



## Sins of Empire

*Brian McClellan*

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## **Sins of Empire** Brian McClellan

The young nation of Fatrasta is a turbulent place - a frontier destination for criminals, fortune-hunters, brave settlers, and sorcerers seeking relics of the past. Only the iron will of the lady chancellor and her secret police holds the capital city of Landfall together against the unrest of a suppressed population and the machinations of powerful empires.

The insurrection that threatens Landfall must be purged with wile and force, a task which falls on the shoulders of a spy named Michel Bravis, convicted war hero Ben Styke, and Lady Vlora Flint, a mercenary general with a past as turbulent as Landfall's present.

As loyalties are tested, revealed, and destroyed, a grim specter as old as time has been unearthed in this wild land, and the people of Landfall will soon discover that rebellion is the least of their worries.

## **Sins of Empire Details**

Date : Published March 7th 2017 by Orbit

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Author : Brian McClellan

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Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Epic Fantasy, High Fantasy

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# From Reader Review Sins of Empire for online ebook

Nils | nilsreviewsit says

‘The smell of the dead, the wind in his hair, the blood on his steel: it made him feel vibrant and alive like nothing in the world had ever done for him.’

?

Sins of Empire is the first instalment of the Gods of Blood and Powder series by Brian McClellan. If you’ve been following me for a while you’ll know how much I love The Powder Mage trilogy, so you can imagine my anticipation in reading this novel which is set in the same world. I’m delighted to tell you that this book was an absolute pleasure to read!

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Sins of Empire is set in the nation of Fatrasta, where there is much unrest between the Palo civilisation and the Kressians. When an ancient power is uncovered, events escalate and the fate of mankind rests in the hands of some unlikely heroes.

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The plot moves at a fairly slow pace, McClellan steadily builds up the intrigue and continuously keeps you guessing as to what is really going on beneath the surface. This was something I really enjoyed as there was a sense of it building towards something monumental.

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As I found with the first trilogy, McClellan is excellent at creating fantastic memorable characters. All the characters within Sins of Empire were heavily flawed, and felt very realistic.

My favourites were Mad Ben Stykes and Vlora. Stykes was an instant favourite for me, I’ve found that I’m always drawn to veteran soldiers with a legendary reputation, especially ones that are slightly crazy! Stykes was perfect! He was definitely feared by many but he had so much heart. I love the way McClellan portrays father figures in his books, and to see the way Stykes would care for the orphan Celine, really was heartwarming.

Vlora was a recurring character from the first series, she was one I wasn’t actually keen on, but in this book she became a favourite! She was an effective leader, who wasn’t afraid to take risks as long as the ultimate outcome was little bloodshed. I just loved her!

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Lastly I have to mention that Sins of Empire has an absolutely epic ending! I spent an entire afternoon glued to the book because it was so action packed and exciting, I just couldn’t put it down. There was definitely plenty of the muskets and mayhem that always draws me to McClellan’s writing.

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Rob says

**Executive Summary:** An excellent start to a new trilogy in Brian McClellan's Power Mage series. This one is a lot more political than the previous series was, which may be why I think this may be his best book yet.

**Audiobook:** I got Promise of Blood in ebook for cheap, so I stuck to that format for the rest of the series. Now I wish I had gone audiobook instead. Christian Rodska is absolutely fantastic. He doesn't attempt to do

any feminine voices, which is probably a smart move on his part, but his male voices are all fantastic. I especially like the voice he used for Ben Styke.

### **Full Review**

I hesitated for about half a second on giving this 4.5 stars instead of 5, but then I remembered how I spent like 10 minutes staring at a wall to get in "just one more chapter". The books you hate to put down and look forward to picking up, are always the deciding factor for me between 4 and 5 stars.

If I had one complaint about the original Powder Mage series, it was that the rather intriguing female characters were mostly relegated to supporting cast. This was especially true for Vlora Flint.

This book picks up about 10 years after the events of The Autumn Republic, and finds Vlora and many of her countryman working as mercenaries for the nation of Fatrasta. I was really happy to see Olem again. He was one of my favorites of the original series.

I haven't read any of the shorter works set in this world, but this book finally gave Vlora some character development I would have liked to see in the last series.

In addition to Vlora we're introduced to two new characters who are both natives of Fatrasta. The first Michel Bravis works as a spy for the secret police. He did not start off very likable to me, though his story was always interesting.

