



The Thousand Deaths of Ardor Benn

Tyler Whitesides

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"I'm hiring you to steal the king's crown."

Ardor Benn is no ordinary thief. Rakish, ambitious, and master of wildly complex heists, he styles himself a Ruse Artist Extraordinaire.

When a priest hires him for the most daring ruse yet, Ardor knows he'll need more than quick wit and sleight of hand. Assembling a dream team of forgers, disguisers, schemers, and thieves, he sets out to steal from the most powerful king the realm has ever known.

But it soon becomes clear there's more at stake than fame and glory -Ard and his team might just be the last hope for human civilization.

The Thousand Deaths of Ardor Benn Details

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Author : Tyler Whitesides

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From Reader Review The Thousand Deaths of Ardor Benn for online ebook

Andrew says

Full review at The Quill to Live: <https://thequilltolive.com/2018/05/15...>

Ardor Benn is a massive (~800 pages) heist novel that I have had my eye on for awhile. It is Tyler's debut work and is extremely impressive in size and scope for a first book. The story follows the aforementioned Ardor Benn, ruse artist extraordinaire, as he steals from the rich and gives to himself across the archipelago in which the story takes place. The world and plot that Tyler has created in this book is definitely its best quality, and is one of the most interesting settings I have come across. Ardor, known for his con talents, is sought out by a priest who hires him for a multi-stage heist to save the world. The heist part of this heist novel is excellent with each stage being complicated, exciting, and engrossing as you watch Ardor and his crew work through a series of roadblocks on the way to their prize. The pacing is mostly good, with the book moving quickly despite its massive size, but there were a few moments where it felt like the plot was dragging its feet as it went through the minutiae of planning various ruses. In the end though, the plot kept me deeply invested until the last page despite a couple of issues becoming apparent the deeper I got into the novel. However, before I talk about the bad, let's talk about more of the great: the worldbuilding.

The world of Ardor Benn is fascinating, deep, and well written with a complicated nation laid out for you over the course of the novel. You slowly learn about the backstory, government, religion, and economy of the islands, and Tyler has made an original and interesting world that I want to be in. In addition, there is a "magic system" that revolves around a substance called "grit" – material that has been fed to, and pooped out of, dragons for processing. Depending on the material fed to the dragons, different kinds of explosive grit can be made to do a number of different things such as: make orbs of light, cancel gravity, create explosions, or form barriers. The book heavily revolves around grit, and it is a cool idea for a weapon that results in tons of weird fights where people are using the various effects to gain an upper hand.

Although I loved the world and the plot, Ardor Benn was not flawless and as I got further and further into the book, a number of small issues started to snowball. First, the characters. A key issue with this heist novel is that despite the book having multiple POV, more than one antagonist, and a number of side characters, there is really only one character of import in the story – Ardor Benn. Ardor is a great character himself, but the more time that you spend with his supporting cast, the more you realize that they have no depth and are only there to make Ardor look good. Take Ardor's partner in crime and oldest friend, Raek. I was super excited to get to know Raek, a goliath of a man who is great at math, because his introduction was awesome. However, as the book progressed, Raek would disappear for hundreds of pages at a time – only to return when Ardor needed a cool tool or gadget that only Raek could make. Then there was the thief that Ardor partners with for this massive ruse, Quarrah. Quarrah was clearly meant to be a major part of the narrative, even being one of the POV's through which the book was narrated. But at the end of the day, Quarrah's story really only consists of her having internal monologues about one of two things – how her skills as a thief have left her woefully unprepared to be a con artist (which while true, got super old after 400 pages of it) and how Ardor Benn was the greatest person she has ever met in every possible way. Both Raek and Quarrah have no depth at all, and I found myself very unmoved when they revealed their backstories later in the novel. I am slightly exaggerating when I say the only character was Ardor; both the priest who hires them for the job and the King they are trying to rob (spoilers) are interesting and fun – but it doesn't do enough to make up for the fact that 80% of the book revolves around Ardor. The book is simply too long to spend that much time talking about one person.

The one additional problem that Ardor Benn has, besides some of it cast, is Tyler tends to over explain what is happening in the book sometimes. There was one instance in particular that is burned into my mind, where one character threatened another (very obviously) and Tyler wrote what felt like a paragraph of internal monologue of the threatened character saying “this guy is threatening me”. A big part of the fun in heist novels is the balance of understanding what is going on, and the mystery of guessing at what you don’t get. Tyler leaned a little to much into giving the reader full understanding and it turned a few passages that might have been thrilling into dull exposition.

Despite ragging on it for two paragraphs, I want to stress that the plot and world of this book are one of a kind and I definitely still recommend it and will be continuing on with the series myself. This is a very impressive debut and Tyler Whitesides is clearly a talented writer with a lot of potential. However, there are still a few kinks in his writing and this book desperately needs some more leads to share the narrative load. All in all, it was an original and thrilling read, and if you can get past some issues I am sure you will love The Thousand Deaths Of Ardor Benn.

