



City of Blades

Robert Jackson Bennett

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A triumphant return to the world of *City of Stairs*.

A generation ago, the city of Voortyashtan was the stronghold of the god of war and death, the birthplace of fearsome supernatural sentinels who killed and subjugated millions.

Now, the city's god is dead. The city itself lies in ruins. And to its new military occupiers, the once-powerful capital is a wasteland of sectarian violence and bloody uprisings.

So it makes perfect sense that General Turyin Mulaghesh—foul-mouthed hero of the battle of Bulikov, rumored war criminal, ally of an embattled Prime Minister—has been exiled there to count down the days until she can draw her pension and be forgotten.

At least, it makes the perfect *cover* story.

The truth is that the general has been pressed into service one last time, dispatched to investigate a discovery with the potential to change the world--or destroy it.

The trouble is that this old soldier isn't sure she's still got what it takes to be the hero.

City of Blades Details

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Author : Robert Jackson Bennett

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From Reader Review City of Blades for online ebook

Phrynn says

Oh yes! This is how you write the second book in a series - you make it as good or even better than the first one. And that's so even when you totally change the main character. Of course Shara and Sigrud do appear and Sigrud in particular has quite a large role but it is General Mulaghesh who steps up front and centre in this book and she is oh so good. She reminds me a little of Joe Abercrombie's Gokta - someone who is actually pretty bad and quite ruthless and yet still likeable and frequently humorous.

As with the first book, great world building, a clever magical system, plenty of action and many interesting and entertaining characters. The author is not afraid to kill off his characters either and there was one death towards the end that really surprised me. Really looking forward now to the next book :)

Terence says

Five years after the Battle of Bulikov, retired General Turyin Mulaghesh is called on once more to serve Saypur. Prime Minister Shara Komayd has an off the books mission for her, find a missing ministry official and investigate a miraculous substance. The worst part of all is Mulaghesh has to travel to Voortyashtan otherwise known as The City of Blades. Voortyashtan was the land of the divinity of war and death Voortya and despite being a ruin since the blink, it's still a dangerous place.

The City of Blades was surprising in many ways. The biggest surprise was that the author decided to make a sequel to City of Stairs. It was surprising, not because City of Stairs was a bad book, but because the events that unfolded were so monumental that it seemed unlikely a sequel could be as good as the original.

Unfortunately I don't believe the sequel was as good as the first book. The main reason for that is it was just too similar to the original. The events in City of Stairs should have been a one time event, not something that could happen again...ever. Yet that's what happens in many ways.

The next large surprise was using City of Stairs support character Turyin Mulaghesh as the main protagonist. I know many people loved Mulaghesh, but all I remembered about her was that she was a foul mouthed woman who was in charge in Bulikov. I didn't dislike her, but I certainly didn't feel she should be the main protagonist. I'll admit I did grow to appreciate her as the story went along, but I still would have preferred Shara Komayd and Sigrud running the show.

Not only is Shara Komayd not the main protagonist, but she is relegated to a similar role that Vinya Komayd played in City of Stairs. She's calling the shots, but unlike Vinya, Shara has lost the support of seemingly everyone and she's certain she'll be out of office soon. I really missed Shara's presence.

In the end I have to say, City of Blades was just not as good as City of Stairs.

3 out of 5 stars

I received this ARC from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Scott Hitchcock says

There were portions of this book I loved and portions I found tedious. The recap of the action from the last book too way too long to deliver as did the setup for this book. Then in the middle it was awesome. Then it went back to sleep. The ending again was awesome although one of the key moments left me wanting a different writing. Still a good series. Looking forward to book 3 in May.

xx Sarah xx (former Nefarious Breeder of Murderous Crustaceans) says

● Damn it All to Subaquatic Hell my Despicable Reading Buddies Actually Enjoyed Book 1 and Want to Read this One Too The End Must Be Near Buddy Reread

(DiAtSHmDRBAEB1aWtRtOTTEMBNBR™) with some people of uncharacteristically good taste over at BB&B ●

► And the moral of this reread is :

If

a = I want to marry General Turyin Mulaghesh

and

b = I want to marry Sigrud je Harkvaldsson

and

c = I want General Turyin Mulaghesh to marry Sigrud je Harkvaldsson

then

a + b + c = Houston, we have a problem we need a harem. Oh wait, I already have one. **Ha.**

· **Book 1: City of Stairs ★★★★★**

· **Book 3: City of Miracles ★★★★★**

[Original review: February 2016]

♦ Yet another Wow BR with my Wow Girls Choko and Maria over at BB&B ♦

Actual rating: 10 stars? 12 stars? Who the hell even knows?

No, **City of Blades** wasn't as **mind-blowingly amazing** as **City of Stairs**. Except that it was. Yep. This doesn't make any sense? It shouldn't. Especially since **City of Blades** was actually even more **mind-blowingly amazing** than **City of Stairs**. Except that it wasn't. Still not making sense? Good. **Death by confusion**, that's what I'm aiming for here. But anyway. The difference between the two instalments in this OMG-you-have-to-read-it-now series is: **City of Stairs** left me **speechless** -as proven by my Super Short I Have Nothing To Say Review (SSIHNTSR™), while **City of Blades** left me **emotionally drained**. And man, how I love feeling like I've been **punched in the gut** repeatedly. Makes me feel alive and stuff, you know.

Please note I am slightly less hairy than the guy getting delightfully punched in the gut here. Because yes, you can be both nefarious and hairless. I mean, I do have hair on my head. It's the rest of me that's slightly less hairy. Just thought I'd let you know.