Ben Styke on the other hand was instantly a favorite, albeit a bit of a trope with the grizzled war hero/turned anti-hero. I thought all three stories started out immediately interesting and converged quite nicely by the end of this book.

I personally don't enjoy military fiction as much as I do political fiction. There was certainly a lot of politics in the original series, but it definitely felt more like an action/military series more than anything. There was a ton of action with the occasional political intrigue mixed in to move the action along.

This book seemed to be the opposite. Much of it was heavy on the politics of Fatrasta, and the role of our three POVs within it. But fear not, the excellent action/battle scenes of the previous series are still quite present, albeit to a lesser degree in the previous series.

I'll be curious to see if that trend keeps up with the next book, or if he'll be ratcheting up the action once again. Either way, I'm very eager to get my hands on it. Brian McClellan has quickly become one of my favorite authors, and this book did not disappoint.

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### **Peter says**

[Vlora and Olem, but specifically Vlora (hide spoiler)]

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### **Roy says**

4.5\*

I read this earlier in the year and wasn't overly fond of it. I gave it a 2nd read after a friend pestered me to read it again, and for some reason it changed my view. 10 years have passed and we enter a new city with some new characters and some old characters from the original trilogy who had smaller bit roles. Great action, pacing was fun, characters were not as strong as the 1st trilogy, but still likeable. Perfect setup/intrigue for the 1st 3/4 and a great climatic battle in the last 1/4. I did feel like the plot was a little simplistic relative to the original trilogy but it still was fun. I guess I must not have been in the right state of mind when I originally read this, because in re-reading, it's 100% changed my mind. Can't wait for book 2 although I guess book 2 and 3 will deal with separate godstones.

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## **Mogsy (MMOGC) says**

4 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2017/04/20/...>

As you know, I'm quite a fan of Brian McClellan's Powder Mage trilogy, and so I was thrilled when I discovered he was planning to write a new series called Gods of Blood and Powder set in the same universe. *Sins of Empire* is a return to this world of magic and war, taking place approximately ten years after the end of *The Autumn Republic*. While the main cast may contain a few familiar faces, this novel is in fact a new story taking place in a new setting, so whether you are an old fan looking to dive back into the world or a newcomer contemplating this as a possible place to jump on board, this book is accessible to all. (However, a small caveat: if you haven't completed the Powder Mage trilogy yet and do intend to at some point, keep in mind *Sins of Empire* may contain some spoilers especially for how that series ends.)

The story begins by depositing us in Fatrasta, a relatively young nation that recently gained independence through a violent, bloody war. Still, despite its turbulent political landscape, the country is booming—travelers from all walks of life are flocking to its borders looking for new opportunities, from criminals feeling prosecution from their nations of origin to intrepid settlers that see this new land as fresh start for their families. Then there are the mercenaries, come to Fatrasta to enjoy the patronage of Chancellor Lindet who governs her land with an iron fist. Among them are the Riflejack army, led by Lady Vlora Flint and her partner Colonel Olem, veterans of the Adro Revolution which took place a decade ago. When an insurrection threatens to destabilize Fatrasta even further, Vlora and Olem are called back to the capital city of Landfall to help put down the rebellion and root out its leader, a mysterious rebel known as Mama Palo.

Meanwhile in a high security labor camp, a convicted war hero who helped win Fatrasta her independence fails to make parole. Angry and demoralized, Ben Styke is just about to accept that he will never taste freedom again when a strange visitor claiming to be a lawyer shows up and makes him an offer he can't refuse. Somewhere else, an ambitious spy named Michel Bravis receives a dangerous assignment to track down the individual or groups responsible for printing and distributing an anti-government publication called "*Sins of Empire*". Even though he feels woefully unqualified for such detective work, Michel has no choice but to accept the mission. After all, this may be the path to earn him the promotion he's always wanted...though on the other hand, failure could mean much more than his downfall.