Rating: The Thousand Deaths Of Ardor Benn – 7.0/10

-Andrew

Roy says

Really cool heist style fantasy. Reminded me of Locke Lamora in style of fantasy but had more of a comical feel to the dialogue. The world building was a lot of fun, especially the magic system, although it did remind me a bit of Mistborns magic system a tad. Good fun fantasy. Ard was a great main character and the number of tricks they pulled and the way they did it was at times surprising, did not predict many of them at all. My only complaint is the length. If it had been on the shorter side 500pages or so, I think it may have worked a little better. Really recommend this one for anyone looking for some fun fantasy and awesome action scenes.

Maja says

This was a fun ride. I'm always down for a good fantasy heist book. This even had one or two dragons (though dragons got bit too little page time). It could however, be shorter. Some stuff could probably even be removed from the book and everything be more comprised, because at +700 pages, it is a pretty massive book for conning and heisting. Also the love-subplot could have been ditched as well because it didn't really go anywhere (at least not in this book, but it might develop in coming installments).

Also in the book, they use a type of magical grit, where different kinds of grit do different stuff. But all the different grit is basically made from barbecue dragon poop.

Paul says

I could attempt to explain the plot to The Thousand Deaths of Ardor Benn, but I fear I would do it some sort of injustice. Like all the best scams there is a lot going on here. My advice, strap yourself in and just go for it. This is a novel that is all about the ride. I can promise you one thing, there will be much to enjoy. This is a novel that defies anything close to categorisation.

Ardor Benn is all cocksure swagger. As quick of mind as he is of wit, he loves the life of a ruse artist. He might tell you it is all about the money but it's not. There is more to it than that. It's the frisson of excitement that occurs whenever part of his latest exquisitely mapped out plan is successful. A platinum rogue and no mistake, I defy anyone to not be won over by Ard's charms. You would be wrong however to dismiss Ard as just a con man. There is more to him than first appears. There is a level of introspection to his character I really enjoyed. Ghosts of past events still haunt his actions. For all his outward bravado he is troubled by the bigger questions in life.

I'll be honest, I'm a sucker for a good heist. The best shakedowns bring together a crew of oddball characters that would fail in any other venture but somehow work when it comes to grand larceny. That rule holds true here, there are a whole host of eccentric individuals. Ard is all wild plans and grandiose spectacle, he is a big picture kind of guy, so needs someone who can help him with the finer detail. Raekon 'Short Fuse' Dorrel is that man. Friends for years, you quickly pick up on the easy camaraderie that exists between the two. I think Raek can best be described as long suffering. It strikes me that keeping up with Ardor Benn is a full-time job.

The newest member of the gang is Quarrah Khai. Used to working alone as a sneak thief she finds being part of a group a bit of a novelty, especially when that group is more like a surrogate family. Quarrah finds herself perplexed, infuriated and often confused by Ardor Benn but she has little choice in her new role. She will be part of Ard's latest outlandish escapade whether she wants to be or not.

My favourite characters were Elbrig and Cinza, the disguise managers. Always a dozen or more steps ahead of everyone else, this eccentric partnership lives for the elaborate. The more complex a scheme the better. Let's just say it's amazing the lengths that some people will go to for their craft.

The author has a real ear for dialogue. The constant bickering back and forth between all the characters is a joy, it helps to make them all seem that much more real. Ard and Raek have a wonderful shorthand they use whenever they talk to one another. Check out George Clooney and Brad Pitt in Ocean's Eleven, and you'll get the idea.

The Thousand Deaths of Ardor Benn is exactly what I had hoped it would be. Tyler Whitesides' adult fiction debut is the literary equivalent of "Find The Lady"; there is misdirection and shenanigans aplenty. This would be entertaining enough but Whitesides elevates the story to another level by incorporating some loftier elements. There is a larger conspiracy that develops as the plot unfolds. A scheme is afoot that has the potential to claim millions of lives. The only thing between the world and utter chaos is Ard and his ragtag group of associates.

Oh, before I forget to mention it, there are also a host of dragons. In fact, the dragons are an essential element to our tale. I'll say no more for fear of spoilers, suffice to say that plans have a way of going south when you need to rely on a gargantuan monster to literally deliver the goods.

Whitesides has also created an intriguing semi-scientific magic system for his world. There are compounds and powders, collectively known as 'grit', that can be used to achieve all manner of different effects. Part alchemy, part maths and part pure dumb luck Ard and Raek use grit in a whole host of inventive ways to help pull off various heists. Those of you who are a fan of impressively large detonations are going to have a blast (I am so sorry, I couldn't resist).

The Tattooed Book Geek (Drew). says

3.5 stars.

As always this review can also be found on my blog The Tattooed Book Geek:
<https://thetattooedbookgeek.wordpress...>

Ardor Benn/Ard who in his own words is a ‘ruse artist extraordinaire’ because why use a mundane and common term like a con artist or swindler.? Is tasked by the elderly Wayfarist (Wayfarism is one of the religions in the book) priest Isle Halavend to steal the royal regalia from the ruler of the Greater Chain (made-up of the islands, Talumon, Dronodan, Strind and Espar with the mountain and home of the dragons, Pekal located in the middle of the inter-island waters) King Pethredote.

