



## The Winds of Khalakovo

*Bradley P. Beaulieu*

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Among inhospitable and unforgiving seas stands Khalakovo, a mountainous archipelago of seven islands, its prominent eyrie stretching a thousand feet into the sky. Serviced by windships bearing goods and dignitaries, Khalakovo's eyrie stands at the crossroads of world trade. But all is not well in Khalakovo. Conflict has erupted between the ruling Landed, the indigenous Aramahn, and the fanatical Maharraht, and a wasting disease has grown rampant over the past decade. Now, Khalakovo is to play host to the Nine Dukes, a meeting which will weigh heavily upon Khalakovo's future.

When an elemental spirit attacks an incoming windship, murdering the Grand Duke and his retinue, Prince Nikandr, heir to the scepter of Khalakovo, is tasked with finding the child prodigy believed to be behind the summoning. However, Nikandr discovers that the boy is an autistic savant who may hold the key to lifting the blight that has been sweeping the islands. Can the Dukes, thirsty for revenge, be held at bay? Can Khalakovo be saved? The elusive answer drifts upon the Winds of Khalakovo...

## The Winds of Khalakovo Details

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# From Reader Review The Winds of Khalakovo for online ebook

## The Pirate Ghost (Formerly known as the Curmudgeon) says

### *The Winds of Khalakovo*

By Bradly P. Beaulieu

I really struggled with rating/reviewing this one. I want so badly to give it a 4 star rating, but, the longer I let memories of it settle in my mind, the more I find that it's 3 1/2 at best. This is another book where the skill of the storyteller, Beaulieu, exceeds, the quality of content in the book. A good story teller can save a mediocre story. The good news is, this may be a 3 star read, but it's better than mediocre. I certainly enjoyed it from start to finish, and, I would certainly recommended it to anyone looking for a new Epic Fantasy to sink their teeth into, but, looking at an overall comparison, is it better than Lord of the Rings? No...Is it better than Zelazny's "Cronicles of Amber?" ...No, is it better than the Belgariad or the Elinium by Eddings? Closer, but...no. It's more along the lines of Crispan Magicker and The Baker's Boy. Both good reads, entertaining but, in the end, forgettable compared to greater epic works. Will you have fun reading this....

YES!

Is it a book for the ages...

NO!

**What I liked and what I didn't like.** (Put together here because most of what I liked is also what I didn't. Twisted, yeah, I know. It's a curmudgeonly trait to like what you don't like and not to like what you do. Okay, that didn't sound any more intelligent and coherent so I'll just trust you get the idea.)

1) Come on! **Sailboats that FLY!** Cannons! This is SO COOL!. So...(cough) that would be an up check in world building for the transportation and mass transit category. I'm not sure he's mapped out the theory behind how the boats work and therefore I was left curious about them when I could have had answers. Since they're magical he should have some idea why these fly and ours don't, save in my dreams. Having said that, the sailing boats were just too cool. I loved the entire concept and the Swashbuckling Swagger of sailors bounding up the rigging, even the three dimensional Naval battles. Which we didn't get near enough exposure to in my book.

I mean come on. I'm retired Navy, where's my great, great navy grandpa John Paul Jones commanding the Bon Home Richard against Serapis. Where is the rag-wagon two ship dual with Wasp and Serapis where Wasp hides out just out of range in the shallows and darts in to fire then darts away before the larger Man O'War can bring her guns to bear.

Where were the Iron Men that crew these wooden ships? Every ship Nickander set foot on was wrecked, crashed or shut out from under him. Some great sailing legend he turned out to be. There were some good scenes towards the end where there came close to really giving us a good battle, but face it, this wasn't the exploits of Horatio Hornblower here. The strategy behind the battles was poor, and there was nothing of that great "chess match" that marks the really good Naval Battles. Where trick is getting your bow around in time to unmask batteries and fire a well packed broadside into your opponent, then whip it around without losing the wind to give him a mouthful of cannon from the otherside. I mean come on, book described "Grape-Shot" in the same way that most people (historians I mean) describe Double shot. There was no grape shot as

I understand it. I mean, come on! John Paul Jones, Father of the U.S. Navy that held out against the leviathan British Empire's Navy, not once but twice (Okay, so it wasn't a complete victory at sea, but by all accounts, they did very well for themselves, there just weren't enough ships to go around), ripped the terrorist pirates out of Tripoli and bottled up the Spanish Fleet in the Philipines ("You may fire when ready Gridely")... that John Paul Jones guy... actually served his last years as a Naval Officer and leader of men working for Cathrine the Great of...you guessed it...RUSSIA! So, I found the areal battles cool and interesting, but they might as well have been shooting muskets from hot air balloons. It didn't have the feel and flavor of a real Battle Royal of Wooden Ships, Iron men and Feisty Elemental creatures like I was expecting. If this really is a fantasy world with a Russian or western European backdrop then, there's a precedent for getting more out of the Naval Battles.

But Flying SHIPS... so Cool!... of course that's what I said when I read about the flying ships on Barsoom (ERB's doing), so it's not my first areal rodeo.