Together, these separate threads make up the story of *Sins of Empire*. In classic epic fantasy fashion, we follow and bounce around between the perspectives as the narrative builds, until all the plot lines converge. Those who have read the Powder Mage books will already be familiar with Vlora who was a supporting character in the original trilogy, but now it's her chance to be a main protagonist in her own right. I must confess, it was a real treat for me to catch up with her again. Thinking back to when *Promise of Blood* first came out, one criticism I had of the book involved the underutilization of the female character POVs, and

even when compared to Nila and Ka-poel, Vloro received relatively little attention. Oh, how the tables have turned now. Despite the popularity of Ka-poel, it is Vloro who I've always had a soft spot for, and it was a joy to watch her take charge and shine bright in this series opener.

Credit must also go to newcomers Ben Styke and Michel Bravis, since they too helped make Sins of Empire a strong introduction. While neither of their stories are as interesting to me as Vloro's at this point, the good news is I can easily see their roles expanding beyond what they are now with future books, and hopefully in time they will become more than just "violent brute with a heart of gold" and "neurotic spy" respectively. However, it's important to note as well that both their sections provided a bit of mystery to this novel, adding to the suspense as little by little the characters uncover more secrets behind the rebellion in Falastra, not to mention a few shocking revelations. I loved the unexpected twists and game-changing surprises, and I have no doubt these will also be greatly appreciated by other Powder Mage fans!

In addition, the author has clearly learned a lot from completing his debut trilogy. Sins of Empire is solidly written, and as the first book of a series, I feel the plot is also more compelling and better constructed compared to Promise of Blood. All in all it is a great introductory volume, accomplishing its goal of setting up a strong foundation, at once familiar but also different enough from the original trilogy that I find myself excited to see where McClellan will take us next. The ending teases much more to come, and I can't wait for more answers in the sequel.

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## Stefan Bach says

Okay, main character of this series is Vloro, right? **Vloro Flint**, right?

Same no-POV, misread, misunderstood, shallowly developed Vloro Flint from **Powder Mage** series that everyone complained about?

Well, that's the problem.

*New series, new world, new timeline – same Vloro Flint.*

And why am I more invested in characters like **Ben Styke**? **Michel Whatever-His-Surname-Actually-Was?** **Mr. Tampo** and **Mama Palo**? Oh, don't get me started on Mr. Tampo and Mama Palo, characters which were singlehandedly responsible for higher score this book - with its boring and repetitive plot in which their unengaged protagonists, antagonists and side characters are yawning-contagious dull company of humdrums - undeservedly gets.

But no, due to spoilers, I cannot say anything about Mr. Tampo and Mama Palo, and the reasons why they save this book from deathly monotony on one hand while suffocating and undermining this book's main protagonist (*that's Vloro Flint for you, and yes, I need to repeat that once in a while, since author didn't seemed to bother enough doing exactly that in his own book!*) on the other one.

I'm not sure I'm going to be able to get this out of my system any time soon and I want to move on, so I'll be very brief.

### **Good things:**

Great worldbuilding added on the previous one.

Magic System is still the same, nothing to fix there.

Prose is better and it will make you fly through the book.

### **Bad things:**

I think I made myself clear enough.

To summarize:

Most interesting part of the story was in prologue and epilogue. And with characters that simply weren't nearly enough interesting to follow, let alone bond with, this book simply isn't good enough and it doesn't stand up to those same standards Brian himself set in his previous trilogy.

Shot and missed on this one. His first.

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### **Solseit says**

The re-read is as beautiful - it not more - than the first read. The book is full of interesting characters, one more interesting than the other. Some of old favorites and some new favorites just make their way through the story in a continuous change of pace and events, twists and turns and dynamic story, just in Brian McClellan's style.

If you have not started this series yet (and you have read The Powder Mage trilogy), this is a great story to begin and be brought in a new world with known magic system and dynamics!

I quickly went through the book and I loved every single line.

The characters - new and old - are just extremely interesting. The story is a constant fast paced surprise that will keep you entertained and rooting for your favorite character.

The underlining events and the world building improved from the Powder Mage trilogy possibly because I already was aware of the world itself so McClellan only needed to add on top of the already great basis! Just an amazing book!

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### **Conor says**

The start of the new series from one of my favorite fantasy authors and the only returning character announced is my least favorite character from the previous series. Cool, cool. And now it seems that Vlora is even going to be one of the major characters. Cool. Great. Even more Vlora. I'm not mad at all. At all.

Seriously though I'm looking forward to this series. The Powder Mage was one of my favorite fantasy series in recent years (with the added bonus of being delivered on time without any extensions to the trilogy along the way but also making really good use of short novellas to fill in the world) and McClellan is one of the authors I'm most looking forward to seeing knew stuff from.