The King’s regalia is made from the only remaining example of fertilised dragon eggshell still in existence, a component needed to make a very rare type of Grit (more on Grit later).

Ard accepts the job and along with Raekon Dorrel/Raek/the Short Fuse a detonation mixer (he mixes Grit compounds) and Ard’s partner they enlist the help of Quarrah Khai, a renowned thief to aid them and along with an assembled team so ensues a series of elaborate and intricate ruses full of outlandish exploits to steal the regalia and bring Isle Halavend’s plan to fruition.

I won’t go into the why’s about why Isle Halavend employs Ard to steal the regalia but suffice to say that the reasons have huge ramifications for all of the Greater Chain and the safety of its inhabitants.

The main resource in the Greater Chain is Grit. Grit can be primary or secondary and has a variety of different uses and types ranging from the mundane (Light and Heat Grit, which as the names suggest provide light and heat) to the more action-oriented types (Barrier, Drift and Void Grit which again, do what the name suggests) through to the rarest type of Grit, Visitant Grit which when used by someone worthy can call forth a Paladin Visitant (though the summons isn’t always successful) who can cause mass destruction.

Side note: there are more types of Grit than those few that I have mentioned and some can also be compounded or prolonged by being mixed together with either compounding or prolonging Grit.

Grit is made by using a specific base material (ranging from wood, metal and stone to human bones through to the fertilised dragon eggshell of the regalia that is indigestible and so, goes through the digestive system of a dragon and remains whole) which is fed to a dragon by a team of Harvesters in baited food to create a certain type of Grit. The dragon is traced (followed) and when the dung is passed (when the dragon goes potty and makes a boom boom) the dragon will then breathe fire on the excrement to harden it, creating Slagstone. The Slagstone is then transported to a factory where the base material is extracted from the Slagstone and processed into powder and so, yes, the Grit is subsequently derived from the powdered dragon poop.??

I liked the idea behind Grit and how it is an integral resource for the society in the Greater Chain finding the concept of the Grit, its importance and its uses to be well incorporated by Whitesides helping to add some originality to the story.

The chapters of the story that take place in the Mooring, a religious building and that revolve around Isle Halavend and Lyndel, a Trothian Agrodite priestess are interesting. They often involve the pair researching

and partaking in conversations as they are sequestered away in the Mooring cove that Halavend uses. These conversations allow us, the reader, to learn more about the two religions, Paladin Visitants, the history of the Greater Chain and also serve to help unveil the truth and motivation behind Halavend employing Ardor.

As a duo, Ard and Raek are fantastic with Ard being the loquacious and charming leader and Raek, the mathematical genius and muscle. The duo are completely different and act as the perfect foil for each other, they are like brothers and the strong bond between them and the banter and camaraderie that they share is a highlight of the book. Add in Quarrah as she attempts to integrate with the duo, learn and fulfil her role in the ruse and build a friendship (that is complicated by her feelings for Ard) with the pair and she is a welcome addition to the story. All in all the trio are well depicted by Whitesides.

For the secondary characters that compromised the initial team on Beripent when the team are trying to steal the regalia I really liked the duo of Elbrig Taut and Cinza Ortemion dubbed the crazies by Raek they are disguise managers (they create costumes, characters and identities as disguises) and the pair were really fun and well, crazy.? When the story moves to Pekal and the process of baiting the dragon, for the team members in this part of the story I liked the addition of Nemery Baggish. She's knowledgeable on dragons and compared to the other criminal members of the Harvesting team she's innocent and naive and there was just something endearing about her.

The Thousand Deaths of Ardor Benn is a promising start to a new fantasy series and in Ard, Raek and Quarrah you have a trio of characters who you can become invested in. However, it would be remiss of me if I didn't mention that whilst admittedly, the book is enjoyable even straying into very enjoyable territory in places that at the same time, unfortunately, the book does on occasion drag also suffering from a lack of emotion and impact during both plot twists and (what should be) important storyline events as rather sadly, instead of having the impact and weight that they deserve and warrant the twists and events themselves are often underwhelming and fall flat.

In my opinion, a couple of small tweaks would greatly benefit the book namely a shorter page-length and tighter plotting on the part of Whitesides as ultimately, The Thousand Deaths of Ardor Benn felt overly long for the story that Whitesides was telling and suffers under the weight of its 700+ page count.

Ard is a charismatic lead, Grit an intriguing and well-implemented idea and so, even with my issues, I'd certainly consider reading future books in the series as there is promise and potential to be found within the pages of Whitesides debut adult fantasy work.

Christine says

There is not enough hype about this book. I greatly enjoyed it! Cool magic system, relatable characters, exciting heists - and the length (~800 pgs) was a plus for me, I hate for a good book to end.