By the way, did I mention this was going to be another SSIHNTSR™? I did? Good. **I lied again**. In my defense, I'll have you know I **really really really wanted to write a short review** here, but couldn't (yes, this is a message from Sarah from the Future. The Sarah that just finished writing this could-have-been-short-but-wasn't-review.) I couldn't because this book is so AWESOME-AMAZEBALLS-DANG-I-LOVE-IT-SO-MUCH-RIGHT-IN-THE-FEELS-THIS-IS-SO-BLOODY-BRILLIANT-I-THINK-I-STOPPED-BREATHING-FOR-A-WHILE-THERE (AADILISMRTFTBISBBITISBFAWT™) that I **couldn't keep my big mouth shut**. I just felt it **my duty** to try and convey how exactly AADILISMRTFTBISBBITISBFAWT™ this book is. Kind of like **my new mission in life** and stuff. Anyway, I'm awfully sorry about this. I promise **I'll behave** from now on (view spoiler).

Okay, let's do this. Take a big breath, people, this one is going to be long and boring. Or boring and long. **Take your pick.**

What made City of Stairs Bloody Amazing were the unique, complex world-building and extremely thought-provoking themes developed by RJB. And the very cool characters. And the intriguing, fast-paced plotline. And the twists and revelations. And stuff. **What makes City of Blades Bloody Amazing? Bloody Amazing Characterization**, that's what. Complex doesn't even begin to cover it. Gut-wrenching either. I don't know how to explain it, really. RJB is so talented he makes you feel like **you ARE the characters**. I think Choko said it best when she mentioned being **viscerally connected** to them. And that is why, dear friends, the book is so emotionally draining. Because, let me tell you, this is **no Fluffy Bunnies and Pastel-Colored Rainbows Land**. Here the characters have been broken and traumatized (both physically and mentally) by years of war and soldiering. The **atmosphere is dark**. Much darker than in **City of Stairs**. And the **mood is very reflective**. You get to the heart of the characters, of their innermost feelings and motivations. **Don't get me wrong**, I am not saying that this book is all Blah Blah Blah Heaven, please-someone-kill-me inner ramblings, and zip zilch nada zero fun. *Do you seriously think I'd be fangirling about this book, had that been the case? Don't you know me at all? Think, people. Think.* There is a **LOT of action** here. There are **uber cool gruesome fights**. And a **very intriguing plot** that keeps you guessing until the very end. And this is where RJB excels. He manages to **mix thought-provoking themes, action, deep insight on his characters and pure entertainment**. Let me tell you, this guy is a **genius**.

So I was looking for a gif to illustrate the fact I might be getting a tinsy little bit carried away and found this.

It doesn't have anything to do with anything but I kind of like the "a lazy lobster is an endangered lobster" philosophy. Besides, how often to you come across Filipino proverbs?

Would you look at me?! I was going to talk about the newest member of my **Cool Chicks Harem** and got lost along the way. Shame on you, RJB, for writing such **awesome stuff** and making me get off track. *Not that I need awesome stuff to get off track. I mean, even Mermen manage to get me off track. And we all know how NOT awesome these Mermen wannabes were, right? Right. My point is, getting off track is my other missions in life.* But I digress. So. The **newest member of my Cool Chicks Harem?** Who made it directly to my **top 10 favorite heroines** of ALL TIMES? Ladies and gentleman, please meet retired **General Turyin Mulaghesh**. You gotta admit, the woman has seen better days: she's past her prime (a female heroine who is past 50? I LOVE you RJB) and is one-armed. She is **damaged, blunt, badass, heart-breaking, ass-kicking, disenchanted, lonesome, fierce, sometimes lost, ever-cursing and deliciously grumpy**. But most importantly, you know what she is? Seriously **amazing AMAZING**. The other characters in the story are all pretty awesome but General M. here? **The woman is seriously amazing AMAZING**. Ooooops, did I say that already? Too bad. So one question remains unanswered here. Which one? This one: **Turyin Mulaghesh, will you marry me?** *Very private message to all my Goodreads Wives (GW™): don't worry, I still love you. You're no longer #1 in my heart, that is all. Please feel free to sob and despair now.*

Just one more thing before I let you resume your boring daily activities: what I love most about RJB's stories is how **thought-provoking** they are (I know I've said this before but I don't care. Ha.) There aren't as many underlying themes in this book as there were in City of Stairs, but they are **just as absorbing**. I've mentioned before that City of Blades was about **war and soldiering**. It is not only about how wars affect soldiers, but also **how it affects populations** and to a greater scale, humanity. It is also a reflection on what is **justifiable** when it comes to war, and what isn't. Is **anything** justifiable? Can **bad deeds** committed in the name of the greater good be forgiven? Is **redemption** possible? Can **one ever forgive** his/herself for his/her past actions, no matter how disreputable? What does **being civilized** mean? Who are we to say **what cultures** are or aren't more civilized than we are? **DAMN. I LOVE THIS STUFF.**

You knew this was coming, right? Sorry, I had to let it out at some point.

What makes all this even more AADILISMRTFTBISBBITISBFAWT™ (please don't tell me you forgot your acronym dictionary again?!) is that you can feel this amazing world **growing one page at a time**. RJB builds it brick by brick, adds layer upon layer, and makes it **more complex and more fascinating** as the story develops. Did I already say this guy was a **genius**? I guess I did. Do we need to talk about sleeping lobsters again? **I think we don't** (view spoiler)

I have the feeling that some people will think this is a disappointing follow-up to City of Stairs. The mood is more **contemplative**, more **intimate**. It is more **sober**, too. Some people are probably going to think the **pace is slower**. Some people might even think it boring. HAHAHAHAHA. Well **some people are hilarious**. And some people are so dead wrong it must hurt. What **disastrous lives** they must lead. It's so good to be me, and **be right all the time**.

So where does that leave us? That leaves us at me starting to feel the Divine Cities **withdrawal symptoms**

kicking in. RJB, you better start writing the **next instalment** SOON. Otherwise I might consider going all **Hamster Ninja Bitch** on you. And believe me, that is not a pretty sight, and definitely **not something to look forward to**. As for you, dear people who are still with me and surprisingly alive after holding your breath for so long, **all I have to say is:**

Carol. says

This was not what I expected.