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### **Scott Hitchcock says**

Although a second trilogy it's a continuation of many of the same characters as the first. The new characters that are introduced however are very engaging and overshadow Vlora who I just cannot warm to. She just doesn't have the depth and charm a lot of the other characters.

The first 80% is mystery and intrigue. The last 20% the battle we've been expecting. The cloak and dagger was entertaining. Round up to a 4\* but I didn't enjoy it as much as the first series.

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## Bookwraiths says

Originally reviewed at Bookwraiths.

*Flintlock fans! Powder pundits—  
And all lovers of spellbinding stories of magic and mayhem:  
Today, today, you are redeemed from boredom,  
Set free from the doldrums of reading despair.  
For that most adroit of authors, Brian of McClellan,  
Has fired off the opening salvo of another fantasy series.  
Challenged all comers to brave his newest creation.*

*From the beginning, Sins of Empire is a dazzling delight,  
Spun from the same enchanted stuff as The Powder Mage Trilogy,  
Set in a new local, overflowing with compelling characters,  
And filled with excitement, and action aplenty.  
Every page a challenge, every plot a delectable morsel.*

*Yet for all its untouched virgin splendor,  
Sins of Empire does not forget its powder mage progenitor.  
Old characters reappearing from the beginning,  
Entangled in new webs of manipulation and mystery  
But just as beloved and enthralling as ever.*

*But this time the way forward is fraught with more peril, more uncertainty,  
For there is no bold Tamas to lead the way.  
Our heroes older, tasked with control, and forced to rise to the occasion.  
Their wits tested by the web of deceit they must untangle,  
The formidable forces they must face down.*

*And so, without any further grandiose pretensions by myself,  
I give to you the Opening Book of Excellence,  
The Bequeather of Beloved Characters,  
The Proverbial Powder Mage Progeny  
The One –  
The Only –  
Sins of Empire!*

Beginning approximately ten years after the events in *The Autumn Republic*, *Sins of Empire* is set upon a new continent and built upon the back of the Fatrastan Revolution (as so wonderfully portrayed in the novella *Ghosts of the Tristan Basin*). The young nation having quickly become an economic power, guided toward the future by the authority regime of Chancellor Lindet and her secret police, aptly dubbed the Blackhats.



But things are not quite as rosy as they seem. A growing rift between the native Palo tribesmen and the Fatrastan colonists brewing into near rebellion. A mysterious leader, known only as Mama Palo, controlling the simmering insurrection, who, supposedly, is hiding in the dangerous confines of the Palo slums of the capital city of Landfall; a place where even the feared Blackhats are not welcomed. Enter the Riflejack mercenaries.

Commanded by Vlora a.k.a. Lady Flint (a name familiar to fans of the original Powder Mage Trilogy), these crack troops find themselves in the employ of Chancellor Lindet, battling Palo rebels in the hinterlands of the continent until they are recalled to the capital. All hell about to break loose there; Lady Flint's tasked with hunting down Mama Palo. A mission that the one time revolutionary Vlora finds unpalatable.

Unwillingly wrapped up in this same situation is a high level Blackhat named Michel Bravis; his assignment to be the Riflejack handler as cover for his real job of rooting out a revolutionary cell which is distributing anti-government pamphlets. This task made more compelling by his superior's brutal reputation of rewarding failure with death or loss of status, the latter nearly worse than the former to a Blackhat.

Then there is Mad Ben Styke, commander of the Mad Lancers, hero of the Fatrastan Revolution, proudly named one of the founders of the country . . . now a convicted war criminal. This giant of a man having spent the last ten years of his life in a harsh labor camp after surviving execution by firing squad. But, when it seems he has no hope left, a mysterious lawyer appears, promising freedom in exchange for the completion of a simple task.

And looming mysteriously over them all is the legendary Godstone. An unwitting professor having unearthed it in the lands around Landfall. Its power without doubt; its importance overwhelming; it's part of the story revealed only gradually.

Shifting back and forth between Vlora, Michel Bravis, and Ben Styke, Brian McClellan slowly builds this narrative, very carefully by creatively re-introducing the powder mage world, its magic, and its returning characters; the steady pace giving new readers time to acclimate themselves while still quickly immersing them in an intriguing set of plots. All of it driven forward by the unique, compelling, and jaded characters. The returning veterans of the series initially shining the brightest before being eclipsed (at least, in my eyes) by one of the newcomers.