Jessica says

I have known Tyler since we did a joint school visit after the first Janitors book came out. I bought a copy and had it signed to my oldest son, not as a pity buy, but as a, "Hey, I like you, you're fun!" buy. My son liked the book, liked the whole series, in fact, and I liked Tyler and his wonderful wife Connie, so we were

all good. When I found out that Tyler's next book would be for grownups, I congratulated him, and he said, "I want you to read it, and I don't want to know what you think about it at the same time." And I told him, "Listen. Maybe I'll read it, maybe I won't. But if I do read it, and I like it, you'll know. If I don't like it, no one will ever know."

And reader, I did buy it. I did read it. And reader, I did love it.

One of my BIGGEST PET PEEVES IN ALL OF FANTASY is a character who is a "rogue" and supposed to be full of witty banter, but they are really just a huge @\$\$hole. I've read so much stilted dialogue and flat jokes masquerading as witty banter that I feel traumatized. BUT YOU WILL NOT FIND THAT HERE. Ardor Benn is ACTUALLY FUNNY. He actually is a good-natured, lovable rogue! I laughed aloud many times. His joking back and forth with his partner, Raek was truly amusing and never cruel. It was so refreshing I could cry!

And speaking of crying: There's like, actual drama here. Characters you care about getting hurt. I cried at somebody's death! And dragons! Did I mention there are dragons?! And a whole magic system like nothing I've ever seen before! And a fascinating religion, and world! And a major twist at the end that made me do a Keanu Reeves WHOA!

In short: This is an excellent book! One of the best epic fantasies I've read in a long time! I'm very excited to see what Tyler does next! The book is the first in a series, but it's not a cliffhanger ending so you don't need to wait! And you shouldn't wait! If you like fantasy, you should pick this up right now! Because did I mention the disguise artists? Oh my gosh! They were killing me! Loved them! And there's a race of blue people with crazy eyes! So unique!

And dragons, guys. DRAGONS.

Stephanie says

I'm so sad I've finished reading this book. I loved every page. Every sentence. Every Character.

I need book 2 in my life ASAP

Aly (Fantasy Books Closer Looks) says

"Rusing was a craft. An art form. Like the rich folks' orchestral music - some movements slow, some movements swift and thrilling, but Ard was always the conductor."

This was such a fun fantasy heist story, and it did a great job at occupying the currently vacant space in my heart left by Scott Lynch's *Gentlemen Bastards* series (at least until November 2019, which seriously can't come soon enough). The story follows an infamous, dashing and devilishly clever ruse artist for hire named Ardor Benn, who works within a kingdom comprised of a series of islands called the "Greater Chain" with his partner and life-long friend Raekon Dorrel. Together they use their wit, resourcefulness and in many cases dumb luck to scam and manipulate those around them to get their next paycheck... that is until they are approached by an old priest who hires them to pull off their most difficult ruse yet: stealing the king's

dragon-shell armor. With the promise of a massive amount of money on the line, the duo hires a skilled thief named Quarrah Khai to assist them for this job, and with the additional help of a series of memorable side-characters, the team works together to infiltrate the palace and claim their riches without losing their heads. What follows is a gripping adventure full of action, comedy, disguises, romance and magic, and while it did suffer from *some* issues in its' pacing and characterization, I still thought it was an extremely immersive and entertaining read!

This book had a really enjoyable cast of characters, with my favorite probably being our titular hero, Ardor (referred to as "Ard" throughout most of the novel). In a lot of ways he was your standard charming rogue with a heart of gold, but that didn't make him any less engaging to me. He was funny, charismatic, emotional and a master manipulator, which when coupled with his effortless intelligence made him a true force to be reckoned with. He certainly had a knack for getting himself into terrible situations, but the question was rarely *if* he would get himself out of said situations, but rather *how*, as you knew he would find some ingenious way using any variables at his disposal. He doesn't experience an especially dramatic character arc, but his story still has several interesting elements, from his struggles with trust and selfishness to even explorations of his spirituality. I also really enjoyed his right-hand man Raek, who was a consistently snarky, reliable and warm presence in the story. He's a large and rather imposing figure upon first glance, but he's also an ingenious mathematician and lover of pastries when not providing some much needed muscle, and their strong friendship and reliance on one-another was one of my favorite aspects of the novel. Their characterizations and dynamic were **very** similar to that of Locke and Jean respectively from the aforementioned *Gentlemen Bastards* series, and I apologize if I'm alienating anyone by again drawing said comparison, but to anyone who has read Scott Lynch's series the similarities may be very noticeable. Some people may take issue with this, and I have no clue if Tyler Whitesides has even read those books, but for me it wasn't an issue, as it was more just giving me the type of characters and strong platonic relationships that I love in my fiction, plus the situations they were placed in were different enough to still feel very fresh! Quarrah was a bit more hit-or-miss for me though, especially in the first half of the story. Her thieving was really cool and impressive, and I appreciated how she was less "stoic bad-ass battle chick" and more "socially awkward girl who isn't used to having to work with a team", but there were times when she really annoyed me with how oblivious she seemed in anything pertaining to running a ruse despite already operating in criminal circles. However, this became much less of an issue as the novel went on and she learned to open up to her new comrades without, for lack of a better term, taking any of Ard's shit, and I ended up quite liking her. You can see the romance between them coming from a mile away (which I hope you don't consider a spoiler), and at times it felt very cheesy and predictable, but I was surprised by how invested in it I had become by the end of the book.