Generally we didn't get to see the best part of the sailing boats until closer to the end when they were locked in battle with each other blasting away with cannons and grape shot. I think Beaulieu also benefited from what I call the BSG 2005 principle. When the writers for Battlestar Galactica 2005 focused on their show, they admit that they only set it in space and focused on the soap opera between characters, relying on the fact that space and battle would generally handle any doubts that it was science fiction. As for BSG, goes Kahlakavo, set up your characters on flying clippers and the Cool aspect of aero- combat is kind of self evident. There was so much more he could have done with the flying ships aspect and the "Pirate's on the Breeze" that he simply left alone. Setting the story, or parts of the story around the flying sailboats and man-o-wars was enough in general. I liked the flying boats. It was still a short cut.

I really wanted better descriptions of the flying boats and areo-naval battles, a better explanation of how they worked and the magic behind them and maybe some more expertise out of the sailors who manned them (So much for swagger).

**2) The Magic System(s)**- Generally I liked the magic as it appeared in the story. I believe I read about two (maybe three or four) distinct magic systems. The Nomad Asheman System and the Matra System (The Dark), with honorable mention to the Soul Stone System which I assumed to be part of the Matra bunch and the evil Asheman system which I took to function the same as the good or neutral asheman system . Not everyone sees these as different systems, but I do, and, I liked the diversity.

*The Nomad - Asheman System* - The Asheman system involved the "summoning" a spirit, which I took to be an "elemental" or air, fire, water, and earth spirits. These spirits existed on the Aethereal (ethereal?) plane, which is a plane of existence that overlaps ours (the prime material plane) like a transparent overlay might cover a picture in a book. The Asheman Summoner would "bind" the spirit temporarily to a gemstone, worn in a circlet around their head. Binding the demon allowed the Asheman Sorcerer to use the spirit's powers in the prime material. For example, fire spirits enabled Rehda to throw fireballs and keep herself warm or wind elementals (Air) to make their small skiffs sail where they wanted them to go. They could also summon earth elementals (kind of like golems) to beat on their enemies and smash them to tiny bittseth.

*The Matra System* - The Matra, which was primarily practice by Noble women, but not exclusive to them, involved astral projection through the Aether that allowed them to see great distances and "assume" different, lesser creatures (and humans), Rocs (large birds) in particular. To do this they used a "drowning pool" as a focus and an "access point" where they could enter the "Dark" (the Aether) though it was never made clear why they needed to do all of that "Drowning" stuff since Atiana entered the "Dark" without being in a drowning pool. I think this drowning pool was supposed to be something like a sensory deprivation chamber (see the movie "Altered States"). I thought it was pretty neat, but, I felt there should have been more organization and more of a science around this magic it seemed generally disorganized.

As for the evil Asheman system. That worked pretty well and pretty fairly. No complaints.

As for the soul stones? What a waist of... I mean did anyone see a good reason for Nickander to have one of these things? If someone else touched it they knew you were lying (since he had the wasting why would he want that?) They didn't give you any powers other than the presumed ability to contact mother... think about this... why would you want to? They could pick up another man's stink if he wore it and never wash out. This thing was more trouble than it was worth. It never actually gave Nickander anything useful past contacting his mother once and an excuse to make the most likeable character a slut (Atiana).

I'm sure there is more to them than this. It just didn't make sense that any noble man would have such a thing. You want to get a message to mother...go tell a bird. It's more effective.

### ***Characters***

*Atiana* – come on, who didn't like Atiana, loyal, loving, feisty, take no crap. Hell she even slapped her sister cross eyed for talking about her man! She alone was the only one who joined "the Dark" that gave a hoot about making sure the end of the world isn't say...TODAY! Other than Nickander (who seemed more worried about the boy). She was hot! Long Red hair, porcelain skin and she wasn't afraid to shoot people or roll in the mud, dark and bear fat in a chick fight! In Texas the saying is ..."That' my kind of woman there!" And... honestly, was there any other character other than Rehda that turned out likeable. I liked Rehda and of course (view spoiler)

Rehda- was she hot or what! (always a plus if you're a guy reading) she didn't mind getting naked (as a gentleman I can neither confirm nor deny that this is a plus...or not...Ah, hell it got my attention!) and, even though she was a (view spoiler) What's not to like, she was deep, conflicted, strong, moral (in her own way) and she developed and grew from story start to story end. I'd even say I like her better than Atiana the Noble-Babe! She even overcame hate. In a land of dickheads and bitches, that's a major character growth statement.

Nickander was a weenie. I'm sorry but he was just so indecisive, and...well, more in-effective than indecisive. This guy would be hung from the nearest yard arm if it wasn't for Atiana and Rehda. His soul stone was defective, he looked like a junkie...other than being rich, what did this guy bring to the table? He sure as hell couldn't drive a damned boat without wrecking it. He could at least dance but Atiana beat him there too (so, he got beat by a GIRL! Nyaaah, Nyaaah).

