](http://www.nikihawkes.com)

Jhereg was nothing like I thought it would be... it was better! I was expecting a typical “boy gets a dragons and goes out on an epic adventure” book (I guess I need to stop judging by the cover alone). What I ended up with was a cheeky, magical, modern-day assassin mystery that blew my socks off.

Highly interesting characters and plot-lines, it was an extremely fast-paced novel that keeps you page-turning to the very end. And when I say fast-paced, I’m not joking around. The author has an incredible “no words wasted” writing style that makes for an exciting read. Trouble is, if you blink or get distracted for even a moment (as I am wont to do) you’ll likely miss something important and plot-advancing – so stay focused!

Initially, I thought a draw-back to this series was the lack of attention on setting. I couldn’t tell if the book was taking place in a complete fantasy world or just in a twist of our modern-day (and actually, I’m still not sure). I initially thought the author was lazy, but now I’m starting to suspect he’s a bit brilliant. His overall mastery over other elements of the craft is what clued me in. You see, the story is written in a strong first-person narrative – done well enough that I always felt totally immersed into the character. I now think the reason the reader doesn’t get to see the settings clearer is that the main character doesn’t pay much attention to such commonplace (for him) details. If this is truly the case, the Brust did an excellent job sticking to his chosen perspective, and I applaud him on it.

Overall, it was a unique read that I wish I’d picked up years ago. The author has a good fusion of fantasy and mystery that really maintained my attention. Though not the first book chronologically, it is the first book according to the publisher, and that’s good enough for me (especially since the author admitted he has no clue in what order his books should be read).

by Niki Hawkes

Other books you might like:

“Dragon Weather” by Lawrence Watt-Evans

“The Thief’s Gamble” by Juliet E. McKenna

“Mistborn” by Brandon Sanderson

“Black Sun Rising” by C.S. Friedman

“Sword-Dancer” by Jennifer Roberson

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## Carol. says

The recent release of *Iorich* sent me down the path of re-reading the Taltos series. While *Iorich* was enjoyable and engrossing, memories sent me back to the inaugural *Vlad*. Sophisticated writing, interesting characters and one seriously convoluted plot. It's interesting, because this is the fourth book in the timeline of the series and *Vlad's* history, but actually the first published (echoes of *Lucas*). I'd recommend reading *Jhereg* first, as it's told in a largely linear fashion with only a few flashbacks, and as such is a decent introduction to the world's political and social structure. As the series continues, *Brust* starts playing in interesting ways with narrative, so it helps to already have a solid grip on the basics.

Characters are done well, with broad brushstrokes. We get some of *Vlad's* early years, and we are given the background on his initial connection with *Loioh*. His friendships with *Dragons Morrolan* and *Aliera*, and his lieutenant *Krager* are well established in this book, with nice repartee and camaraderie. *Loioh* is a smart sidekick, but not overly humanized. The plot is entirely plausible within the world setting, and although *Vlad's* antagonist has spent decades planning his revenge, his rationale is somewhat understandable and brings a sense of sympathy even as *Vlad* works to save the situation.

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## Bradley says

While there was nothing absolutely mind-blowing about the plot or the fantasy, the one thing that really stood out in this book was the fantastic writing.

It was absolutely some of the easiest reading I've had for an obviously detailed and fleshed out world full of lots of magic, interesting races, very long lived people, and dragons. It flew by so quickly and easily, I was rather surprised at how much info-dump never came across as info-dump. I learned so much about the world, naturally, that I was giddy after the reading.

Is it because I've grown very used to the tropes involved, over so many years of enjoying fantasy? Possibly. But then, that's another reason I need to give this book props. From the mid-eighties, it still comes off as hugely superior in execution, characterization, big ideas, and joy. This is SUPERIOR fantasy.

I've read my fair share of SUPERIOR fantasy, of course, but this one feels so effortless.

Assassins? Check. Dragons? Check. Near immortals everywhere you look? Check. Tons and tons of magic? Absolutely.

I'm pretty sure I'm going to fly through all *Brust's* novels in no time whatsoever. They're pretty damn fantastic and smart.

## Mogsy (MMOGC) says

Guess this is what you'd call an oldie but a goodie. I can't believe I hadn't heard of Steven Brust until a few weeks ago, but he was recommended to me by a gaming friend of mine, and then another good friend jumped into the Twitter conversation to second the recommendation. So, that's two shoutouts from a couple of people whose opinions I highly value, and that's when I knew I had to get my hands on this book, posthaste!