Enchanted by *City of Stairs* (my review), I worked my way backward through some of Bennett's earlier books, including *American Elsewhere* and *The Troupe*. Solid writing chops, vivid imagery, stellar characterization, and clear improvement with each published book. To say I was looking forward to *City of Blades* was an understatement.

“Though he’s never been involved in an operation—besides Bulikov, which he feels doesn’t count—he can’t help but be a little concerned about how all this is starting. And he’s not sure why a letter containing only the words ‘Make it matter’ could have any impact on whether it starts at all.”

City of Blades begins on a small island where General Turyin Mulaghesh has retired from the Saypuri Military Council. A note from current Council President Shara along with a threat to her pension brings her out of retirement for a short term posting to the Continent, to the would-be seaport **“Voortyashtan, ass-end of the universe, armpit of the world.”** With the cover story of a temporary posting until meeting retirement qualifications, Turyin is to investigate the disappearance of Special Investigator Choudhry, herself posted there under subterfuge. Unfortunately, the outpost is on the edge of unsecure territory. There is the protection of a military fort, ostensibly working for peace between themselves and the hill tribes, while a team from the Dreyling States is building a seaport that’s destined to make the port a crucial player in international economics. The port requires excavation of a former god’s city that is now underwater, and people are nervous about the potential of the Divine—even if all the gods are dead. Except as Turyin now knows, there’s been a discovery of a miraculously conducting metal that might mean the gods aren’t completely dead.

While it is a complicated story, the reader is eased into it, first through meeting Turyin and then as she gets more information on her assignment. Flashbacks come naturally to Turyin as she travels, meeting people she used to know early in her career. The story takes place five years after *City of Stairs*, so while it may help to have read it in order to understand the complex history between the Saypur people and the Continentals and the Continental relationship to the Divine, it isn’t strictly necessary. However, there’s a lot of subtleties to these relationships that add tension and emotion, so I’d recommend it.

Unsurprisingly with Bennett, characterization is well done. General Turyin is rough, unskilled in diplomacy or in undercover techniques, in chronic pain, and feels vastly inadequate to the task. Verbally, she’s a little bit shocking, although her internal dialogue gives her greater subtlety. Strangely, it’s hard to get a sense of the missing agent Choudhry, although perhaps it is because as everyone says, she was going mad. But the character of Turyin dominates:

“Mulaghesh walks to the railing. ‘You want to know why I’m here? Here of all places on this damned world?’ ‘Tell us!’ shouts one of the men below. ‘Tell us!’ ‘Fine!’ snarls Mulaghesh. ‘I’m on vacation,

you dumb sons of bitches."

Plotting was a tad dizzying, but it comes together at the end. If I had any complaint, it would be that certain peripheral characters occasionally seemed forced to act in order to move a plot point forward rather than story-built motivation.

"Biswal told them over and over again it was to be a civilized, strategic procession... But it quickly became such a hard thing, executing a civilized war. The people in these villages did not evacuate quietly, no matter how much Yellow Company ordered them to."

The hardest part for me was the emotional tone of the book. If Stairs was about the relationship of people to their divine, Blades is about soldiering and promises. It is hard hitting, a commentary on politics, violence, and bloodshed and it goes on to make the point again. And again. And again. While brutal and relentless, the General remains resolute. Near the end, it hit a little too closely to my own personal life, as well as our cultural lives as Americans, the idea of incremental, partial gains instead of winning the whole battlefield. The best Turyin can hope for is to minimize the number of deaths. Along these lines, there's an authorial choice for a character that I vehemently disagree with in terms of hope and the future. Unlike Bennett's other books which tend to have strong hopeful notes, this feels grim-noble, resolute to stay the ethical course but ultimately doomed to unsuccessful struggle.

Above all, the writing is stunning.

"And this realization, this bright, brittle memory, formed a tiny crack insider her, and suddenly she understood what she'd done, what they'd all done, and she burst into tears and sank to the ground."

Ultimately, highly recommended. But read *City of Stairs* first, and prepare to have your gut wrenched.

Four and a half PTSD stars.

Many thanks to NetGalley and Crown Publishing for an arc of this book. Note that while the quotes are taken from an advance copy and are subject to change, they give the flavor of Bennett's powerful writing.

Cross posted <https://clsiewert.wordpress.com/2016/...>

Bradley says

Thanks goes to Netgalley for the advance copy!

We're not in Saypuri anymore, Toto.

Oh, Shara, Shara, what have you done?

I'll do my very best to not reveal any spoilers, but a few things might be helpful. Shara is no longer the main character, and while Sigurd does play a pretty major role, it is General Mulaghesh that gets all the glories, glories, and ten-times the glories. I loved her nearly as much as Sigurd in City of Stairs, but she outshines

even Sigurd in this book.

I had some reservations about the first book. I admired the very thing that made me dislike it. Bennett is pretty much a master at blending genres, and I didn't know whether I should applaud or despair the mixing of mystery and epic fantasy and mythos the way he did.

That was then. This is now. And now I'm a total convert. We've got Shara being an ass, Mulaghesh being strong-armed by her friend, and a ghost story. Sounds pretty simple, right?

No. The tale is pretty straightforward compared to the twists and turns and big reveals of the previous novel, and the end of this one does have a truly Divine Epic Resolution that is nearly as satisfying as that we achieved in City of Stairs, but what I was most genuinely impressed with was the Soldier's Tale. I thought it was pretty damn heartfelt and beautiful as hell.

Is it as good as the first? I think it's better as long as you're not hoping for sneaky twisty-turny plots. It's certainly more accessible, and it does have its share of great surprises.

The one thing I ought to stress, though, is that this is a Bennett novel. He generally writes rings around lesser writers. What I am comparing is this novel versus the one prior. We can't go around comparing works of facile brilliance and creativity with creatures utterly unlike it, now can we?

These, I can safely say, are works of true Originality, if only in the unique blends and surprising allocations of genre, character, and plot. I love it. I'm seriously impressed as hell. :)

Thanks for a winner, Mr. Bennett!