The person I am referring to is Mad Ben Styke. This hulking killer already garnering my immediate attention because of his portrayal in *Ghosts of the Tristan Basin* (which fans of the *Powder Mage Trilogy* need to read). Here he is a much more well-rounded character, showing serious complexity for his nature, unexpected tenderness and compassion, as well as unbridled viciousness when necessary. Can't wait to see where Brian McClellan takes him from this beginning.

Coming in a close second to Mad Ben is Vlora a.k.a. Lady Flint, whom I admit was never a favorite of mine in the original trilogy. (No, she did not have a fair chance to shine back then, since she was forever labeled due to her actions toward her fiancé, but be that as it may, she wasn't very interesting either.) Now, however, she is a much more well-rounded character; her drive, her stubbornness, and her abilities better understood and explored.

And last but not least is Michel Bravis, who I found quite odd at first (He was constantly having conversations and arguments with himself out loud.), but whose development and interesting plot turned him into far more than merely a carbon copy of Inspector Adamant.

I will also add there is a surprise character in the mix whom I really enjoyed, but will not talk about further. This individual gradually assuming a central role in the story, and I dearly hope this person does not disappear in the sequels.

That brings up the other triumph of *Sins of Empire*: the suspense and revelations. No one and nothing is what it appears here. Brian McClellan pulling the rug out from under his readers time after time. Each seeming revelations suspect, as yet another piece of the puzzle falls into place. Certainly, there were a few surprises which I guessed, but, overall, the author kept me glued to the pages, as he stunned me with momentous revelations after momentous revelation. Each building toward the epic conclusion at the end.

And what a conclusion it is. No powder mage novel would be complete without some rousing battle scenes, because Brian McClellan is so gifted at choreographing them, writing them in a coherent way, that they have become trademarks of his books. And the last few chapters of *Sins of Empire* are dominated by familiar, flintlock fighting and more than a little powder mage magic. It is cool, satisfying, and fun beyond measure.

As for criticisms . . . Are you really asking me that? I mean, how often do I give a book 5 stars? You know it isn't very often. And this book got 5 stars, so that means the criticisms I have are so minuscule as to be non-existent.

With a fast paced narrative, compelling characters, a cool magic system, a diverse world and an epic conclusion, *Sins of Empire* is a flintlock fantasy completed to perfection. This novel showcasing the silky smooth talent of Brian McClellan in crafting an epic fantasy which long time fans and new comers can both enjoy and love. Without a doubt, it is my frontrunner for Best Fantasy of 2017, start of a new series which will certainly surpass the original if this opening installment is any harbinger of things to come. Highly recommended!

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## **Terence says**

Fatrasta is a nation at conflict with itself. It subjugates a people group and their desire for equality. The Lady Chancellor uses not only her secret police the Blackhats, but also employs the Riflejack Mercenary Company led by Lady Vlora Flint. Fatrasta has also buried it's heroes who helped win them freedom, most notably Ben Styke. Styke has spent 10 years rotting in a Fatrastan labor camp. Fatrasta's problems may be worse than they initially feared, as a long silent threat appears to have returned along with an object best left buried.

I have to say before I even begin that I was worried I wouldn't like *Sins of Empire* or the new series. My reason being is that Field Marshal Tamas was far and away my favorite character in the Powder Mage trilogy. I wasn't sure if I'd enjoy the storytelling with him gone, especially as my other favorites Bo and Ka-poel were no where to be seen. Even worse the only character mentioned returning from the original trilogy was Vlora, who I didn't care for.

As *Sins of Empire* began my worries seemed more reasonable as the story largely resembled *Promise of Blood*. The story has a mysterious man causing trouble in Gregious Tampo. Tampo seemed largely similar to Vetas from the intital trilogy. It also has a spy investigating in blackhat Michel Bravis, who was similar to Inspector Adamat. Around the halfway point in the novel, I have to admit I had no idea what I was in for. Brian McClellan borrowed some familiar elements, but they didnt lead to the same results at all.

*Sins of Empire* is a massive story with many moving parts and various characters. In many ways it's a

mystery as multiple investigations are going on that play massive parts in the story being told. I didn't particularly love any one character, but the book played out as a true ensemble cast.