Jhereg is the beginning of a whole bunch of books set in Brust's Dragaera world. It is the first novel to be published in the Vlad Taltos series, even though its place is actually fourth or so in its timeline. It introduces us to Vladimir Taltos, an Easterner (human) working as a killer-for-hire in the House of Jhereg in a setting where his kind are barely tolerated by a race of long-lived, statuesque sorcerers called the Dragaerans (or, as my friend told me, just think of them as "elves"!)

Being a Jhereg doesn't help either, since their faction is like the mafia of the Dragaeran world.

One day, a powerful Jhereg boss offers Vlad a lucrative contract to track down and assassinate a council member who stole millions of gold from the house. It is discovered, unfortunately, that this thief has fled to Castle Black, home of the Dragonlord Morrolan who is also Vlad's good friend. Now Vlad has to try and figure out a way to fulfill his contract without royally pissing off Morrolan, whose strict rule against the killing of anyone on his premises while they are under his protection is proving to be more than just a minor inconvenience.

At just 200-something pages, this was a very quick read. Despite the volume's relative thinness, however, there is a lot information crammed in here. You'll immediately get the sense of hugeness from the world of Dragaera, and I admit I spent much of the first half of this book feeling like I was missing something, because not everything about the setting is explained right away. There will be names of people, animals, factions, cultural traditions, events in history, etc. that are alluded to, but won't mean anything to you until you get further into the book (or even the series). Even now, I wish I had more room in this review to give examples of all the strange magical spells, weapons, creatures, lore and customs that are in this book, but there's just too damn much. The good news is, everything you need know in order to understand and follow the story will be there, and it will come in time.

I also really liked the writing style, the fast pace and the lightness of it. Normally when you get high fantasy featuring a world full of magic and so much history, along with noble sorcerers and lords and ladies and such and such, you'd expect the writing style and dialogue to be somewhat serious and austere. Not so much with this book, which includes instances of modern day habits or colloquialisms, and that played a part in making Jhereg easy to get into and reading it so much fun.

It's got a great story overall, involving a plot about an assassination, but which almost reads more like story about a heist. It has elements of mystery in it too, as Vlad likes to conduct investigations and figure out the solutions from the clues he finds. He as much as admits that he prefers the process of planning an assassination to the actual assassinating, and events in the story reflect that. It just struck me as interesting especially when compared to more recent fantasy novels about assassins, which tend to be darker and more action-oriented, and Jhereg was published before I was even born.

The series is still going on today, with book 14 expected to come out later this year. So glad I discovered these books, thanks to my friends. I've got a lot of books in my to-be-read pile, but since all the Vlad novels seem to be such quick reads, there might actually be hope of me finishing up to Tiassa before Hawk comes

out. Maybe.

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### **Laura says**

This is a very well written book with nice action and magic. A sort of cheeky modern story in a fantasy world.

It's just not my particular cup of tea!

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### **Jim says**

Reread Feb2012, review added.

I originally gave this 4 stars, although I've read it numerous times & really enjoyed it. I just never thought it had any redeeming features beyond sheer enjoyment. Now that I've read most of the rest of the series, I see on a re-read that the craftsmanship of this story demands another star.

This is not the first book in the chronology of the series, but it is the first published. Why should you read it first? Because the author couldn't have picked a better way to introduce the reader to an entirely new world & mythology. The story demands our likable anti-hero, Vlad Taltos, look deeply into another character. His search uncovers more than expected & gives us an understanding of the world that we never would have had otherwise. Not only is it entirely entertaining & fast moving, but I had no trouble at all remembering odd names & characters. Each comes alive in a way that sticks in the memory, with a depth that is incredible for the terse wording. Not just the main characters either, although there were most of a dozen of those alone. It's truly an amazing feat.

Now I REALLY want to go on to the next book, Yendi, but I have other commitments - damn!

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### **Sebastien Castell says**

This is the third in my list of books that inspired me to start writing fantasy and in many ways is the most influential. The hero of the series, Vlad Taltos, is an assassin, which is, you know, not an especially nice thing to be. The thing is, deep down Vlad really wants to be a nice guy. He just needs to kill a few shitbags first. Now it's true that the list of people Vlad needs to kill includes pretty much the entire Dragaeran Empire, but he's willing to leave a few off the list if they change their ways. Oh, and Vlad's sidekick a wise-talking miniature dragon who calls him 'Boss' all the time. Seriously - who wouldn't want to read that?

Brust blends heroic fantasy with a film noir, almost Raymond Chandler-esque voice. In fact, *Jhereg* was the book that taught me you could write fantasy without having your characters talk in fake British accents and spouting thee's and thou's every sentence. It's a short book by today's standards, and one that will fly by. Fortunately, there's a dozen more to keep you busy once you're done.

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## **Kylie says**

4.5 stars. Full review to come on my channel. I will say this is a really promising start to what I think will be a great fantasy series.

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