



Blue and Gold

K.J. Parker

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'Well, let me see,' I said, as the innkeeper poured me a beer. 'In the morning I discovered the secret of changing base metal into gold. In the afternoon, I murdered my wife.'

For a man as remarkable as the philosopher Saloninus, just another day.

Of course, we only have his word for it, and Saloninus has been known to be creative with the truth. Little white lies are inevitable expedients when you're one jump ahead of the secret police and on the brink of one of the greatest discoveries in the history of alchemy. But why would a scientist with the world's most generous, forgiving patron be so desperate to run away? And what, if anything, has blue got to do with gold?

Blue and Gold Details

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Author : K.J. Parker

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From Reader Review Blue and Gold for online ebook

Liviu says

"Blue and Gold" is the short 100 page novel by KJ Parker tbp late 2010 (or novella - though like Purple and Black this one has a feeling of completeness while for example the excellent A Rich Full Week from the Swords/Dark magic anthology has the novella episodic feeling)

I actually read it several times to get all its nuances since it's packed with stuff whose true meaning becomes apparent only gradually; a first person narration from self-confessed unreliable narrator, philosopher, writer, criminal and genius alchemist Saloninus aka Nino, former college chum and current court alchemist and brother-in-law to prince Phocas who rules the respective country; the prince wants to find the secret of transmutation (base metals in gold), while his ambitious, beautiful and vain sister Eudoxia wants the elixir of immortality Saloninus hinted at in one of his famous works, while Saloninus wants only to get away, or so we are led to believe...

Things are much more complicated and there are layers of meaning and past happenings that are only slowly and exquisitely unraveled but the first lines are just superb:

"...In the morning I discovered the secret of changing base metal into gold. In the afternoon I murdered my wife"

Of course Saloninus is a self-confessed unreliable narrator...

Just awesome

Gavin says

This novella turned out to be a ton of fun. I'm glad I gave K.J.Parker another chance as I've failed in the past with his debut book and with a Tom Holt book I tried in my younger days. I'm usually a one flop and done sort of guy but this was just a novella and the blurb was really appealing. Lucky for me this story delivered on the promise of that awesome blurb!

"Well, let me see," I said, as the innkeeper poured me a beer. "In the morning I discovered the secret of changing base metal into gold. In the afternoon, I murdered my wife."

So begins the story of the alchemist Saloninus, who may or may not have discovered how to turn base metal into gold and who may or may not have killed his wife! The whole tale was told in Saloninus's own words and he proved an engaging and compelling narrator.

I wasn't happy about being manhandled, but then I thought about the man whose skull I'd broken and decided not to make an issue of it. Memo to self, I thought; must make special effort not to hurt people.

Albeit not a narrator particularly high in morals or all that trustworthy!

The story proved a good mix of humorous and compelling and Parker threw in enough twists and turns to

keep things interesting.

I'll definitely be picking up the sequel to this story and probably Parker's other novellas as well.

Rating: 4 stars.

Kat Hooper says

ORIGINALLY POSTED AT Fantasy Literature.

Talk about unreliable narrators! If you like that technique, you're sure to enjoy K.J. Parker's *Blue and Gold*. It's a fast, intense, and dramatic little book that will entertain you for an afternoon.

Saloninus is probably the cleverest alchemist who ever lived (or is he?). After publishing several important (?) papers and losing his tuition money, he drops out of the university and begins a life of crime, then gets commissioned by the prince to figure out how to do two things: 1. Produce the elixir of eternal youth and 2. Turn base metal into gold. During the process, though, he accidentally (?) poisons his beautiful and brilliant wife, so now he's on the run and he's pretty stressed-out.

Blue and Gold's plot is told in a series of scenes that take place in the present and past as Saloninus gradually fills in more and more detail and occasionally corrects his previous misstatements. His scientific, yet unethical (perhaps even sociopathic), voice is fascinating. He doesn't let us in on some important facts, and every time he adjusts the story we get a fresh — but not necessarily more accurate — perspective. It's hard to know whether we're supposed to be for or against Saloninus; all we know is that we can't trust him. How can you trust someone who knowingly publishes scholarly papers based on faulty logic? And who won't tell you who he is or what his goals and purposes are? It's good that this novella is short, because this might not work in a longer story. Fortunately, Saloninus comes clean in the end, so you needn't worry about an ambiguous conclusion.