The best of the rest would be Vickie (Nickie's sister). Let's see, she started a cast iron bitch and ended up in about the same position. She was never likeable, though she was sympathetic (which she undid by not being likeable). She was strong, but strong doing what? It's one thing to be out in a field standing like a stone wall, and another thing to be "like younder Jackson there, standing like a stone wall!" (Civil war reference, Stonewall Jackson). She didn't have a purpose that I could tell.

The Mantra, Mother, Sisters, the dark bitches... my word... were these a pack of the most petty useless magic using, unpleasant twits in the universe? You'd think someone might try to help Atiana instead of pouncing on her every time she entered the dark.

The other Nobility? Oh, Le' PUGH! Now I know why the bad guys wanted to rip open the rift and start over again. They even kilt Nick's DOG! What kind of asshole kills a guys dog? Where I'm from (the south) It's beyond fightin time if you kick a man's dog. Put a bullet in him, and it's time to bring two buckets of ass-whippin down on the guy!

Did this guy even have a father, or was he one of those cardboard cutout figures they put in his chair to make people think he wasn't actually a cadaver?

Plot? Not too bad. Not particularly tight, and not particularly inventive, but, generally okay. He should have never put the wacky sphinx goddess bitch god on an island, that was a waste of ink and paper. Any tall rock would do. "If you want to pass by me, then you must answer these questions three!" At least she was better looking than the old grumpy troll dude guarding thee "pit of peril" in Monty Python.

Does this sound angry? Yes... the writing started, the author's style was so much better than the story. I really wanted a new Epic Fantasy that I could get behind. I feel let down. I am disappointed.

I still give it a three. There were good things and bad things. It meets a standard of being an entertaining read. I would recommend it to people who aren't as nitpicky as me. I'm not putting it on my top ten list any time soon.

But man, flying ships! ....so cool... so... cool!

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### **Chris says**

I'm really torn here. There are parts of the book that scream 4-star, and others that demand 2-star. Most of it is one or the other, with the rest falling in the middle. In the end, that's what I'm using for the overall rating.

Pros:

Worldbuilding. I love the way the aristocracy is set up and the structure of the Duchy. There's serious potential with the Motherland (I forget what it's called) to the West and other geographical areas.

Intrigue. Awesome. The political maneuverings of the different houses, shifting alliances and all. Again, real potential in future volumes. This is one area where it reminded me of the structure of the *Dune* universe.

Culture. Fascinating. I love that Beaulieu's going away from the typical Western European flavor. When most authors do that, they end up with an Asian or Native American culture feel. While those can be fun, I love that he's taken it another step in the alternative direction and gone Russian on us.

Atiana. She's a darling. Of all the characters, she's by far my favorite. She's part spoiled princess, but she follows her conscience and has some serious integrity. She has a heart as well, which seems unusual for one from her Harkonnen Vostroma family.

Magic system. Though it needs to be illustrated a little more clearly, I think the magic is pretty cool in this book. Note, illustrated doesn't necessarily mean explained. I don't have to have it broken down. If I can visualize it, I'm good to go.

The air ships. This was a beautifully done concept. Not entirely original in idea, the execution was very good. The technical/magical combination that made flying ships possible was one in a way that was believable and plausible. I especially loved when the seasoned sailor Nikandr was seasick, when forced to sail on actual water. That was great!

Cons:

The characters that aren't named Atiana. Most of them are shallow, or simply not drawn out. In most cases, Beaulieu has the potential to really expand on them and erase this criticism. I think Paul Atreides Nikandr Iaroslav could be a cool character if he gets some development. I do actually like Feyd Rautha Borund Radieva as a antagonist and all-around douche bag. I won't list him in the Pros section though, as he's fairly

shallow to this point. I think he could become a great character with the proper work, though.

Rehada. She has a special place away from the other characters on my shit list. Ugh. She could have been great, and might be in a film version. But here it was hard to sympathize with her (view spoiler) Her motivations started out pretty good, but she seemed more like a method of moving the plot along than a serious character for development. I was glad , though, when (view spoiler)

The demon/sprit thingies. I mean, they were cool enough in concept. But in execution, I was going WTF? a lot. For one, I never could figure out the difference between a vanahezhan and a suurahezhan and a jalahezhan and a whatefukahezhan. Did anyone? It seemed like their names changed with each sentence sometimes.

All in all, I think this was a well written book. The concepts and cultures are wonderful. I wasn't always pleased with the execution, but I'd definitely say that Beaulieu has an excellent foundation here with this first novel. I'm looking forward to reading more.

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### **Liviu says**

The Winds of Khalakovo is another fantasy that started very interesting and then just lost my interest and never regained it; the book lacked magic for me and I did not care for its characters or its world, so another series drop; I guess it's time to get back to sf and mainstream until The Order of the Scales comes later in May...

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### **Jon says**

Prince Nikandr Iaroslov, of the Duchy of Khalakovo, one of the mountainous islands of the Grand Duchy of Anuskaya, harbors many secrets. He contracted a fatal wasting disease, as has his sister Victania, for which he desperately seeks a cure. His lover, Rehada, is a native Aramahn, scorned as the 'Landless' by the 'Landed' citizens of the duchy. Rehada, in turn, harbors secrets of hate and revenge for the murder of her infant daughter by the Landed. Scorning her peaceful Aramahn heritage, she joins the splinter terrorist sect called the Maharraht, seeking to secretly strike back at the invaders. The Aramahn work with the Landed, setting an example of peaceful coexistence, unconditional love and all-encompassing forgiveness, while the Maharraht strive for action, sabotage, subterfuge and lethal violence to rid the islands of the hated Landed.

