



The Bastard King

Dan Chernenko , Harry Turtledove

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Since the Scepter of Mercy was lost from Avornis, the kingdom has been at risk from its magic-using neighbors. King Lanius and King Grus retrieved the Scepter in a tale of great triumph and adventure. But the true story of their dual reign has never been told. Until now...

The Bastard King Details

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From Reader Review The Bastard King for online ebook

Rick Dygert says

This series (The scepter of mercy) was not all that good. I did like the characters but the story seemed to be a lot longer than necessary. I thought the scepter was going to do something special, but it didn't.

Tyler says

It is difficult to say if there is just too much fluff in this book or if it is just arranged in such a way to confound a decent pacing. Many of the subplots seem to have no relevance (as of yet, it is a trilogy) to anything and are the most predictable and boring parts of the story. Lanius and Grus seem oblivious that they will need the Scepter despite one or the other thinking about it every ten pages or so. Those two were also the most difficult to understand, they seemed to have understandable characterization and then would go and do something that would confuse me completely as it was so out of character.

Deren Kellogg says

Interesting trilogy. The author, for once, does not seem to be going for epic scale, making this a different kind of fantasy story. The focus is really kept to two characters and does not involve a long journey. I enjoyed this without really being blown away by it. By the way, this story is way too similar to the actual history of the tenth-century Byzantine emperors Alexander (Lanius' drunken uncle, forget the character name), Constantine VII (Lanius), and Romanus I (Grus) to be coincidence.

Todd says

This book isn't really worth reading. It starts off well and sounds interesting when you read the back. During the beginning of the book King/Prince Lanius comes across as an endearing genius and an interesting character.

The book focuses on captain/commander Grus whose importance is pretty unclear for a good portion of the intrigue at the start. In the end the book seems to be a story about if Lanius or Grus are the good or bad kings.

The book is written in a maddeningly annoying manner. I picked this book up at a used book store for five dollars and feel like I wasted money. Lanius becomes a whiny incompetent and Grus is an arrogant jackass. Overall the characters turn from interesting and engaging to flat and annoying. The magic system is uninteresting and vague. The plot is boring and lacks an interesting conflict, the way the "king" rules is very hands off and I can't understand how their kingdom was ever "powerful".

The enemy who was a former god is annoying, overall, I don't plan to read the rest of this series and I wouldn't recommend the book to anyone. I don't even know if I want to force someone else to read it by giving it to a second hand store.

Keri says

It wasn't bad, but it wasn't great. This review may contain spoilers (that can be read on the back of the book).

The story starts off with two men who are completely unrelated in the beginning. One is the son of a King (but a bastard child since the laws dictate a King can only have six wives, and the son is of the seventh) and the other is the Captain of a barge in the Royal Navy (nowhere near as prestigious as the army).

Throughout the book, you start to see how they're slowly coming together in times of need. The son of the king, Lanius, has his leadership passed from regent to regent until he is of age to rule. He thinks himself smarter than the rest, but can't deal with battle. Grus, the Captain risen from peasant, slowly becomes the Commodore who becomes the country's King. Simultaneous King. And the story proceeds on with Lanius and Grus having to rule together.

I will admit, while reading, I had no clue when Grus actually wanted to take the throne. He has his reasons, but none of them actually seemed plausible. This could be because the first half of the book involves lapses of years from chapter to chapter, and the rest of the pacing of this book is *very* quick.

The second issue I have is that the book has a tendency to repeat itself. The first four times, I understood that Grus's wife was upset that he had a son with another woman (another bastard in the book). I did not need to read it the fifth, sixth or even twelfth time. Just like Lanius's resentment for Grus ruling as well...Mr. Chernenko, you got your point across the first time.

The last one, that I may be singularly alone in, is that the first half of the book contained little interaction in a romantic sense. It was only when Lanius weds, and Grus becomes King, that we see a sudden influx of relationship. Also, I understand that Grus's character is meant to be the imperfect man, but there are some things he does that make me go "...what?!"

All in all, I did enjoy reading the book. I will admit to skimming some of the sections that were simple rewordings of whatever had been said before. The relationship between Grus and Nicator (his First Mate) was entertaining enough to get me through the first 100 or so pages, and the rest of the story took me to the end.

I will finish this series...but not immediately.

Steve says

This book takes a bit to find its flow but once it does it is quite good! The world created is truly original. The beginning 100 pages or so jump through about 15 years, only giving you the highlights, it is needed as background but can be pretty dry. Characters are good but unlike Turtledoves (writing as Chernenko) other books there are basically only two perspectives, that of Grus and King Lanius. Overall a good read that left me ready to tackle book 2, The Chernagor Pirates!

Andrew says

Very pedestrian forgettable characters.

Pancha says

The narration was very staccato, and 100+ pages in I still felt like I was in a prologue or summary before the real action began. Because the POV jumped so quickly between characters and time passed so quickly, neither main character was well fleshed-out, and they felt shallow and unexplored.

Julie says

Having the narrative shift back and forth between the two assumed protagonists kept this from gathering any momentum for me. I would have greatly preferred just sticking to Grus for the duration, but no dice.

Mireille says

Keep your Hemingway out of my fantasy, and I'll be happy. The cat sat on the mat. That's the overall writing style, an odd choice for a book filled with characters who rape, cheat on their wives, and are at their best when they're at war. The plot is a good one, an interesting enough concept to push me through to the very end of the book. But this author's writing style earns a place on my list of: don't waste your time.

Beth Medved says

A well-written story with two likable main characters, for two very different reasons.

Julie says

I've started this book three different times and just can't get through it. I'm giving up.

Writing is average--the story is mostly told by one person talking to another person about what is going on in the empire and what must be done to fix it. If the whole point of the book is to get the young, inexperienced but intelligent king to team up with the experienced war commander to go find a sacred relic, then perhaps the author could have wrapped up their back stories in two chapters rather than twelve. I gave up half-way through the book when the two main characters finally got together.

Desiree Huffman says

Hated the writing style in this book , could not finish it....

Data says

I am often somewhat annoyed by Harry Turtledove's style, but this time I was good with it. It fits the characters; I simply liked the two who become the co-kings (seems like an oxymoron to me, maybe that's why I like it) of Avornis.

Edit: I seem to be more annoyed this read. Not sure that it really deserved 4 stars.

Susan Gottfried says

But... but... It's Harry Turtledove!

It's Harry Turtledove writing under a pseudonym, for reasons I don't get. He wanted to see how they'd be received without his name?

Not well, I'm afraid. And yet, what's interesting is that I can see shades of old-school SciFi in the construction of this book. I just didn't care that much for it -- not only was it rather boring, everyone in the palace was despicable.

On to bigger and better.