I enjoyed the setting of *Blue and Gold*. It's that cozy academic scene that I love: writing theses, studying, attending lectures, consulting advisers, gaining life-long friends. I've washed plenty of beakers, weighed my share of powdery chemicals, and sat at numerous lab benches. It felt so real here. I don't know who K.J. Parker is, but (s)he knows what (s)he's talking about. Throughout *Blue and Gold*, the science of alchemy is used as a metaphor for the passage of time, spending money, rising and declining social status, personality development, falling in love, and death.

Blue and Gold is a fast-paced, gripping, excellently written story, which will be especially enjoyed by those who appreciate unreliable narrators and who feel nostalgic about academic settings.

Chip says

Characters 4*

Plot 4*

World building 2.5*

Total: 3.5*

An intriguing short story that was a good quick read. The writing style was a bit dense, but the concept was enjoyable.

D.D. Price says

This book is a fun read. The only other book I've by Parker was the Folding Knife which I really liked. This novella is completely different and very funny, especially the way it starts out. But it's funny in a very dark way. I imagine this is something more similar to what he writes as Tom Holt. It is only 99 pages so it is very short and light reading. I finished it in one day easily. If you want to get a feel for his style but don't want to read a full length novel to start out then this would be a good start. It is about an alchemist who is trying to turn base metal into gold. He does not succeed in this endeavor but it is a fun adventure with a lot of twists and turns jam-packed into these short pages.

Kyle says

Actual rating: 3.5

What a fun little read! For so short a story, it's really a testament to the author's skills as a writer to make such a likeable character in just under 100 pages. And I think this all works quite well as a novella, and makes me question why so many authors these days muddle down their works with overlong and overworked pages...

The only reason for such an average score is that I felt this story came off more as a sequel to another work. You're immediately thrown into the story of Saloninus, and though the plot flowed quickly yet smoothly, it could've been dealt better as a sophomore effort. I believe there should've been a novella before this to get some of the more expository material out of the way. The way it's written, progression-wise, didn't hinder it at all, really. I just wish I had had a bit more backstory before diving in.

Regardless, I'll surely be picking up the second novella in this brief series, because this was a very entertaining read.

unknown says

This book is a joke.

No, really. I'm not being mean. K.J. Parker is just messing with you: this is a story told by an unreliable narrator who is upfront about being unreliable, and the entire narrative is just a setup for a punchline that doesn't arrive until you've read the final two words.

There's a really great first line:

"Well, let me see," I said, as the innkeeper poured me a beer. "In the morning I discovered the secret of

changing base metal into gold. In the afternoon, I murdered my wife."

Both of those things end up being not exactly true, but they aren't really false either. Saloninus claims to be the world's greatest alchemist, and maybe he is, but you can't exactly take him at his word. Sometimes, he tells you how something happened. Then he tells you how it *could* have happened, if he wants to make himself look good. Then eventually, he admits what *actually* happened, which is closer to the first version, but now you know why. With the justifications this guy comes up with for his actions, you can see why he lies and embellishes.

It turns out that I like novellas. It's a good length -- more beef than a short story, but not so long that it milks all the life out of an idea (beef, milks... is that a mixed metaphor or not?). I can handle a character changing things up on me for 99 pages. Any longer, and I'd be ready to punch the book in the face. This is the second K.J. Parker novella I've read, and while I think it is just as good as *Purple and Black*, I'm taking away a star because it's basically the same idea: both books string you along and then pull the rug out from under you. They're all setup, but this time I knew the punchline was coming. I mean, I still laughed.

Or did I? You'll just have to take my word for it.

Alina says

May the topic not be of the utmost interest for me, Parker's writing and the intricate layers sure made it a worth reading.

Dan says

Blue and Gold is my first full length (I use the term loosely as it is a novella) read from K.J. Parker (or Tom Holt for that matter). I have read one of his shorts in the anthology *Swords & Dark Magic*, and really enjoyed it. And like that short, this is a clever and imaginative story.

The story is told by an unreliable narrator (he tells you he's not to be trusted right from the beginning) from the first person view. Because of this, and despite a rather simple premise; a man on the run from the law for killing his wife, *Blue and Gold* is filled with many subtle twists and turns that keeps the reader's interest piqued and engaged. And though the subject matter is rather weighty, murdering one's spouse, the story is told with a certain amount of levity and humour, which adds a uniqueness and enjoyment to the whole affair.

Due to the length of the material we get to learn just enough of our protagonist to be able to relate, but without learning his whole history, hopes and dreams as we would in a longer work. It's a quick read, and just the right size and pace for a story of this kind.