Princess Atiana Radieva, of the Duchy of Vostroma, arrives with the rest of her family to seal the arranged marriage with Prince Nikandr, becoming the third and final side of this love/hate triangle. She and her two sisters grew up with Nikandr, teasing him and their brother, Borund, relentlessly and sometimes cruelly. Nikandr dreads leaving Rehada, has little hope of forging any emotional connection to Atiana, and fears what will happen should the Vostromans discover his disease. As with most arranged marriages among aristocracy, all is not romance and roses, political influence shifts hands, trade concessions secure Khalakovon natural resources for the Vostromans, all to strengthen these two Duchies as the islands are wracked by years of famine and blight. The starving peasants care little for the political posturing, seething with unrest and starting to riot over scant rations.

I could appreciate the new twist on a fantasy world, using Czarist Russia (and possibly the Cossacks in particular) as a basis for the ruling regime. I didn't quite grasp the connection from land-locked unforgiving

Ukraine or Siberia with a naval-like empire of wind ships, which appeared to be (from the limited descriptions provided by the author) some sort of strange sailing monstrosity with masts on four sides (top, bottom, port and starboard). Landing, even on an eyrie perch, must have been a nightmare, and what happens in an emergency when you need to 'crash' land on the sea or land? Masts break and sails rip dramatically, but completely impractical and short-sighted.

The magic system as revealed through the actions of various bit players also did not lend itself to easy understanding. The Aramahn bond with elemental spirits through various semi-precious stones and the Matri (the Duchy matriarchs) manipulate the aether from the cold dark, forcing order upon the world's winds over the entropy of the natural and spiritual worlds. This, together with a thin skin of worldbuilding left me with nothing but the forward fast pace of the events unfolding to keep my attention. Not even the tragic ending could bring any emotion to the surface for Nikandr, Atiana or Rehada. The growth experienced by these characters failed to convince me to believe the actions they took. Even Rehada's confession to Atiana lacked conviction. Nikandr's professed love for the pivotal Nasim, even though Nikandr seemed willing to sacrifice himself for the boy, just didn't ring true. Much too much 'telling' and sparse 'showing' prevailed throughout the novel.

Kudos to Brad Beaulieu for providing me with a crash course in Slavic vocabulary, including words he crafted for this world that look and sound like their consonant-heavy guttural Eastern European counterparts.

I doubt I'll be following the further permutations of Nikandr, Atiana, Nasim or the Flying Cossacks. The pacing kept me wanting to read what happened next, but when I finished, I found I didn't care what had happened.

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### **Jim says**

It was a decent enough novel in a lot of ways, at times a 4 star one. There was a neat magic system, world, & an excellent conflict. The last was quite believable & nerve wracking. The ignorance & ambitions driving it were just so realistic, but even with all that going for it, I just couldn't work up a lot of enthusiasm for the story on a regular basis. I'd start to get really into it & one of its flaws would push me away. I *wanted* to read it to the end, so that says something.

The first thing I saw was "Dramatis Personae", a very bad sign in my experience. If an author feels the need to list characters before I start the book, it's likely he expects me to need the list - a sure mark of poor writing, IMO. The story should introduce the characters in such a way that I can remember them & **this one did**. Although they weren't familiar names, they were short & easily pronounceable, so I didn't have any trouble keeping them straight. Kudos!!!

So why the need for a list? Probably for all the titles, magic user types & creatures. They're not listed, but we do get a look at some of the magic users with their titles or types. That helped some, but it was still pretty tough to keep them all straight. Between that, the different critters & other Russian words, it just got downright confusing at first, until I'd learned the language. The author did do a good job of making the made up parts of the language seem just like Russian ones, though. Since I only speak Bad American & have no interest in speaking anything else, this wasn't really a plus.

Unfortunately, the magic system didn't always ring true. Some of that could have been my confusion, but there just wasn't any proper explanation of the differentiation between the powers/magic of the various

groups. They seemed to blend well enough when the story needed them to. (view spoiler) I just wound up taking a lot on faith, but that never really helps a story because it can't draw me in then. If anything, it puts some distance between us.

The basic culture was a pretty weird mix of island, Russian aristocratic & peasant, plus a gypsy (sort of) cultures. It was interesting & believable within the framework of the world. The characters were drawn from all facets & started out very well drawn. Unfortunately, several of the critical motivations just weren't believable at all. One pivotal figure just never rang true for me at all. (view spoiler) After that, I just read to the end of the book without a lot of hope.

It ended well enough, but there are enough loose ends that I'm sure there will be a sequel or two. I won't be reading them, though. Overall, it was better than just OK, but not really good for me. If you're better at picking up languages or know Russian, this might just be well worth your while, though. It was certainly different than the run-of-the-mill stuff that's being churned out.

