



Kellanved's Reach

Ian C. Esslemont

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The incessant war between the bickering city states of Quon Tali rages. So engrossed are the warring lords and princes in their own petty feuds that few notice that an upstart mage from Dal Hon has gained control of the southern seas. But some powers are alarmed. And in the meantime, as Purge and Tali indulge in what seems like a their never-ending game of war, a mercenary caught up in the fight between the two states suddenly refuses to play along and causes all sorts of chaos. Simultaneously, a pair of escapees from Castle Gris make their way across this ravaged landscape of flame and butchery. Their intention to seek out the legendary Crimson Guard.

And then there's Kellanved who could not care less about any of this petty politicking or strategy or war. Something other and altogether more mysterious has caught his attention and he - together with a reluctant and decidedly sceptical Dancer - traverse continents and journey through the Realms in pursuit . . . But this ancient mystery that has so captivated Kellanved is neither esoteric nor ephemeral. No, it is of an altogether darker and more dangerous hue. It involves the Elder races themselves, and more specifically - certainly more alarmingly - the semi-mythic, and universally dreaded, Army of Dust and Bone.

Surely no one in their right mind would be so foolish as to embark on a journey from which none have returned? Well, no one except Kellanved that is . . .

Returning to the turbulent early history of what would become the Malazan Empire, here is the third awesome chapter in Ian C. Esslemont's new epic fantasy sequence.

Kellanved's Reach Details

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From Reader Review Kellanved's Reach for online ebook

James Lafayette Tivendale says

"The elders were powerful and dreadful - it was a blessing their days were over. Only a fool, or an insane power-craving... He shook his head once again, this time in exasperation. Ah..."

I received an advanced review copy of Kellanved's Reach in exchange for an honest review. I would like to thank Ian C. Esselmont and TransworldBooks/ Penguin Books UK. Before I start the review proper I will quickly state that I am quite lucky as a reviewer because of some of the books I get to read early. Ever so often a book arrives on your doorstep and everything else ceases to exist until a certain novel has been completed. This was one such occasion. I was deep through Mark Lawrence's Holy Sister and John Gwynne's A Time of Blood - by far, two of my favourite authors but the works of Erikson and Esselmont, and the world they've created is incomparable and the pinnacle of not just fantasy but current literature in general. I had to drop everything and start this immediately.

Originally touted as being a trilogy, I can safely say that the way this book ends we will have a lot more in store in this prequel series, but I'll come back to that shortly. Kellanved, now the ruler of Malaz with his friend, the dexterous and handily swift assassin Dancer continue the shadowy Mage's conquest for utter world domination. Kellanved found a flint spearhead at the end of Deadhouse Landing and believes it is the key to unlock an elder mystery and obtain and perhaps even control an overwhelming ancient power that could tip the balance in his favour - to aid his plan, even though nobody is truly aware of what he wants to accomplish. Not even Dancer.

I would say 25% of the narrative follows the exploits of my favourite fantasy duo but, like all Malazan books, you cannot rest on your laurels with what you already know. About another 100 new characters are introduced. As if there weren't already enough in this behemoth but amazing fantasy experience! For anyone who has (and if you haven't I recommend you do) read the main series' before, you'll be happy that many of the series superstars and most important players are featured and more and more are introduced.

"The main body of the force was some thirty Malazan fighters, hand-picked and led by Dassem, and including their early recruit Dujek and his shadow, Jack... Tasyschrenn stood with Dancer."

Spoiler - So many great moments I've really been waiting for are revealed here. Such as how Whiskeyjack earned his name, how Greymane joined the Malazan Empire and why Shimmer is such a bad-ass.

Apart from Dancer and Kellanved's story, it seems war is waging everywhere and we witness events from both sides of multiple battles that are happening concurrently. Typical to Malazan, generally there are no 'black or white' good or bad guys during point of view perspectives, so you feel for the players on both sides. To begin with, it was confusing as to who had an allegiance with who and what their required end game was and what their objectives were. At about 30% it all clicked and then it seemed to flow expertly. After reading 60% of this book and reading some stunning set-pieces, in my opinion, up there with some of the best in the overall Malazan canon, I couldn't put this book down and I couldn't see this book getting less than a 9/10.

Dancer's Lament had 3 point of view perspectives, Silk, Iko and Dancer. This new entry has approximately 15. As previously hinted at, with unfamiliar character perspectives it takes a few of their passages to work out where they fit on the board of the greater game but all will come clear. I don't think there was a single perspective I didn't enjoy. These included Dancer's friend and blind bird lady Ullara who is wandering

without knowing what fate has in store, Gregor and his mage accomplice (who cannot be hit) who both wish to join the Crimson Guard, and war commander Orjin who really doesn't know his place in this warring world at the moment but just knows he can aid somehow. We see brief but excellent snippets of The Crimson Guard hierarchy before K'azz D'Avore was commander and seeing his character at this stage was really interesting. Warning - I made the typical newbie mistake. There was a new character who I wasn't familiar with who seemed like a stunning creation so I Googled his name and was told who he'd become and what his alias is, and that he's very important in later novels. Do not make the same mistake!

On many forums, there are often heated debates of the best way to start the Malazan series to get the best experience. I personally think there are 5 ways to start but that's an unpopular view. After reading this the image of Ouroboros came to my mind. If you start with the Path of Ascendancy series then Gardens of the Moon won't be so difficult. However, if you don't read the main series first then you'll miss the amazing reveals and air fist-bump moments (which I'm sad to admit happened a lot whilst I was reading this book so made me look like a lunatic to my housemate!)

So, why didn't it get five-stars? It was doing everything perfectly, until the ending. There is nothing wrong with what actually happens at the climax but it seemed a bit muddled and out of order for me. There is a stunning set-piece, the typical BOOM - wow that was amazing Malazan finale experience. Then, it spent about 6% of the book wrapping other characters arcs off. I must admit these chapters were done well, but it completely disjointed the pacing and experience. It was almost as if we'd had the finale and Esslemont was just tidying up a few threads before moving on. It might be my personal opinion but I enjoy the explosive, climatic culmination to be the final segment in a novel and that I then will not be able to stop thinking about it for weeks. This is perhaps just personal taste though. To conclude, the works of Malazan are by far my favourite fantasy series and experience I've had with reading, period. I rate quite harshly on this site because I don't think I'll ever read a book again that is as good as Midnight Tides which is my only 10/10 rating. I don't need to do a sexy statement for a blurb here. If you are reading this you know how good this series and Malazan in general is. Pre-order it now!