Petrik says

3.5/5 stars

I climbed the City of Stairs happily, and then I stumbled a bit in the City of Blades.

City of Blades is the second book in Robert Jackson Bennett's The Divine Cities trilogy. It's overall a great book but in my opinion, this was a far cry from the greatness of City of Stairs. There are several reasons for this so let me begin with the problems I had on the book first.

Out of the three main protagonists in the previous book, Mulaghesh was the one that I care the least. She was interesting when she's a side character around Shara and Sigrud, but to have her be the main character all by herself with several new characters for almost the first half of the book was not a good experience for me. She didn't get interesting for me until the halfway point of the book and this brought me again to my other reason. Except for Signe, all the new characters were really bland and not interesting, the villain was also predictable right from the start. Structure-wise, this was almost a complete copy of City of Stairs storytelling structure; this is both a good and bad case but I'll get into it later.

The first book was also a slow burn but at least it established the main compelling mystery plot immediately right from the first chapter, making the reader know that there will be a grand conclusion to the plot from the get-go. The mystery in the first book was really well-written and well-paced, this one just seems

directionless for the majority of the time. The first half comprised of only Mulaghesh exploring the city of Voortyashtan and it felt so damn long. The plot was also very straightforward where City of Stairs was more multi-layered and complex. In conclusion, my main problem with this book is that nothing grabbed my interest in the first half. **It's really not until Sigrud appears in the book (around 40%) that the book finally grabbed my attention.**

Up until today, I have only DNFed one book and I'll admit, I have considered DNFing this book in the first half. I usually don't read any reviews of the book I'm reading but I just had to for this one, I'm glad I did because apparently a lot of readers feel the same the book: a boring first half and a great second half; because of this, it pushed me to stick through it and I'm happy for it because oh boy, that turning point in the halfway mark of the book was amazing, turning everything I previously disliked about the book into something good. I'm not kidding, that event in the halfway mark was simply jaw-dropping.

“Lonely places draw lonely people...They echo inside us, and we cannot help but listen.”

The story took place five years after the end of City of Stairs and like I said earlier, not only this time the main character is different, the setting of the plot is also different. We're not in Bulikov anymore but in the city of Voortyashtan. City of Blades is very similar to its predecessor in terms of storytelling structure, the good thing about this is that it still works. Why change something that's not broken, right? The bad thing about this though: there is almost nothing new in this sequel and I was hoping for more variety.

Picture: Voortya Sentinel by Mblank17

One of the main difference in the story is that the theme of this book focused more on war, its effect, and the meaning of it, meanwhile the first book focused more on religion. This makes for a fresh experience, especially when all the discussion on war and PTSD were just irresistible and applicable to our world.

“I was taught that peace is the absence of war. But I wonder if these days we've simply replaced conventional war with a war of paper. I'm not so sure which is better.”

In terms of world-building and prose, there are no complaints from me here. Although the new city in this book isn't as fascinating as Bulikov, Bennett's world-building skill remains top-notch. The prose was still really enjoyable to read and I just love reading about the world, divinities, and cities that Bennett created within his trilogy. Plus, I think it's been a while since I highlighted so many passages within a fantasy series and I just love how thought-provoking Bennett's prose can be at times.

“Do you not enslave people now?” asks the man. “Chains are forged of many strange metals. Poverty is one. Fear, another. Ritual and custom are yet more. All actions are forms of slavery,

methods of forcing people to do what they deeply wish not to do.”

Although I’m a bit critical towards this book, overall I do think that City of Blades was a great sequel. It’s just a shame that in my opinion, it wasn’t up to the standard set by City of Stairs. To sum up what I think about this sequel: **Bad first half, incredible second half.** I will continue to the last book immediately I can’t wait to find out how this trilogy will end. I just hope City of Miracles will deliver a satisfying conclusion that this trilogy deserves.

“Deserve.’ How preoccupied we are with that. With what we should have, with what we are owed. I wonder if any word has ever caused more heartache.”

*You can find **this** and the rest of my Adult Epic/High Fantasy & Sci-Fi reviews at **BookNest***

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

5 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <http://bibliosanctum.com/2016/01/18/b...>

City of Blades is the second novel in Robert Jackson Bennett’s The Divine Cities sequence featuring my favorite character from City of Stairs...and it might surprise you to know it’s not Sigrud! I know the big Dreyling was a fan favorite from the first book, but for me personally, the most intriguing and admirable character has always been and will always be General Turyin Mulaghesh. I was already waiting on pin and needles to get my hands on City of Blades after the amazing time I had with City of Stairs, but my excitement went through the roof after the publisher description came out and I found out that the good general was going to star as the main protagonist.

Anyway, you’ve been duly warned. I promise I will try and make this review more than just a love letter to Mulaghesh. But no promises.

Taking place approximately five years after the first book, City of Blades opens in a tropical paradise where General Turyin Mulaghesh has quietly retreated to after her retirement from the Saypuri army. But thanks to a bureaucratic mishap, she finds herself pulled back into the service of Prime Minister Shara Komayd, who sends her to the ravaged city of Voortyashtan on a covert mission. Once the home of a death goddess and her legions of fearsome warriors, the city has become a stricken ruin after the downfall of its Divinity. Now it is the site of much change but also rising tensions: the construction of a new harbor has caused violence to erupt among the local tribes; the Saypuri military presence is on edge trying to keep the peace; and unknown to all but a few, a seemingly miraculous new type of metal has been discovered in Voortyashtan whose properties may potentially alter the face of the world.

Mulaghesh has been tasked to not only investigate this new ore but also to track down the last ministry agent who traveled to Voortyashtan to poke around only to end up missing. But while the general knows she’s been thrown into a veritable rat’s nest of secrets and lies, her loyalty has always been to Saypur and her fellow troops. Justifiably miffed that she’s been dragged out of her isolation and retirement, Mulaghesh is

nonetheless determined to get down to the bottom of this mystery, because deep down in her heart of hearts she is still a true soldier—and a true soldier knows what it means to serve her country and her people.