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### **Tamara says**

Goodbye, book. I don't quite know what I don't like about this book - it had interesting worldbuilding, an uncliched narrative, decent characterization...and stupefyingly boring. Just mind numbing. Excellent mileage as an insomnia cure, here, but that's it. Maybe i'll try it again in a few years - I want to like it, I just don't.

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### **Courtney Schafer says**

The Winds of Khalakovo is a richly detailed epic fantasy that focuses on the clash between two very different cultures – the ruling Landed (inspired by Czarist Russia), and the indigenous Aramahn (a nomadic people with religious beliefs reminiscent of Buddhism). A splinter faction of the Aramahn, the Maharraht, is locked in a guerilla war against the Landed, hoping to drive them from the archipelago where the book is set. Beaulieu does an excellent job of depicting the tensions and politics of the world using three main viewpoint characters: Nikandr, a prince of the Landed; Rehada, his Aramahn lover, who is also a spy for the Maharraht; and Atiana, the Landed princess Nikandr is meant to marry. All three are complex, fully realized characters, and Beaulieu handles their separate arcs with wonderful aplomb. Rehada's struggle with the desire for revenge combined with her feelings of betrayal toward her people and her beliefs is particularly well done. The novel has a terrific mix of intrigue and action, and the worldbuilding is fascinating: skyships and gunpowder mix with two separate magical systems: the Aramahn shamans controlling elemental spirits, and the telepathic Matri of the Landed. Best of all is the way Beaulieu deftly weaves the major plot threads together and builds the action to a truly epic climax. If you're a fan of epic fantasy, don't miss this one.

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### **Kaitlin says**

This book took a while for me to get into, largely due to things getting a bit busy with my uni work. However, even though this took me a while, I do think that once you get into this series it has an awful lot of potential and I am looking forward to seeing where the story goes next.

This is set on a couple of different islands which are travelled between by air ships. This immediately caught my attention as I love steampunk style writing and I thought this might be that. I'd say it's a lot more like sky-pirates, but that too is pretty cool!

We pick up the story following a division between the Landed (rulers of the islands), the Aramahn (indigenous to the islands) and the Maharrat who are fanatical revolutionaries. We also have a plague called the Wasting attacking people on the islands and stealing their lives. We follow the meeting of the Nine Dukes which is supposedly going to change the face of Khalakovo, and shape its future...

Other things I liked a lot about this book:

- It's complicated. Whilst I don't think that this book is a strong 3.5\* read (it only just got the 3.5\* rating) and I don't think it's anywhere near as strong as the later book *Twelve Kings* (not part of the same series) I do love the complexity of this book and I think although it takes a while to immerse yourself once you do it's pretty marvellous.

- The characters. We have a few main characters that we're following and they are Nikandr, Rehada and Atiana. The two ladies, Rehada and Atiana, really did capture my attention at times and I found myself loving how they were strong when they needed to be, but also vulnerable when they needed to be. They felt like genuine characters rather than made-up puppets to keep the story going and I appreciated that. I will say that Rehada did shift loyalty a few times and was a little more focused on love than I would have liked making Atiana my favourite, but I still enjoyed both storylines.

I also liked Nikandr, but I will say that his story wasn't as consistently interesting to me as Atiana or Rehada.

- The magic. This book has all sorts of strange things within it such as elemental spirits, the Dark (kind of like a magical in-between state) and the Rift. We also get looks at creatures which seem mystical and there's a fair bit to take in.

- The world. I generally really liked the concept of the mountainous islands surrounded by sea and traversed by air ship. It's a pretty cool set up straight away, and it lends itself to adventuring and treachery (which both feature).

- The mystery. I think this is one of those series which reels you in slowly and even though it's dramatic straight away I didn't realise how much I enjoyed it until I was nearing the end and then I went and bought the next two in the series. There's a lot of plotting and mystery here and I really enjoyed that.

Overall I will say that although I think this does have its flaws and isn't as easy to slip into as *Twelve Kings* it does have a whole heap of potential and I think that the series could become very engaging as it goes on. This story kept me interested even though it took a while to get through and there was always something new to discover or learn, which I liked. A low 3.5\* but a 3.5\* all the same :)

(Finally - I just want to note that the audiobook seriously helped me with immersion as I read the first 60% of this on my kindle and then switched to audio and because a lot of the words have a Slavic feel to them I think hearing them read aloud was excellent and immersive!)