I also loved the magic system in this story, as it was really unlike anything I had ever read in any other fantasy novel. It's based around a substance called "grit", which is a powder stored in small portable pots which, when ignited, has a vast amount of abilities depending on what the powder is comprised of. These include creating magical barriers, explosions, loss of memory, resistance to gravity, deafening noise and creating illusions just to name a few, and the creative ways that Whitesides implements and combines these abilities was so fun and interesting. I also think its worth noting the method with which grit is formed, because oh man it is wacky. First you take the substances you want infused into your grit, sew them into the carcass of an animal, feed it to a dragon, track said dragon until it...um... relieves itself, the dragon torches its droppings until they are rock solid, at which point **that** material is ground into a fine powder and is ready for use. It was nothing if not unique! At first the whole magic system of grit was a bit confusing, but Whitesides was kind enough to provide a detailed record to all types of grit and their properties, cast-times and abilities at the back of the novel... which I did not realize existed until I finished the book. Whoops. But either way, as a reader you get the hang of how it works pretty quickly and I loved it!

Clocking in at about 730 pages this book was a bit of a beast, and in a novel that size I would be shocked if it **didn't** run into a few pacing issues. I found that this was particularly evident earlier on in the novel as the ruse was initially being formulated, and it wasn't until about 150 pages in that things really picked up. In the grand scheme of a book **this** large that is still relatively early on, but I can see why for many readers that is too large of a portion to have to initially get through, but once I did I couldn't put this book down. There were also some chapters scattered through-out the novel that followed Isle Halevand (the priest who hired Ard) and an associate of his as they uncover hidden secrets about this world's kingdom and history, and while the information they uncover is important, the method in which they tell it was such a slog to get through. Most of the time they were just giant dumps of uninteresting exposition and they made everything come to a grinding halt. These chapters were pretty few and far between but I was always happy to move on once they were finished.

Despite these criticisms I had such a fun time reading this book. It was energetic, had great dialogue, fascinating magic and plenty of interesting characters and plot twists. I can not wait for the next entry in the series!

Sammi says

This was...a long book. And boy did I feel it about halfway through, wondering where the thread had gone and when we were going to get back to the point. I'll also say that early on this book had me comparing it to *The Lies of Locke Lamora*, which isn't really fair because 1. in the end they weren't really that similar at all, and 2. Ardor Benn can't hold a candle to Locke Lamora. I have to imagine that the author knew that readers would make this comparison, especially since this is titled so similarly to Lynch's book, but it was probably not to his advantage.

The Good:

When the characters were plotting the ruses, it was pretty interesting. I felt like too much of the plot was probably given away during the setup stage, where each character would precisely explain what the plan was. We don't see Brad Pitt buying the SWAT gear in the middle of *Ocean's 11*, and for good reason. The audience needs to be in on the ruse but they are also the mark. Most of the action came from unexpected sources which was fine, but didn't quite scratch that con artist itch.

The Bad:

Okay, everything about Tanalin Phor was terrible. For Locke Lamora fans, she is the Sabetha in this story, but worse. I know she's not in it much but the scenes she was in were just cringy. She didn't act like a normal person, she didn't have any characteristics or anything, she was just a convenience for the plot and someone for Ard to pine over until he found someone who was more accessible, at which point he seemed to drop her like a stone. That meeting between the two of them was just...weird. I can't even explain it. Blech.

Quarrah had potential to be awesome, but then she became bogged down in Ard's nonsense and just became this wimpering shell of a person. Her relationship with Ard went from "This dude can be charming when he wants" to "I LOVE HIM" with absolutely no in between or anything to show us how she came to that decision. I loved the setup on this and could see that it had good potential, but it left me wanting and Quarrah changed from this headstrong, take care of yourself woman to, like, an Ard groupie. It was weird and I didn't like it.

The grit stuff was good enough, if you like that sort of thing. It reminded me of *Mistborn* in that it seemed

like a player's guide to a video game rather than any sort of real world building, but whatever. It worked well enough.

Ehh, I had some other stuff to say about this book but I've already forgotten, even though I just finished it 20 minutes ago. Two stars because I love con artist stories, but I think the biggest con was getting anyone to read this.

EDIT: Oh shit I forgot how bonkers this book got at the end, with Ard suddenly turning religious and the whole con (view spoiler). But it was the bad kind of bonkers, the out of left field bonkers, not anything that was carefully set up or foreshadowed. I always feel like authors have definitely lost the thread when they introduce that, looking at you JJ Abrams. It was strange.