However, the more she digs, the more dark secrets she unearths about Voortyashtan, and the more unpleasant memories resurface from her violent past. What I love about this book is that there are so many significant revelations about my favorite character, some of which were interesting to discover, and others which may chill your blood. In City of Blades readers get to see a whole different side to Turyin Mulaghesh, one that we never knew existed. At the end of the day, she's a much deeper and more complex character than even I gave her credit for, but Robert Jackson Bennett also did a great job moderating her development, keeping her genuine and flawed. Mulaghesh is in Voortyashtan to do what needs to be done, but once you peel back the layers you can't help but think there might also be a part of her seeking some kind of redemption for the atrocities she once committed.

This should come as no surprise, but I liked City of Blades even more than the first book (and I liked City of Stairs plenty, so that's really saying something). Structurally, I felt this sequel read more like a mystery, with Mulaghesh reluctantly playing the detective/secret agent role—an idea that appealed to me immensely—but thematically I also found the story to be heavier and more profound than its predecessor. There are important moments in this book that touch upon topics like post-traumatic stress disorder, the price of victory, and what it means to be a soldier. Philosophically, it goes deeper in exploring the individual and collective beliefs related to the divine and to the afterlife, and this is also where the author greatly expands upon the world building. Bottom line, Bennett pulls no punches in this one, and City of Blades is bolder and harder hitting in almost every aspect.

Still, for me it all comes back down to General Turyin Mulaghesh. In fact, Bennett does a fantastic job with every single one of his characters, as we've seen we've seen with Shara and Sigrud from the first book, both of whom make appear in City of Blades again along with a fascinating new cast of supporting characters. But Mulaghesh? Mulaghesh is in a league of her own. She is simply—bar none—the best character I have ever encountered. It's so rare to find a fantasy novel with a middle-aged woman as the protagonist, rarer still to find one who is also a veteran living with a disability. Not that a losing her hand has slowed her down one bit, of course...and she's liable to punch me in the face for even suggesting that might be the case. To be honest, I can't remember the last time I've felt such appreciation for a character in a fantasy novel, and it's a true testament to Bennett's talent for building such a strong, believable and engaging protagonist.

What more can I say? I know it's only January, but I am already sure this book will end up being one of my favorites of 2016. It was everything I hoped for and more, giving me so many reasons to be happy that I got to revisit The Divine Cities. In a word, City of Blades is perfection. This one gets full five stars and my hearty recommendation.

Philip says

4 stars.

A completely unexpected sort-of-sequel to a great book that I didn't think should have a sequel. City of Stairs displayed some incredible world-building and an interesting plot that came to a very logical end. I had serious doubts about the necessity of this book but, upon reading, have decided that it *is* quite necessary.

The book takes place five years later in a different setting with a different main character and only weaves a

few plot points into a story that could more or less coincidentally take place in the same world. Consensus seemed to be that this is superior to the first book and for the first half or so I couldn't see why. It's much more straightforward in the beginning and, despite being a "mystery," there isn't a ton of suspense. I even found myself getting a little (gasp!) bored. But after the stage was set, BOOM. The second half came out of nowhere and sucker punched me.

As with the previous book, this is quite a blend of genres- mystery, military fiction, fantasy- but first and foremost I think it's a character study. Bennett plucked out a relatively minor character who I felt very little connection with and turned her into an incredibly fascinating human. I remember not being particularly impressed with the characterization in general in City of Stairs. On the cusp of being three-dimensional but never quite reaching that bar. Here, not only is Mulaghesh transformed, even the tiny bits of Shara we glimpse gave me a lot more insight into her. We're also introduced to some other wonderful characters, not least of whom is Sigrud's daughter, Signe. Bennett has a lot to say on the nature of war and heroism and, as in the previous book, I found this to have some (interesting? Uncomfortable? Coincidental?) parallels to actual world history.

With a last act that floored me (view spoiler) and a solemn, heartbreakingly hopeful ending I'm again inclined to say, why not end things here? This is a perfectly sensible place to end. Why write a third novel? But if this book is any indication, I'm sure City of Miracles will justify its existence completely.

Melissa ♥ Dog/Wolf Lover ♥ Martin says

MY BLOG: Melissa Martin's Reading List

This book was sooooooo good! My freaking hero is General Turyin Mulaghesh! She is older and still bad to the bone, puts up with nothing.. well until they force her out of retirement, which makes her mad as hell.

I think I'm just going to put in a few excerpts first from my hero and then get on with the review.

*"The first murder took place deep in disputed territory, General. It's not safe."
"Neither am I. I can handle myself."*

*"Leave now," says Signe, "and you'll only inspire more questions."
"She leaves because it's true!" shouts Balakilya, striding to stand in the central aisle. "She fears the truth, so she flees from it!"
"See?" says Signe.
"General Mulaghesh," says Biswal, looking up, "perhaps if you could spare a few words for-"
"She's come to murder whatever's left of our culture!" cries Balakilya.
"She's here to force us to bow to the whip of Saypur!" shouts another man.*

"Oh for the love of..." Mulaghesh walks to the railing. "You want to know why I'm here? Here of all places on this damned world!"

"Tell us!" shouts one of the men below. "Tell us!"

"Fine!" snarls Mulaghesh. "I'm on vacation, you dumb ass sons of bitches!"

A loud silence echoes over the Galleries. Mulaghesh turns and strides away. As she walks through the door she hears someone say, very quietly, "Did she say vacation?"

I just loved her throughout the whole book. I'm not going to tell you what it's about, you can read the blurb. But I just found another hero in this woman, she's older, she has one arm and a wooden one that works okay for her, she is awesome with weapons and she's got some snark that cracks me up.

There are some crazy stuff going on in this city, Mulaghesh would never have guessed the evil place she just got dropped! There are different groups of people, there are evil beings, ghosts, different realms, crazy people doing crazy things to each other, some magical ore, and the list goes on and on.