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## **Sarah says**

3.5 stars

Beaulieu has written an incredibly complex novel filled with rich cultural detail and plenty of symbolism. In fact, many reviewers have compared *The Winds of Khalakovo* to Steven Erikson's *Malazan* novels in world building, meaning that readers might often have to go back to catch details they might have previously

missed. This complex world building is a huge undertaking on the part of the author and could possibly serve to delight readers. Regardless of how you crack this egg, having your debut book compared to Steven Erikson's Malazan books is one hell of an accomplishment. For fans of complex worlds and books that set an impressive foundation for an incredibly promising epic fantasy series, you need look no further than *The Winds of Khalakovo*. Despite its flaws, it's a book to pay attention to written by an author worth noting

Read my full review here:

<http://bookwormblues.blogspot.com/201...>

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## Justin says

<http://staffersmusings.blogspot.com/2...>

Earlier this week I criticized Brandon Sanderson's new novel **Alloy of Law** for being shallow. Bradley Beaulieu's debut, **The Winds of Khalakovo**, is the polar opposite. Where Sanderson wrote something light and breakneck, Beaulieu has offered a deep and deliberate novel. It's also the closest thing to Russian literature I've come across in fantasy, including novels written by Russians. Having read my fair share of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, I wasn't sure that I needed that particular style in my genre reading. It turns out that not only was I happy to revisit that somewhat masochistic style, it's something I want to see a lot more.

The story centers around Khalakovo, a mountainous archipelago of seven islands. Serviced by windships bearing goods and dignitaries, Khalakovo's eyrie stands at the trade crossroads of the Grand Duchy of Anuskaya. The protagonist, Nikandar, Prince of Khalakovo (although not the heir), is set to marry the daughter of a rival Duchy. Of course, he's not in love with her, instead he showers his affections on Rehada, an indigenous Aramahn whore.

Amid this tangled web of love, a conspiracy begins to brew with other Duchies vying for power, and a fringe Aramahn group known as Maharraht who would see the entire system upended. To a modern reader these dynamics will be reminiscent of the United States involvement in the Middle East. Impossible loves and a rejection of western ideas, I say? How Russian, you might respond.

**Winds** is just that. The world, characters, and plot lines all maintain a very Eastern European texture that call to mind the Middle East, Crimea, Poland, and yes, Russia. So much so that Nikandar dances the *preesyadka* and wears a drooping mustache while the Aramahn wear layered robes and live a life of nomadic self-improvement. Driving the point home are Russian words interspersed throughout the novel like *da*, *nyet*, and *dosvedanya*, a habit I admit to finding somewhat annoying (Ari Marmell's intelligent discussion on the subject).

To anyone who's read some 'Golden Age' Russian literature, the themes in **Winds** will be familiar, especially suffering as a means of redemption. Rehada, in particular, although not exclusively, is subjected to this device. She also falls into the tradition outlined by Russian literary critic Viktor Shklovsky who wrote, "Russian literature has a bad tradition. [It's] devoted to the description of unsuccessful love affairs." Where the suffering love affair exists on the surface of the narrative, the undercurrents of rebellion against western (new?) ideas are more subtle and probably more indicative of a Russian nascence.

Beaulieu's world casts the Duchies as an imperialist culture who've conquered the archipelagos and

subjugated the nomadic Aramahn people (Tartars?). Known as the Landed, the Duchies are at odds with the Maharraht who reject the way of life forced on them and would sooner see it all end. It would be somewhat misleading to call the Landed western, but the sentiments are the same as in Russian lit. The rejection of the new and outside, in favor of the old and insular. In **Crime and Punishment**, Dostoevsky uses Raskolnikov and his tragedy to call for the return of Russianism by rediscovering religion and national pride. So too does Beaulieu with the Maharraht, although his conclusions may differ from those literary forefathers.

Themes and symbolism are great, but the damn thing has to read well too, right? And for the most part, **Winds** is just as successful in that regard. Beaulieu draws convincing, layered characters that fight for themselves and their loved ones far more often than an ideal. In short, they're real. His prose is more than capable, and his dialogue has a poignancy that fits the thematic tones perfectly.

Unfortunately, there are times when Beaulieu lacks clarity in both his description of action sequences and his explanation of world mechanics. **Winds** takes the (now) popular approach of worldbuilding by inference, most popularized by Steven Erikson's **Malazan Book of the Fallen**. I'm a fan of the approach (generally), but oftentimes it forced me to flip back to see if I missed some detail. This lack of surety is most often reflected in his magic systems (notice, the plural) that never seem to bridge the gap between cause and effect.

Likewise, many of the novel's action sequences take place on airships moving in three dimensions relative to one another and stationary objects beneath them. The end result is usually confusion about who's where and what's going on. Perhaps the best example of this is in the second chapter where I had to read a scene three times before grasping what was happening. I was so frustrated by it that I put **Winds** down to read the aforementioned **Alloy of Law**. Further compounding these moments of confusion is the novel's inconsistent pacing with peaks and valleys that likely contribute to its Russianness (come on, **War and Peace** is a slog).

In the moment, each of these flaws seems dooming. On the whole, amid such dynamic characters and meaty themes they fade into the background, taking little away from the experience. As a debut author Bradley Beaulieu is suffering growing pains in bringing new (old) literary traditions to genre fiction. I've glossed over a lot of the intricate plotting in favor of discussing the bigger picture, but I can vouch that **The Winds of Khalakovo** is high fantasy full of magic, swashbuckling, and political intrigue. I applaud what he's done here and can't wait to see what's next.