Any reader who came to enjoy Brian McClellan's Powder Mage trilogy owes it to themselves to read Sins of Empire. It was a strong start to a new trilogy.

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## **Petros Triantafyllou says**

Sins of Empire is, undoubtedly, the undisputed high point of McClellan's career so far.

Colonel Ben Styke, a decorated war hero of the Fatrastan's war for independence, has been convicted and imprisoned for the past ten years as a war criminal.

Silver Rose Michel Brevis, a governmental spy of Fatrasta, is tasked with the duties of a detective, a job with a required set of skills that he doesn't possess.

Lady Vlora Flint, a General and co-owner of a mercenary company called 'Rifle Jackets', is under contract with the Governor of Fatrasta.

None of them knows each other, and their lives are set on paths that aren't meant to cross. At least not until a professor locates and excavates an ancient artifact of the utmost importance; a legendary Godstone. What, you will ask me, is a goddamn Godstone? Well, what does it sound like it is?

*"Priviled!"*

*Robson turned to find that the old professor had caught up.*

*"Priviled," Cressel wheezed. "What's happening? Are you all right?"*

*"Yes, yes, I'm fine." Robson waved him off and began striding back toward the camp. Cressel fell in beside him.*

*"But, sir, you look like you've seen a ghost!"*

*Robson considered the brief vision, his brow furrowing as he let it hand in his mind for a few moments.*

*"No," he said. "Not a ghost. I've seen God."*

A couple of months ago I discussed with a friend about the success of Brian's first trilogy, and whether he can follow up on it or not, with Gods of Blood and Powder. Brian's talent was of course unmistakable, but I didn't think possible that he could once more create characters as powerful as Taniel and/or Tamas. Starting the book, I thought I was right. I was disappointed to find Vlora with a POV (a character I had disliked from the first trilogy), and Michel seemed like a poor imitation of Adamat. Guess what - Never in my life have I been so wrong. All main protagonists, including Ben Styke, proved to be some of the most complex and compelling characters I've ever had the joy to read about.

Sins of Empire is set in the same universe as the first trilogy, but in a different continent and time period (approximately ten years after the events of Powder Mage). McClellan was very careful with the re-introducing of the world and magic system, allowing new readers to fully comprehend the various machinations, and keeping his old fans interested without boring them with unnecessary repetitions.

The plot is intriguing and mind-capturing from the very first pages (the prologue, to be exact). The prose is smooth as silk, and the narrative unfolds at a quick pace. All in all, Sins of Empire is one of the best examples of modern fantasy fiction, and the start of a new trilogy whose success is already ensured.

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## Esmerelda Weatherwax says

I tried reading *Promise of Blood* a few years ago, and although I finished, it didn't leave any lasting impression on me and I didn't continue on with the series. From what I remember, it had all the elements I'm usually intrigued by, but for whatever reason, it just didn't land for me. So, when I heard that this series was better than the first I decided to pick it up, and I'm really happy I did. Giving a second chance to authors who didn't suit you the first time around is a good habit to get into – I've found a lot of books I've loved by just trying again.

I listened to this on audiobook and the names are somewhat strange, so the spelling probably isn't going to be correct. The audiobook is fantastic by the way, so any audiophiles out there should def check out the audio if the review sounds good to you.

The book starts out with a mysterious artefact being discovered, it's a giant monolith that has been unearthed and the crew in charge of the dig called in the authorities to take a look at it. There's a mysterious madness that's dampening the excitement of finding this new archaeological treasure – the workers and anyone who spends an inordinate amount of time around this object loses their minds and goes insane. As such, only a skeleton crew of disposable people are working on uncovering the artefact, and the entire endeavour is being kept hush-hush. There's an ancient language written on it that no one is familiar with, and it's known to belong to a race of people who have retreated off the continent and are mostly an isolated race of people who no longer venture off of their lands.

Now, I thought at the beginning that the whole story was going to be about this mysterious object, what it does, where it came from, who built it, and all of that – but the object was barely mentioned after the first chapter until about 70-80% through the book when it came up as a major plot point in a looming war.