I was so glad to find that Sigrud was back and he's just as cool as ever! I love him too :-)

At times I got confused in the book and it came back around and I got an idea of what was going on. But it is so freaking good, magical...fighting...killings...divine things..... I believe the author weaved a wonderful tale with this one. I think I like this one better than the first one and I'm thinking/hoping there is going to be another one! I can't even imagine where that one will take us.

There are some sad things that happen in the book as per the norm, there are also a few gruesome things, but it all makes sense in the end, oh.. and the end! I was like.. I knew something wasn't right with that person and what the.....

I'm not one that is good with words so let me just say again, the book is awesome and read it :-)

I would like to thank Blogging For Books for a free print copy of this book in exchange for my honest review.

Hannah says

I am in love with the world and the mythology Robert Jackson Bennet created and very much in awe with its intricacy and originality. I was getting a bit disillusioned with the genre but this fantasy trilogy is making me a very happy fan. If you haven't already: go and read it!

Set several years after the events of the first book, the world has not changed as much as Shara wanted it to. When a Ministry operative disappears in Voortyashtan (the city created by the now dead Goddess of War), Shara manipulates Turyin Mulaghesh to go and try to find her. Mulaghesh is still struggling with the awful things she has done in life and feels like she has to atone.

I adored this theme of atonement and of doing better and of trying to leave the world a better place. This book is decidedly darker than the first; Turyin is a lot more hardened and she has done some truly terrible things in the past wars. I loved spending more time with her and this book manages to make her even more

badass than the first while also rendering her more human and fragile. She is a brilliantly done character - which is important to me because I always struggle when series shift to a new view point.

What makes this book stand out even more is the absolutely stunning way Robert Jackson Bennet has with words - he creates wonderful sentences and turns of phrases that lift this already brilliant book even higher. His descriptions of the otherworldy settings are a beauty to behold and I cannot wait to see what he conjures up in the next book.

First sentence: "Somewhere around mile three on the trek up the hill Pitry Suturashni decides he would not describe the Javrati sun as 'warm and relaxing', as the travel advertisements say."

Celeste says

You can find this review and more at Novel Notions.

"Dying nobly is preferable to living savagely."

I'm completely blown away by Bennett's world building. ***City of Blades* thrilled me and surprised me and cut me to the quick with its rich character development and lore.** I cared so much about the characters, and felt every emotion they felt as I read. Bennett's world is unlike any I've ever come across; he absolutely excels at creating both empathetic characters and compelling mythology and history to add a depth and uniqueness to his writing that I believe to be rare.

"O, the things we kill for our dreams, forgetting all the while we shall wake up to find them naught but dust and ash!

What fools we are to pretend that when we walk to war we do not bring our loved ones with us."

City of Blades picks up five years after the events of *City of Stairs*. General Turyin Mulaghesh has retired at long last. Or, at least, she thought she had. She's roped into one final job by a friend who won't take no for an answer. Against her better judgement, she returns to a part of the world she hoped to never revisit, in order to investigate a mystery completely outside her realm of expertise.

"Chains are forged of many strange metals. Poverty is one. Fear, another. Ritual and custom are yet more. All actions are forms of slavery, methods of forcing people to do what they deeply wish *not* to do."

Mulaghesh is a complete different main character from Shara in *City of Stairs*. Where Shara has made a weapon of her wits, Mulaghesh is herself a weapon. After enlisting in the military at the tender age of

sixteen, Mulaghesh has spent the rest of her life in military service and retains the body of a fighter despite her years. But while Mulaghesh isn't Shara, she's no slouch in the mental department. She's a straight shooter and a clear thinker, and all she wants to do is serve and protect. I found her to be the epitome of who a soldier should be.

"A soldier serves not to take, they don't strive to *have* something, but rather they strive so that others might one day have something. And a blade isn't a happy friend to a soldier, but a burden, a heavy one, to be used scrupulously and carefully. A good soldier does everything they can so they do not *have* to kill. That's what training is for. But if we have to, we will. And when we do that we give up some part of ourselves, as we're asked to do."

Books from the perspective of a warrior of Mulaghesh's type and caliber rarely make it into my list of favorites because it's not a lifestyle I can at all relate to, but this book is definitely an exception. And while she is a warrior, she is first and foremost a soldier, and she does an exemplary job of demonstrating the difference. The inner struggles Mulaghesh deals with regarding her past and what it means to be a soldier really resonated with me, and I found her incredibly compelling. Middle aged women of the armed forces aren't often represented as main characters, and I loved the life experience she brought to the table. She wrestled with remorse and duty and honor, and those struggles were deep and real.

"Killing echoes inside you. It never goes away. Maybe some who kill don't know they've lost something, but they have."

While Mulaghesh is the central character, she is by no means the only one. We have return characters from the previous book as well as brand new characters. I won't reveal any names, but I was incredibly impressed at the depth and development Bennett wrested from side characters in this story. There were events I found completely shocking because of how well developed some such characters were. This isn't a world where departed loved ones spring back to life or where the consequences of your actions are wiped away because you perform a heroic deed. **Bennett's world is gritty and dark and real, and sorrow doesn't pass you by just because you're important.** Everyone has demons they're fighting and struggles they might never overcome.

"'Deserve.' How preoccupied we are with that. With what we should have, with what we are owed. I wonder if any word has ever caused more heartache."

Once again we are presented with a mystery that remains a mystery until Bennett is ready for his reveal. I appreciate so much that so far, there is nothing remotely predictable about this trilogy. We also get more background of the fascinating mythology of the Divine. **The religious element of this series feels so original to me, and is more thought provoking than any other fictional religion I've come across.**

"People often ask me what I see when I look at the world. My answer is simple, and true.

Possibilities. I see possibilities.”