Tara (Spinatale Reviews) says

Rating: 3.5 stars

The Thousand Deaths of Ardor Benn is an intriguing adult fantasy debut by Tyler Whitesides. While it is a tad overly long, it manages to entertain and engage the reader for the entirety of the 784 pages. The world-building is complex and the magic system extremely well developed. There are dragons, heists, and just a bit of romance.

The Thousand Deaths of Ardor Benn gives the reader an in-depth look into the planning and thought that go into a heist. From the conception to the execution, Whitesides meticulously takes the reader through the entirety of the heist. While it could be a bit tedious to read the very detailed descriptions, it was also fascinating. I also enjoyed the inevitable bumps and roadblocks that occurred. It was interesting to see how the characters adapted the plan on the fly. Each part of the ruse had its own story arc. The different parts actually read a bit like conjoined short stories. Since this book is such a giant, it was nice to have the natural divisions for reading purposes, although it made the overall pacing a bit odd.

The magic system was equal parts cool and disgusting (you'll understand the second part once you read the book). It reminded me a bit of Allomancy from Sanderson's Mistborn series. Except there were dragons. The dragons were actually one of my favorite parts of the book. They were equal parts fascinating and terrifying. In general, the magic system was well-developed and explained in an easily understandable manner. However, the various religions were very confusing. At first, I was a bit overwhelmed as I struggled to understand both the magic system and the different religions. Once I got used to them, reading became significantly easier and much more enjoyable.

The banter between the characters was one of my favorite parts of the book. It was witty, sharp, and occasionally made me laugh out loud. However, the main problem that I had with the book is that the characters only existed in relation to Ardor Benn. Even when he's not physically present or it's technically Quarrah's point of view, all interactions revolved around him. At one point, Quarrah even noted that she's gone from being entirely independent to being paralyzed without Ardor to guide her. The characters had such promise, I think the book would have been significantly stronger if they had been more nuanced and well-developed.

The Thousand Deaths of Ardor Benn was an entertaining read with plenty of high-stakes action, political intrigue, and dragons to keep the reader engaged. If you enjoyed The Lies of Locke Lamora or just like a

good heist story, consider checking this one out.

*Disclaimer: I received this book for free from the publisher in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review.

TS Chan says

I received an advanced reading copy from the publisher, Little, Brown Book Group, via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

3.5/5 stars

The Thousand Deaths of Ardor Benn is quite a commendable adult fantasy debut, flintlock-style, by Tyler Whitesides that is fun, entertaining and has a unique magic system.

Firstly, this book caught my attention because it was tagged as "Perfect for fans of The Lies of Locke Lamora, Eli Monpress and Theft of Swords." As these are some of my favourite titles, I simply cannot pass this up.

Ardor Benn is a ruse artist extraordinaire who enjoys trickery and mischief, and due to his legend was approached by the most unlikely employer who required his services to undertake the biggest and most audacious heist he had ever performed. And it was an extensive one, such that the story sometimes felt a bit too long.

The narrative follows the 3rd person limited point-of-view of three main characters - Ardor himself, a female thief named Quarrah Khai whom he had to employ to assist with this heist of his lifetime, and a significant man of religion, Isle Halavend (in this world, an Isle is akin to a priest). The character development was good enough that I was interested in each POV, even though my favourite is Ardor. That is not surprising as I've always had a soft spot for roguish characters with good hearts - a cliche that is well-used in stories like this, but one that I will not grow tired of anytime soon.

Aside from Quarrah, our ruse artist extraordinaire has a partner in crime who is also his best friend for many years, Raekon Dorrel. Ard is the master plotter while Raek is the master mixer who prepares all the necessary ingredients to pull off the former's ruses. What do I mean by mixer? Allow me to elucidate a bit about the magic system, which is hard rule-based magic like Allomancy from Mistborn, except it is detonated/ignited instead of consumed. The source of these magical ingredients called Grits is - wait for it - the excrement of dragons. Depending on the material fed to the dragons, the resultant Grit can have different usages, such as Barrier, Blast, Drift, Light, Cold and Heat Grit. And there are Prolonging and Compounding Grits which can be combined with the others to extend its duration or enhance its effects. A detonation will result in a cloud which is spherical, and anything within it will be affected by the Grit's purpose. A master mixer such as Raek will be able to ascertain the weight of different Grits required to achieve the desired outcome. There is a glossary on the Grit system at the back of the book which is quite detailed. Admittedly, some of the action scenes are pretty darn cool with the inventive use of the different types of Grits.

On top of this rather complex magic system, another aspect of the worldbuilding also took me a while to get settled in. We have a religion called Wayfarist, and the faithful are those who have the Urges to keep progressing and advancing, while the faithless are called Settled or Landers. It is all rather quite strange, and

I am still tottering as to how I feel about it.

There are times when I find the writing a bit clunky and perhaps a little less refined. Nonetheless, the book is easy to read, and I noticed the narrative improving as it progressed. Plotwise, it is to be expected that nothing will exactly go smoothly for Ard and his team. Regardless, there were a few cool revelations and plot directions which I did not anticipate. And for those who like having some element of romance in their stories, rest assured you will find it in Ardor Benn's debut story.