What the book was mostly about is reconstruction and tense interactions with different classes of citizens after a civil war. Since I didn't read the first trilogy, I assume the war they're referring to in this book was the war that took place in the last series. There's talk about a man named Tanniel – which I do remember being a character from the first book. So, if you haven't read the *Promise of Blood* and it's sequels, and don't like spoilers, I would recommend reading that series first. I didn't mind learning about Tanniels success's, defeats and ultimate fate because I don't plan on reading the first series, but I undoubtedly would have known more about the world and it's characters if I had.

There's a lot of tension between the defeated Palo citizens and the upper-class Fadrastian class that won the last civil uprising. The Palo have been pushed down so far that they're living in a giant crater and they've constructed a vertical city within the crater that was honestly my favorite part of the book. There's a web of politics that all of the characters get caught up in. Pamphlets are being distributed all over the city and they contain inflammatory language about the ruling class, and it's creating a fair amount of dissent in the general population. Mercenaries are called in by the ruling class to try and keep the peace, while also hired to track down Mama Palo, the supposed leader of this new rebellion. There are spies sent to spy on the spies, there's underworld crime, magical items looming in the background, as well as disgraced and forgotten war heroes trying to make a come back. There's so much going on in this book it's hard to summarize.

The characters were really endearing, I got attached to all of them which is a huge plus, and what I think was missing for me in *Promise of Blood*. Perhaps I read it in the wrong mood, and as I'm writing this review I'm

beginning to change my mind on reading the first series haha.

Gloria Flint is the leader of the mercenaries hired to come in and root out the leader of the Palo rebellion. She's not a cutthroat despite being called Flint for her steely nature – she cares a lot about her men and wants to keep them safe and as happy as she can. She's not pleased at all with the job she was hired to do, it keeps getting bigger and more dangerous as time ticks on. She regrets getting herself involved and is trying to find a peaceful resolution to everything and get her people out of there as quickly as possible. She commands her men to be honorable and keeps a rigid set of rules; absolutely no stealing (not even from corpses), no raiding citizens homes, no raping, no undue bloodshed. She takes a lot of pride in the fact that her men are disciplined, well trained, and for the most part well behaved for a group of mercenaries.

Mikel is a spy working for the government, he's also been hired to try and root out who the dissenters are and keep them silent. He has a dual personality, he's always talking to or arguing with himself over something. He has a strained relationship with his mom, she's running herself poor buying too many penny novels and strongly disapproves of her son's involvement with the government. She's a tough character who isn't afraid to give her son shit if she thinks he deserves it, but it could also ruin Mikel if she's overheard saying some of the treasonous things she likes to rant about. He's desperate to work his way to the top of the government, and will stop at almost nothing to do it – but his alternate persona comes into play later and mixes things up a bit.

Stykes is a forgotten war hero who's lived in a slave labor camp for nearly a decade. He's had a long record of good behavior, and is hoping that his parole hearing will turn out in his favor. However, the parole hearing goes very, very badly – but he still manages to get out with the help of a mysterious “lawyer” who pays for Stykes release. The lawyer comes into play with all of the characters, and it's interesting to watch them try and figure out who he is and what he really wants. Stykes eventually ends up in the employ of Gloria Flint and is trying to help her men navigate through the city without being killed, as well as help Gloria flush out Mama Palo.

The worldbuilding was really fantastic, the highlight for me was the mega-slum that the Palo made for themselves. The Depths is a vertical city that's an “ecosystem unto itself”, there are palaces as well as slums, doctors, weavers, soldiers – everything you can imagine is found in The Depths. It's a winding city with so many narrow allies, zigzagging passages, and houses that all look similar that it's easy to get lost. Once you're far down in The Depths the sun doesn't reach the bottom, and the only light is artificially produced, it makes for a very creepy atmosphere.

Knacks are different magical abilities that can range from not needing sleep, to really good hearing, to super speed/strength. Knacks aren't uncommon, and the different knacks aren't equal in power, some are rather mundane. There are also powder mages that can use gunpowder as a drug that enhances their abilities, a mage can snort some powder and be able to see the crew of a ship running around on the deck while standing on the shore.

The Dioneys are the race of people that left the continent many centuries ago and haven't come back, they've left behind a number of artefacts, and with each new artefact, the people of Fatrasta become more and more knowledgeable about magic and sorcery.