It should also be noted that Beaulieu's publisher, Night Shade Books, has made a concerted effort to bring new voices to the forefront. I wonder how many other presses would take a chance on this novel. Sure, it's epic fantasy, but it's also unfamiliar. So for that, thumbs up to the Night Shade team.

**The Straights of Galahesh**, book two in **The Lays of Anuskaya**, is due out April of 2012. You can find Beaulieu on his website or on Twitter.

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**Ranting Dragon says**

<http://www.rantingdragon.com/the-wind...>

It took me a while to fall in love with **The Winds of Khalakovo**, the first part in the **Lays of Anuskaya** series by Bradley P. Beaulieu. As with many other epic fantasy novels, I expected to enter a big story filled with

scientific magic and a world yet to be built. Beaulieu, however, thrusts us into a complete world, rich with history, politics, and elemental magic. Instead of info dumps taking the reader by the hand, we see the world through the eyes of our main characters and learn only what they don't already know. Only by paying close attention to the small hints of information do we find out more.

Being used to having my epic world-building served to me on a silver platter, I had difficulty getting into the book at first and found that I needed to adjust my expectations. However, as the story moved on, the characters met, and the political schemes were set in motion, the story quickly picked up pace and, all of a sudden, I had trouble putting the book down.

### **Arranging the pieces**

With subtle ease, Beaulieu arranges all the pieces along the playing board. The story starts when Prince Nikandr, son of the Duke of the islands of Khalakovo, is arranged to be married to Atiana, daughter of the Duke of the Vostroma islands. The ceremony is to take place during a meeting of the Nine Dukes, all rulers of their respective island Duchies. However, when the Grand Duke, leader of the Nine Dukes, is murdered by a wind spirit, the meeting turns into a political nightmare, with each of the Dukes ready to attack the other and a civil war brewing with Khalakovo in the middle of it.

It is a situation that reminds me of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. However, beyond the politics and intrigue, *The Winds of Khalakovo* is nothing like George R.R. Martin's work. Of course, there are similarities; there are neither good nor bad guys in this situation, as every character seems both good and evil. Beaulieu, though, has a very clear goal in mind: his story is clearly moving somewhere, and does so with a breathtaking pace. There are no slow scenes in which the author is bent on torturing his characters. Instead, the characters are tortured—and developed—through the events that created a book filled with so much suspense that it seemed to be trembling in my hands.

### **The heart of the story**

At the heart of this story, however, is a mystery of elemental magic of old. A blight is creeping over the Grand Duchy, killing crops and emptying the seas, infecting random people—including Nikandr—with a deadly disease called the wasting. Somehow this seems related to a rift between the world and the realm of the spirits. In the center of all this is a young autistic boy who may well hold the key to defeating the blight, a boy who is sought after by not only Nikandr, but also the fanatical Maharraht, bent on the destruction of the Grand Duchy.

### **Characters to love and hate**

Throughout these events, I had a love-hate relationship with the characters. The love between Nikandr and his sister Victania seems a bit sketchy to me; it feels like they are romantically involved, a fact made even less understandable by the very unrealistic and unlikable character of Victania. And the way Atiana seems to change from hating Nikandr to loving him over the course of a single day isn't believable—I'm not buying the whole tough-girl-who-secretly-wants-love angle.

On the other hand, though, the other characters are well-fleshed-out and believable. Nikandr is one of the best characters in fantasy: a little naïve; young, but expected to grow up; and still playful while all his childhood friends seemed to have moved on. Faced with the decisions of real life in a brewing civil war, he is forced to grow up pretty fast, and the way Beaulieu develops this aspect of the story is extraordinary and seems rather realistic to me.

### **An intriguing world**

The world of *The Winds of Khalakovo* forms a very intriguing aspect of the story as well. While the world is

never force-fed to a reader, it quickly becomes evident that this world is well-wrought. All the elements are connected: two peoples and two magic systems, subtly connected to each other; a conflict between religion and reality; a civilization adjusted to life on scattered islands; and transportation between the islands on board of amazing airships, which again use one of the magic systems to function. Each of these elements is pictured in a believable way and is well-conceived. The airships, especially, offer some really colorful and enthralling scenes. Above that, the culture in *The Winds of Khalakovo* is based on Russian culture, adding an original and intriguing twist to the world.

### **Why should you read this book?**

With *The Winds of Khalakovo*, Beaulieu offers us a well-written novel overflowing with action and suspense, great characters—and a couple horrible ones—and a brilliantly-wrought story of mystery, magic, and political intrigue, where everything seems possible and you never know what lies around the next corner.

All in all, *The Winds of Khalakovo* is an amazing first volume in what may become a series to challenge more established epic fantasy series like *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Malazan Book of the Fallen*. However, at this stage, I dare not make such a lofty claim just yet. *The Winds of Khalakovo* was not without its minor flaws, but this near-perfect novel promises a bright future for Beaulieu's *The Lays of Anushka*. If you are a fan of the epic fantasy genre, you should definitely give this book a chance.