Not too much depth, but a darn fun read overall. 3.75/5

Althea Ann says

KJ Parker revisited the character of Saloninus, introduced here, in *'The Devil You Know,'* which I read a few

months ago. I understand why - it's a great character! (Imagine if Leonardo da Vinci had been an amoral conman and alchemist?) If you've read either one, some of the details here will be familiar to you. I did think that 'The Devil You Know' was slightly better, but this one was great too.

KJ Parker's wry cynicism regarding human nature is on display in top form, in this story.

The narrator tells you upfront that he's unreliable: a liar, a criminal, and not to be trusted. He also tells us that he discovered the secret of transmuting base metals to gold, and that he murdered his wife. Should we believe either of these things?

Along the way, Saloninus' stories shift a bit - sometimes more than a bit - but they're always entertaining. I liked the commentary on how discovering the secret of how to create gold might not really be the best thing for its discoverer... along with many other gems.

Hayley Stone says

This novella was loaned to me by a friend, and I'm so pleased he recommended it. *Blue and Gold* has one of the best unreliable narrators I've ever read. It's a delightful, twisted tale that takes full advantage of its morally negligent characters, yet still has you somehow rooting for the main character to succeed (and this despite his untrustworthy personality). Parker's attention to detail is so thorough and realistic that it immediately pulls you into the world of Saloninus the alchemist, and doesn't release you until the last page. Highly recommended for fans of more cynical fantasy.

Jason says

4 Stars

"I'm Saloninus, by the way. And I tell lies, from time to time. Which goes to prove the old rule; never entirely trust a man who talks about himself in the third person."

Blue and Gold by K.J. Parker is the first in the Saloninus series. It is a whimsical fantasy about the world's greatest alchemist and probably also liar. This is a short and fun read about a likable asshole. Saloninus is quite unreliable...literally.

I love how the story was told, the way in which it unfolds, the way the plot twisted and turned, and of course the way it had to be told again as it was full of lies. I enjoyed the characters of this book and would like to read more about him.

"It's a central paradox that love and rape both find expression in the same act. For two years, I raped science, trying to give Phocas and Eudoxia what they wanted, gold and youth. Couldn't be done, of course. Not possible. But they both had blind, unlimited faith in me; like being in love, or believing in God. I think I

could've endured that. I might just possibly have been able to keep going, trusting that sooner or later the faith would start to crack and break up, they'd realise I wasn't nearly as clever as they thought I was, and they'd eventually let me go, or kill me..."

This story and main character reminded me a great deal of Johannes Cabal the Necromancer by Jonathan L. Howard. They share in their level of despicability, and crazy machinations. I think that Saloninus would be a brother to Johannes.

This is a fun read by an author that I really enjoy.

Claudia says

"In the morning I discovered the secret of changing base metal into gold. In the afternoon I murdered my wife." Unmistakable mister Parker ;))

Just like in *"The Two of Swords"* he brings to life some hack of a character: *"I'm Saloninus, by the way. And I tell lies, from time to time"*.

Well, that 'time to time' is pretty relative. Up until the end you have no idea what is true or not. And even now that I finished it, I'm not quite sure he told the truth in the end. After all, Blue and Gold, Reality and Utopia blend in too tight to tell them apart.

Saloninus the philosopher is also an alchemist and a very modest one: *"Considering my situation dispassionately and in depth, I was forced to the conclusion that I'd have to be brave, resourceful and imaginative. Depressing. I hate situations that bring out the best in me."* He gets himself into all sorts of troubles, apparently by chance. Apparently...

Anyway, if you read something by KJ Parker, you know what to expect. And you won't be disappointed. The story has so many hidden meanings and I think everyone will find something new to discover.

Daphne says

Incredibly short novella that I fell right into from the first page. The story was drawn out beautifully, and I love my some anti-hero MCs.

Manuel Antão says

If you're into stuff like this, you can read the full review.

Unreliability in Fiction: "Blue and Gold" by K. J. Parker

"The two predominant factors that make me up, philosophy and criminality, when combined, when combined together on the block of ice hat serves me for a personality go to make up alchemy."

In "Blue and Gold" by K. J. Parker

Beep.

Beep... -cking answering machines! Kevin... Kevin... Kevin, I know you're there. With her probably, whoever she is – stupid cow. Listen Kevin, you actually love me really. You're jus' confuuuused, and I don't blame you. But you better not do anything you'll regret – and if you're doing it now I will hunt you down and... and cut your goolies off... You see the thing is... the thing is... God, iss really ridiculous communicating like this. We're human beings. Why don'sh you just pick up the phone and we'll talk like grown-up adults. Hmm? Hmm KEVIN, PICK UP THE BLOODY PHO... Beep.

If you're into SF, you can read the rest of this review/story elsewhere.