In short, this novel is an entertaining read for those who enjoy a fantasy heist that occasionally heads in unexpected directions. I definitely liked it enough to read its sequel.

This review can also be found at Booknest

Nicole says

Review originally posted at Erlebnisse: erlebnisseweb.wordpress.com/2018/05/2...

Um, is it possible to give a book six stars?

Because holy shit, friends.

I have a feeling this review is going to be everywhere, so I do sincerely apologize for that. But I just...sorta...fell completely in love with this book? And after walking for two miles during my lunch break, my mind going over and over the events that transpired between these pages (especially the last, eh, 300 or so), I'm still not sure exactly how to articulate how fantastic this book is. I mean, sure, I could just say, "Hey, holy shit, this book is pretty dang fantastic and you definitely want to read it if you like fantasy and heists and characters who feel like people instead of characters and such a complex, vibrant world with a new magic system and why haven't you read it already, I need someone to talk to about this book, but especially page 627?!"

I mean, sure, I could write that and leave it at that.

But that doesn't seem to truly do the book justice, you know?

So, I received an ARC from Orbit, which, first of all (!!). The fact that I'm "working with" Orbit now to write reviews over some of their books is something that will never, ever, ever cease to blow my mind (I know this is a common thing for book bloggers, but this is new to me, so stay with me). Because Orbit is one of my favorite publishers of all time. They publish good shit, friends. You already know this. So when this title was included in the options, I selected it. I'd never heard about it before, but you had me at heists and dragons. How could it not be good?

I was so not prepared for this story.

(That's a good thing.)

In a lot of ways, it reminded me of Scott Lynch's The Lies of Lock Lamora. If you've read my review of that novel, you know how hard I fell for that book and how much it shook me to my core. Lynch has a level of

mastery that few other authors I've ever read can match. And I read a lot of books. I thought Whitesides was akin to Lynch's level of skill with this story in many ways. The way how both authors have come up with this complex narrative of heists that, if I'm able to pull myself out of the story (which is really freakin' hard to do), I am just blown away by the intricacy and the layers of complexity. Both authors have created worlds so in-depth, it wouldn't take much convincing at all for me to believe that these worlds are actually, in fact, real, and they are nothing more but humble scribes retelling events that actually happened. It's that immersive.

Both authors have an uncanny knack for creating a feeling of comfort that you completely believe everything is going to be okay, only to destroy it all in the matter of one sentence. For Lynch, it was on page 466. For Whitesides, my sense of security and trust shattered on page 627.

Masterful. Positively masterful.

With *The Thousand Deaths of Ardor Benn*, there was so much I was impressed by and loved, that I don't truly think I can sum it up in the span of one already overly long review and capture everything. So I'll try to give you a quick run down of some of my highlights, with the knowledge that, once I publish this post, ten more things I should have written but forgot will pop up and I'll be super peeved by it:

Again, the worldbuilding. Reading this book in large chunks (because it's impossible to read it any other way), every time I was forced to close it, whether it be I needed to move on to the next thing, appointments, my boss walking around the corner and about to catch me sneaking in more chapters hunched in my desk like a gremlin; regardless of why I had to close the book, it always took me a moment to orient myself and truly remember that I wasn't actually within this world, trying to stay alive during the latest heist. From the little details to the high-stakes politics to the intensely fascinating religions, I was hooked and didn't want to let go.

Grit. I won't lie: I'm still not entirely sure how the stuff works, but whoa is that just completely and totally and utterly fantastic. Do you love fantasy but you've been tired of the same old magic system book after book? Grit and its various uses, how it's created and how integral it is to the plot is as unique as it gets.

The relationship between Ardor Benn and Raekon Dorrel. To be honest, their relationship reminded me a lot of Megan O'Keefe's duo in her *The Scorched Continent* trilogy, Detan and Tibbs. A fantastic duo in their own right, their relationship is one of the most organic I've read. Ard and Raek have the same kind of relationship that makes me want to root for them no matter what. I think their relationship being so real is why page 627 hurt so much.**

Quarrah Khai. I want novels written about this woman. Seriously.

Oh and how every single thing really had a purpose. There was never a throw away character (I'm still impressed by that twist, because I did not see that coming), from side characters you wouldn't expect, down to the freakin' lizard.

Speaking of additional characters, I honestly think my two favorite characters were Cinzia and Elbrig. I don't want to describe them too much, because I want you to get an untainted introduction to them like I did, but hot damn. Those characters were so unique, so intricate and the things they can pull off? I can only applaud.

I probably should stop, because this is getting to be one of the longest book reviews I've written. But in all honesty, this book deserves that. I'm not sure what else I could say to express my enthusiasm, respect, love and awe that I have for this story, aside from maybe one additional thing:

Any word on the publication date for book two?

Read on!