I highly recommend this series if to any fantasy fan, and **if you enjoy more philosophical, cerebral fantasy, this is definitely the series for you.** Rarely have I read such a strong second installment in any trilogy. I can't wait to see how Bennett concludes this story in City of Miracles.

Another buddy read with the ever lovely TS. Happy to report that we both enjoyed this installment as much as we did the first!

Gavin says

I felt like this was a worthy sequel to the excellent City of Stairs. It is thought provoking fantasy set in an original, well crafted, fantasy world. Just like the first book the story was a murder mystery with plenty of intrigue and personal dilemmas for the characters to deal with.

We got a new Continental city and a new lead character for this second book. General Mulaghesh takes star billing on this one. She had retired after her heroics in the battle of Bulikov but Shara manages to convince her to take an off the books assignment in distant Voortyashtan to investigate the disappearance of a missing spy. Voortyashtan's Goddess Voortya is confirmed as dead but a few mysteries soon have Mulaghesh wondering if the city still has some Divine attention!

The story was decent. It was more intriguing and interesting than truly exciting but it was decent enough. There was a slight lull in the middle stages where I felt like an action scene dragged on just a touch too long but this did start and finish strongly. If I had another tiny criticism it was that Bennett just went a bit too bleak with this one. I think one death less might have resulted in a better balance between the hope/despair ratio of the story. I do not mind dark reads, and this definitely had some dark moments, but I'm not a fan of unremittingly bleak tales and towards the end this one just inched a tiny bit close to that for my liking.

The new city and the new lead character worked quite well. Voortyashtan itself was not so fascinating as Bulikov but it did provide plenty of interesting characters and some fun intrigue in its local politics. Mulaghesh was a big hit as a lead character. Her no nonsense style combined with her efforts to redeem herself from some past mistakes made her very easy to root for.

All in all I did enjoy this one. I probably liked the first book a touch better but I suspect that is because of the freshness factor of the world building. Some of that wonder was lost in this instalment but the characters and the story were just as strong.

Rating: 4 stars.

Audio Note: I felt like Alma Cuervo did a good job with the audio.

Mayim de Vries says

There are some authors who only know how to write one book. And so they write it over and over

again under different titles.

General Turyin Mulaghesh “*a woman whose glance was so bright and piercing you almost wanted to check yourself for bruises after she looked at you*” is not what she used to be. If you remember the description from the City of Stairs, you see her

“*dressed in her uniform which is pressed, polished, spotless. Her hair is tied back in a brutal bun, and her knee-high black boots boast a mirror shine. Her left breast is covered in medals; her right handles the considerable overflow. Overall, she does not look well dressed, but rather carefully assembled.*”

In the "City of Blades", Mulaghesh is our main protagonist. This once belligerent and obnoxious woman is in the process of slow decay after deliberate withdrawal from public life. She is pulled out of her early retirement by no-one else than Ashara Komayd, the Prime Minister of Saypur, and sent to “*Voortyashtan, ass-end of the universe, armpit of the world*” where a person is shipped to only if they “*sleep with or kill the wrong person*” on an undercover mission, i.e. a thing that she is the least predisposed and trained to do. But Turyin Mulaghesh is someone who has chosen to live her life for the safety and betterment of others. She has chosen, in a word, to serve. And so, serve she goes.

The present city of Voortyashtan is but a sad remnant of the ancient oceanopolis, capital of the goddess of war and death Voortya. Festering resentment against Saypuri occupation, clan feuds, an ambitious construction project that can alter the life of the whole continent, worrying miraculous substances, and a missing agent is what Mulaghesh dives into. Head first. And one-handed.

At its most basic this book is about promises. After all, as Mulaghesh notes, “*that's what the whole civilised society is founded upon, isn't it?*” Not so much the easy, daily ones (I promise you will like this book), rather those stronger than ourselves (I will love you until the eternity and one day longer).

“*What wild promises we make in order to justify the worst of decisions.*”

How to make those promises matter? What kind of promises will be kept even after we perish?

“*Deaths of all kinds echo on. And sometimes, it seems, they drown out all of life*”

At its most basic this book is about war. Not so much war as an absence of peace (this tends to be trivialised in the age that invented PTSD), rather war conceived as the essence of peace, its absolutely inevitable element. The war between Saypur and the continent continues; it is a quiet one, but still deadly.

“*And there are lots of ways to win a war. A war isn't between armies, it's between nations.*”

‘Are you a part of me? Am I a part of you?’ This is the question war asks the mankind and the City of Blades tries to answer to. Voortya is a goddess born of the Hobbesian part of human soul where the perpetual *bellum omnium contra omnes* (war of all against all) has always been and will always be the natural state of things.

And this, we can see war either as the inevitable or the inexcusable.

“*War and conflict form the sea through which nation-states swim...war is momentum. War is natural. And war makes one strong.*”

If it is the former, “A soldier does not give, they take! A soldier does not serve, but forces others to serve! A soldier does not cede power, but wields it, wrests it from the hands of any who dares lay claim to it! A soldier never gives, a soldier never serves! A soldier fights only to kill, to claim, to take, to conquer! That is what we are!” If it is the latter, war is simple service and

“a true soldier, I think, does not take. A soldier gives...And a blade is not a happy friend to a soldier, but a burden, a heavy one to be used scrupulously and carefully...And a blade isn’t a happy friend to a soldier, but a burden, a heavy one, to be used scrupulously and carefully.”

At its most basic this book is about life. And love, about defiant love.

“We are beautiful, strange creatures of heat and noise, of sudden, inscrutable impulses, of savage passions... Yet when we consider our own existence, we think ourselves calm, composed, rational, in control . . . All the while forgetting that we are at the mercy of these rebellious, hidden systems – and the elements, of course. And when the elements have their way, and the tiny fire within us flickers out.”

In this respect, **Signe Harkvaldsson is one of the best characters I came across the numerous pages of fantasy books I have read.** And while sometimes I had a feeling that the book drags a bit, the passages she featured in left me with wanting to know her more, know her better.