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### **Jeff Salyards says**

Say whatever else you want about *THE WINDS OF KHALAKOVO*, but you can't call it derivative. Right from the get go, Beaulieu throws the reader in the deep end, introducing Russian-inspired names; a fascinating magic system that doesn't include an instruction booklet and isn't systematically explained; bandoliers, rifles, and cannons; air ships that (thankfully!) don't resemble your Steampunk zeppelins in the slightest (don't get me wrong, I like those, but it's good to see a different take on dirigibles); complex politics and faction alignments that require some puzzling out to make sense of; a stately pace, as measured and patient as Russian literature of old; did I mention those names?

In the hands of a lesser writer, this might have been off putting, or worse still, just a damn unsightly mess, but Beaulieu has clearly thought all of this through, and doesn't pander—he trusts that his readers will be smart enough and invest enough to reap the rewards, which are many. The characterization is terrific, and the interactions feel real and grounded, despite the foreignness of the setting (which, to my mind, is actually a strong selling point!). While the pace is hardly breakneck, the prose is inviting and lush, with some wonderful descriptions that again take the edge of the fact that some stuff is a little confusing at first, and the author is in no rush to over explain with clumsy infodumps.

I hate it when a review says something to the effect of: "For a debut, it is very solid and blahblahblah," as if it implies that the standards are lower for debuts. Sort of a backhanded compliment. That said, it's rare to see a debut author show such confidence, trusting that the story and characters will draw the reader in until the world building starts to fall into place and make some semblance of sense, and yet Beaulieu has no problems at all here. *WINDS* sets the table nicely for the rest of the books in the trilogy, with believable characters who have complex, adult relationships, some fantastic political intrigue and backbiting, and a really intriguing and fleshed out setting.

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## **Stefan says**

Prince Nikandr of Khalakovo is betrothed to Princess Atiana of Vostromo. Atiana is beautiful, and the match will be beneficial for both houses, but Nikandr is less than happy because he lives with two damning secrets. For one, his true love is not Atiana but an Aramahn prostitute named Rehada. What's even worse, Nikandr has contracted the early stages of a terrible disease that's laying waste to both the people and the crops of Anuskaya.

Tensions in the duchies of Anuskaya are high. Food shortages caused by the blight are making life harder for the common people. The Maharraht, a violent sect of the otherwise peaceful Aramahn, is trying to overthrow the rule of the Landed nobility. Grand Duke Stasa is old and ill, which means that leadership of Anuskaya may soon be changing hands. The political struggles between the duchies come to a head when the Maharraht pull off their boldest move yet, while the nobility of Anuskaya is gathered in Khalakovo...

Please read the entire review here on my site Far Beyond Reality!

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## **colleen the convivial curmudgeon says**

2.5

I read this for the group read for the Spec Fic group. It's probably not something I would've picked up for myself, having that whole epic quality (i.e. lots and lots of books and often slow, draggy plots) that doesn't generally appeal to me. But the blurb seemed vaguely promising and I was definitely intrigued by a story that had a Russian influence instead of the usual; however, I found myself disappointed that the Russian flavor seems limited to names of places and people and a few things, and it never really seems to have any more depth than that.

And, really, that sums up the whole book in many ways - characters, plots, intrigues: they all lack depth.

Speaking first of the intrigue, this is one place where other people felt it was good, but considering that there didn't seem to be a lot of maneuvering and it lacked vagueness (i.e. you always knew who was on which side, their motivations were always fairly simple and straightforward, and there was little doubt about how the winds blew, so to speak).

As to the characters - the good guys were good and the bad guys were all jackasses. (I didn't mind Nikandr as much as some others did, though I do agree with Hugh that he was pretty ineffectual and Atiana was the real shining light.)

As for the writing itself, I found it a bit jerky in places. Things would be skipped, and then later gone back over. Tenses shifted as perspectives shifted, and you'd see the same thing through multiple perspectives sometimes, but then a lot of other things seemed to happen off-stage.

The magic systems were interesting, but didn't seem to be all that original, imo. The hezhan, for instance, are basically just elementals. The 'dark' of the women (who I just wanted to smack upside their collective heads) seemed to have a bit more originality, but I wished it was explained a little more.

For all that, though, it was a book that, while I was reading, I enjoyed well enough. I didn't constantly count pages (well, not constantly, but there were a few particularly draggy bits when I wished it would pick up), and I didn't find myself bored and hateful while I was reading.

But when I put the book down I felt no real need to pick it back up, and found myself procrastinating its return more than once.

Oh - and I didn't like the ending. I know that it's a big series and the various lose ends and things will be picked up in future installments, but it felt too open-ended, not to mention that it was pretty much a bummer ending after going through everything.

(Speaking of going through everything, Nikandr did have a bit of the No One Should Survive That syndrome, as he's blunders through near fatal situation after near fatal situation, gets bumped and bruised and beaten along the way, and yet seems fine just a few days later and merrily bumbles his way along again.)

So, yeah, it wasn't bad but it didn't really capture me in any real way, and I doubt I'll be continuing the series.

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### **Bradley says**

I hope you enjoy the book. It's been a long while in the making, and it's exciting to finally have it out there. Please also feel free to check out my website ([www.quillings.com](http://www.quillings.com)) and drop me a line there if you're so inclined.

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