** I know I keep bringing up that line, but seriously. Have you ever been super content, having those feel-good-feels because things went how you imagined they would and then suddenly, one line just stops you in your tracks, makes you tense up and freeze, and suddenly you have to read it over again to make sure you've read it correctly, because there is no way that just happened? Tolkien did it to me in The Hobbit; Lynch in Lamora; Brent Weeks in The Broken Eye. And now Whitesides has done it to me here.

Christy Johnson says

I'll cut right to the chase with you- this is a wonderful book. So engaging, in fact, that I read it in its entirety in less than two days. I simply couldn't stop. The Thousand Deaths of Ardor Benn has all of the things I love to read- fantasy, adventure, mystery, intrigue, and a bit of romance, and Tyler Whitesides has delivered on all of them.

After agreeing to a daring task set by a desperate priest who caused him to magically forget the details, Ardor Benn is left puzzling how to steal the King's Regalia, a ceremonial armor crafted from rare dragon egg shell. He recruits a group of the masters of disguise, stealth, forgery, explosives and escape to do the impossible for the artifact is guarded day and night under the tightest security. Yet the desperate priest is adamant that it is for the good of the whole realm for an incurable sickness is washing across the land and no one knows the reason or the cure. Armed with grit, magic derived of the dying dragons, and his own wit Ard and his friends embark on this quest to find that things are much more serious than any dared fear and an unknown traitor is undermining Ard's every move.

Ardor Benn is an ebullient and likeable character. He is a perfect blend of Jack Sparrow, Han Solo, the Scarlet Pimpernel, and Robin Hood. He is exciting to read and watch. As a reader, it is easy to be in his mind. His natural honesty and curiosity make him a refreshing voice for the reader. As questions came to mind while reading, Ardor was there in the book asking them. He was a perfect vessel to travel the bounds of the story; it was natural to connect with him. Ardor is a con artist extraordinaire at first sight, but progresses to a more complex and inspiring person to watch as the story progresses. He is a smooth talker, yet never malicious; he comes across as impulsive, but he carefully makes decisions and does not waver once his mind is made up; he has a show of bravado that covers up a genuine and compassionate heart; he may seem lighthearted or eccentric, yet has earned the respect of those who know him; he is quick thinking and witted- it is a joy to see his mind work solutions to sudden intense situations.

The set up and structure of the magic was creative and fascinating. The monetary system and the magic are based on the diminishing population of dragons in the world. Naturally their depleted numbers are a concern and a source of one conflict in the story. The influence of the dragons is ubiquitous, and the author does a remarkable job at making the dragons part of the culture of the land from the religions practiced to the everyday slang the characters use. It felt immersive and realistic. Clearly Whitesides was assiduous in creating this very detailed and essential mythos of the story.

The setting calls to mind that of a bygone era of flintlocks and carriages. Here the author has generously given us a familiar framework and added in his own tantalizing, unique properties while eliminating tedious and excessive exposition. There is a lot of dialog that permits us to see the setting through the characters eyes

and actions allowing us to build our own image and making the story our own. I think there is no finer gift to a reader. Especially in certain parts of the book, the setting is a perfect mirror for the conflict, internal and external, that is happening in the story. I absolutely delight in metaphors like that, and this book doesn't disappoint.

A refreshing aspect is that we are allowed inside the mind of the mentor figure, religious leader Isle Halavand. I've read other stories where the mentors knowledge is kept from the reader and found it very frustrating, but here Whitesides graciously allows us in. This gives us a chance to share the journey of discovery as well as the burden of knowledge with him and have empathy for the protagonist who doesn't yet know as much as the reader. He also serves as a valuable source of truth because we know that everything he says is plausible. His interactions with Ardor Benn, who begins as religiously ambivalent, are insightful to both characters.

After traveling through the many life-changing events that Ardor experiences, watching him grow and evolve, it is a natural process to reflect on my own current state of life: am I too 'Settled' with where I am or am I more 'Wayfarer' and continually trying to improve myself and move forward? Newly armed with this fresh perspective gives me an unexpected but welcome motivation. This self-reflective mindset is, for me, what delineates a mere 'good book' from a great one.

I am truly envious of those encountering Ardor Benn for the first time. If I had any regret it would be that I perhaps read it too fast, and so couldn't stay in the world for as long as I would have liked. Fortunately, this is the type of book that will perpetually offer fresh insight and delight as I reread while awaiting the sequel.

Liviu says

starts quite strong - and overall the novel has a lot of energy until the end keeping me turning the pages which pretty much deserves 5 stars on its own as I would estimate less than 5% of the books I open today keep me engaged for long- but the mashing of fantasy and sf elements (in an otherwise fairly common buddy-buddy con-men adventure) starts creaking towards the end with the novel getting close to jumping the shark and losing any shred of suspension of disbelief; a strong last few pages salvages it though and overall an entertaining read that misses being great when the author tries to raise the stakes and make his main character a "true hero" TM

will definitely take a look at book 2 and hope it gets more adventure, less save the world, universe etc