“Mulaghesh sees many things in that smile. She sees charm, wit, and a roiling sea of cleverness; she sees a sharp, diamond-hard attention, recording everything that’s witnessed; but what Mulaghesh sees most in that broad, white smile is an unshakable, concrete confidence that its owner is at any given moment the smartest person in the room.”

My objections to the book are not many, but they are substantial. **Mainly, while City of Blades tells a different story than the City of Stairs, it does so in the same way, using the same means, the same pathways.**

“So if this stuff is miraculous, thinks Mulaghesh, then maybe yet another Divinity isn’t as dead as we’d like it to be.”

In short, the reader has a feeling that it is the same book with a recurring pattern, circling repetitions of something that should have been a unique and one-of-a-kind occurrence, i.e. the emanation of the divine.

“There’s a place below this one, floating on an ocean underneath reality” and the boundaries are beginning to blur. Voortyashtan is yet another Bulikov, a scar in reality, Mulghesh stands in for Shara, Shara becomes Vinya, and only Sigrud remains more or less himself. (view spoiler)

Overall, if you liked the first part of the Divine Cities, there is no reason for you to dislike this one provided that you do not expect anything more and anything different. After all, we love the books we loved already.

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Other Divine Cities:

1. City of Stairs
2. City of Blades

TS Chan says

City of Blades is easily one of the best books I've read this year; it has almost everything I could ask for in a sequel that builds upon a fantastic start to a trilogy.

It is a rare occasion that a middle book makes it into my favourites shelf, and to think I've almost decided to put aside reading The Divine Cities. Then again, City of Blades does not feel like a middle book because the previous story in City of Stairs is self-contained and had its resolution. By now, it appears to me that each book is like a stand-alone in a series with a fairly significant time-jump in between. The political landscape has progressed, and the characters whom we have met in the earlier book have moved on with their lives.

What made the sequel work so well for me is that the main character dominating the narrative is not someone new but one who I am already invested in from the first book. Mulaghesh, the jaded ex-general has been persuaded to perform one last operative, purportedly to serve out her incomplete tenure to earn the full pension payouts of her position. When I first picked up City of Blades, I wondered how I would take to having Mulaghesh as the main POV in this volume. As much as I enjoyed her parts in the earlier one, I was not certain having her dominate the narrative will work for me.

Truth be told, in short order, I loved it! Bennett brought something different to the table by giving us the perspective of a much more mature character in Mulaghesh. From an hyper-intelligent political spy moving to the peak of her career to an accomplished, steadfast but tired ex-soldier who reluctantly comes out of her secluded retirement, I am yet again astounded with the stellar characterisation in these books.

Mulaghesh shares a common trait with Shara, and that is the dogged determination to get things done, and done right because she cares. However, while Shara is a scholar with more knowledge of the Divine than most people do, Mulaghesh does not have that advantage. As she delves into the mystery of the missing ministry operative, Mulaghesh uncovers unsettling and portent signs of that which cannot be explained, or in other words, Miracles. A disturbingly dark past event in her life - one Mulaghesh prefers to keep buried and forgotten - is brought squarely into focus in a former Divine city of the goddess of war and death, Voortya. Mulaghesh is still a highly competent and tough fighter in her 50's and her POV is so engaging because her demeanour belies what she truly is on the inside. Perhaps I can use the analogy of crusty bread - a hard and thin outer layer protecting a soft fluffy centre (I wouldn't let her hear me call her fluffy though).

And this is why I believe that Bennett is such an incredible author. Mulaghesh didn't just miraculously appear as a character in City of Blades simply because she was the perfect choice to carry off the book's gritty commentary on war and death, and what it means to be a soldier. Her introduction in the City of Stairs showed who Mulaghesh is as a person; we can appreciate her concern and care for the soldiers and people under her watch. And who she is, plays a very crucial role in the culmination of the plot in this book.

"This is the service, and we soldiers are servants. Sure, when people think of a soldier, they think of soldiers taking. They think of us taking territory, taking the enemy, taking a city or a country, taking treasure, or blood. This grand, abstract idea of 'taking,' as if we were pirates, swaggering and brandishing our weapons, bullying and intimidating people. But a soldier, a true soldier, I think, does not take. A soldier gives."

As much as I was already enjoying the book right from the start, I was thrilled when Sigrud finally made his appearance. Without a doubt, the most badass scene belonged to him yet again, but that's not all there is to this intimidating man. I don't want to spoil anything except to say that the character development in Sigrud is taken to another level by the end of this book and it was quite a hard-hitting one.

Lead characters cannot stand on their own and to fully expand on their identities as realistic and relatable individuals, the supporting ones need to be equally and empathically developed. Suffice to say that it is the manner in which these side characters bring out the nuances of Mulaghesh's and Sigrud's personalities which made our main characters so compelling. And a crucible of violence, death and unrelenting grief pushes their boundaries to the limits.

The rich, vivid and evocative worldbuilding continues to fascinate me to no end. Through the perspective of Mulaghesh, we see how the Blink altered another Divine city. The co-existence of the Miracles and the mundane result in the most surreal and bizarre outcomes when the Divinities died.

I also absolutely adore mystery plots that are rooted in lore, religion and mythology. Just in this one book, I was treated to an absorbing mystery of my favourite kind, 'real' characters who I feel so much for, a world and its lore which I cannot get enough of, and loads of thought-provoking passages that highlight allegorical themes so relevant to our real world.

Deserve. How preoccupied we are with that. With what we should have, with what we are owed. I wonder if any word has ever caused more heartache.

The Divine Cities is shaping up to be one of my favourite series with its exceptional characters, captivating stories, lush worldbuilding and impeccable writing in a genre-defying narrative. I am craving for more and hope that the final book, City of Miracles, will live up to this excellent sequel.

This review can also be found at Booknest

Another buddy read with the lovely and wonderful bookish buddy, Celeste, who loved it as much as I did. Her review on City of Blades is exceptional, so do check it out.