The writing really gets out of the way of the story, McClellan was a student of Brandon Sanderson and in some ways, it really shows. The prose is utilitarian more than flowery, but it really speeds up the storytelling, especially during action scenes. There are some curses that are used, but fuck has been substituted for “pit”. As always, this is grating to me but I liked the story and the characters enough to ignore it. Although he's a

student of Sanderson, I would describe McClellan as a better character writer. These characters were much less predictable because they were more grey than noble bright – although not the kind of grey Abercrombie writes. A light grey, if you will.

I crushed this book in 2 days despite it being a longer book, I think it's somewhere in the 500 page range. I was just so fascinated by how everything was going down that I just kept listening 8 hours a day to the audio. I think the pacing is pretty well done, where there isn't action to create a tense atmosphere, there are plot points that keep you interested – and vice versa.

As far as originality, I've seen a lot of flintlock military stuff before, but I really enjoyed that this was post-war not during it (at least for most of the book). I like when authors tackle the harder bits about what happens after that huge epic war that everyone likes reading about. It's harder to pin down how a society will function during a reconstruction period and I consider it a big bite to chew if the author decides to try writing a story like that. As I've said before, I really liked *The Depths*, it was a very original take on a slum, and it really set the mood for the chapters where it was featured.

I really, really liked this book, and I've already read the sequel which I got through Netgalley – that review will be coming up soon!

Audience:

For people who like:

flintlock  
military  
multipov  
female pov  
low romance  
post war reconstruction  
spies  
class warfare  
Plot: 13.5/15

Characters: 13/15

World Building: 13.5/15

Writing: 12/15

Pacing: 12/15

Originality: 12/15

Personal Enjoyment: 9/10

Final Score: 85/100

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## **Kaitlin says**

I picked this book up on audio and I am really very glad I did so as I have previously tried the Powder Mage series by this author and although it had promise it didn't really feel as developed as I wanted it too (probably because it was a debut series)...However, this series is set in the same world, following on from the events of the previous series, but it can be read as a series on its own. I only read book 1 in the Powder Mage series before starting this one, and it all made sense to me and felt like a fleshed out series. Sometimes I think authors just need a bit of time to find their footing with a world or series, and I think that is certainly the case here as McClellan's second series appealed far more and had a lot to like.

This book starts off following quite a few different characters. Each one is working for the Empire in some way, but they all have their own missions and work for different parts of it.

We have:

- Lady Vlora Flint - A young woman in charge of a group of mercenaries and hired on to find the leader of the rival group in the Depths. She is a feisty character with a lot of likeable qualities from her leadership skills through to her compassion, her desire to keep her men safe, and her cunning. I definitely found that of all the characters she was the one I enjoyed from the start, and I like her partner and her other crew members too.
- Mama Paelos (spelling may be incorrect as I audio-booked this) - The leader of the rebels and someone who is looking to start a rebellion, but no one quite knows who she really is...
- Mad Ben Styke - A criminal of war who is locked up in jail at the start of the book with little hope for Bail. He was put there by people who wanted to see his name forgotten, and many think he is dead outside of the prison, but there are still whispers about him on the outside as he infamously fought in the wars.
- Michel - A Spy and double-agent who is trying hard to infiltrate the Blackcats and earn a Gold rose which will give him access to some of the most secret parts of the Empire. He is determined not to fail his mission, but there are some seriously high stakes to play with.
- Tampo - A man in the shadows and a puppet-master of sorts. Someone who knows an awful lot more than they initially let on.

I really enjoyed getting to know each of the characters, and seeing how they interacted as the story developed. There is a lot to like about each one - the sign of a good story - so all the parts felt like they were entertaining and I found I could relate and connect with each character.

I definitely think the world and magic of the world is interesting. We have the Dragon-men, we have Blood magic and Sorcery, Powder mages and more. Lots of this magic is just a part of the story so you have to just accept and learn as you go (unless you've read the first series) but I still really liked it and would say it's got a lot of potential. There's also some pretty big artefacts with magical potential and these could be a big part in future books.

On the whole, a book that I definitely enjoyed despite being unfamiliar with the ending of the previous series. I do imagine this one will spoil that series as it brings back some characters who you will have seen in the first series, but it's still well worth reading and you do not need to have read that to get this series. 4\*s from me :)

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**Melissa ♥ Dog/Wolf Lover ♥ Martin says**

**\$2.99 on kindle today. 5-7-17**

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