



## Acacia: The War with the Mein

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Leodan Akaran, ruler of the Known World, has inherited generations of apparent peace and prosperity, won ages ago by his ancestors. A widower of high intelligence, he presides over an empire called Acacia, after the idyllic island from which he rules. He dotes on his four children and hides from them the dark realities of traffic in drugs and human lives on which their prosperity depends. He hopes that he might change this, but powerful forces stand in his way. And then a deadly assassin sent from a race called the Mein, exiled long ago to an ice-locked stronghold in the frozen north, strikes at Leodan in the heart of Acacia while they unleash surprise attacks across the empire. On his deathbed, Leodan puts into play a plan to allow his children to escape, each to their separate destiny. And so his children begin a quest to avenge their father's death and restore the Acacian empire—this time on the basis of universal freedom.

## Acacia: The War with the Mein Details

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Author : David Anthony Durham

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## From Reader Review Acacia: The War with the Mein for online ebook

### Jesse says

So I finally finished this book. I can't believe how long it took me. Slow to start, but great 100 pages in.

Ok so to the characters. I liked these characters. The interesting thing about them is that i liked the secondary characters of Leeka Alain and Thadeus alot more than the 4 heirs to the books title throne. Why? Because they were great figures, yet they were also flawed. One man betrayed his most beloved friend and that friends children, because of something said friend's father did. He regrets it, and spends the rest of the book redeeming himself for this act. The other is a fallen general who struggles to avenge his nation and soveriegn, only to have the struggle crush his spirit and hope. Then he becomes a drug addict, and spends the rest of the book reclaiming all of himself that he had lost. Don't get me wrong. The kids are interesting and believable orphaned heirs to the throne. They are even interesting in the mythic/archtypal roles they play. Badasses are badasses, but flawed badasses are cooler is all I'm saying. I also liked that the antagonists of this story are very morally gray. They aren't evil, they are an oppressed people who just want revenge on the empire that oppressed them for so long. Though they do get a little dirt on their morals when they then maintain said empires corrupt practices. Still, the badasses are badasses rule applies and so they are also very entertaining as well as being real. So characters are a solid 4 stars.

The setting is really unique. Its 5 stars all the way. In many peoples fantasy I can see obvious broad cultural/ethnological stereotypes used. This isn't bad, its just using what common popular historical info people have in their heads. Tap into what people already have in their heads to some degree and they will keep coming back for more. Interestingly enough in this book, the world is just different enough that I can't easilly say "oh that part is from Rome History" or "Thats like mixed up Arthurian legend"..etc. Yet the setting is just enough like our own view of ancient history, as to whisper similarities in our unconcious' ear. The Acacians to me have the flavor of several different Imperial cultures, pieced together into a wholey unique feel. The same can be said for the Meinish. I want to call them Goths, or Huns, or even something else I'm not entirely familiar with. Which in the end is what they are. They make a logical sense as a people, but I can't point a finger at any one group that I know of (maybe there is one I don't know of) and say, "there, that is who the Meinish are based on". The Talayan cultures definitely feel African in nature, but that a cheese I ate definetly tasted like a French Cheese. Which one?, theres like a 1000!. I like this about the book though. It wasn't like I was reading epic fantasy that copies the broad and semi-broad strokes of all the other epic fantasy authors out there. Oh and I just have to mention that the Shipping League and their sea platforms are awesome! So 5 stars for setting.

Finally we come to the actual plot. This is the first book, so it is setting up much larger things. So I cut it a little slack, but still the orphaned children finding their destiny and coming home to collect, is classic. I don't mind it so much myself, but I can't give a huge amount of credit for using what could be called a cliche plotline. So I'm going with 3 stars, and hoping the next ones plot is a bit more out of left field.

Over all I must say that if you like George R.R. Martin style epic fantasy, you will probably like this. It could of stood to have a bit more developed spycraft/intrigue (I find it hard to believe that an Imperial dynasty that has lasted for 22 generations unbroken, would not have a well developed intelligence network. Hang on until page 100, it starts slow but by the end it will be worth it.

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### **Justus says**

I can't think of a fantasy book that was less fun to read than this one.

I knew I was probably going to be in trouble when the first six chapters were from six different points of view. I don't know why every fantasy author thinks a) we need that b) they have the skills to write that many characters well.

Hard to form much empathy with any of the characters. At the 50% mark there has been on-average 2 chapters per-character. Character overload. That we get a 9-year fast forward and a "this is the brief version of what happened to all of the characters in those nine years" exposition doesn't help matters.

Combine that with Durham's maddening elliptical style (nearly everything of consequence either happens off-screen or is narrated in a kind of Encyclopedia Britannica "this is what happened" style). He also seems to abhor writing dialog (which is usually a key component in fleshing out characters). I'm not sure there is one proper conversation in dialogue in the entire book.

One (small) positive is that despite this being a "trilogy" things wrap up pretty well at the end of the first book. I have absolutely zero desire to read any more of this series.

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### **Stephen says**

3.5 stars. This is one of those books I began to like more and more AFTER I was finished with it. The pacing was a bit uneven and there were some spots that dragged on too long(it is large book). However, when I finished the book and thought about it, I started thinking, WOW a lot of very interesting, orginal ideas were explored in this book and the world-building was very convincing. I really liked the set up of the Known World, the exploration of the evil activities used to keep the Akaran empire together (i.e., the Quota and the Mist)and its effect on the otherwise likeable Akaran family. Also, the author did a very good job introducing the evil Lothan Aklun while keeping them mysterious enough to keep us hanging on for the next novel. Again, while reading the book, I would have probably rated it on 3 stars. However, looking at it in hindsight and thinking about everything that was included in the book, I gave it an extra half star for all of the amazing ideas introduced in the story. I will certainly look out for the next book in the series.

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### **Jeffrey says**

This huge 750 page paperback is the first volume in the fantasy world created by the author. It contains impressive worldbuilding, history, magic of a sort and religion, but in some ways the huge worldbuilding and the effort of the author to cram so much into this first volume is, to my mind a real downfall.

The novel can be divided into three separate parts. The first 200 pages of the novel, which are devoted to explaining the world, the use of a drug called Mist to enslave hundreds of people in the populous and the use of slave labor and sale of children to appease foreign adversaries, and also to set the stage for the attack by the Mein, is frightfully long and really just forces one at times to skim the book. The worldbuilding is

impressive, but given the thrust of the story, that is that it starts on the first page with the journey of an assassin and yet takes over 200 pages for the Assassin to strike is difficult.

The next 300 pages are much better as the author splits time between the children of the king of Acacia who are all forced into new lives -- Spratling is a pirate ship captain, Mena is a Priestess of the Vuma, who learns to be a great swordswoman, Aliver, is a warrior and Corinn lives in the taken palace controlled by Hamish the ruler of the Mein, and also two others from Acacia, Thaddeus Clegg, the prime Minister and a General, plus Hamish the ruler of the Mein.

The last 250 pages is consumed with Aliver's journey to meet with the Santoth's, a group of vile sorcerers who have been trapped for hundreds of years by Aliver's ancestor and the attempt by the Acacians both in the field with Aliver and by Corinn to take back control of the country.

This was also well done as we can see how Corinn becomes powerful and seizes control of a special book in a diabolical way. I liked this part less than the middle but it was still very good.

I have the second volume out of the library right now but I think I need a break from this world -- rather than rushing right into the next volume, which I think in a way is very telling.

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## Outis says

Legs on a snake.

This is probably the closest thing I've read to a modern epic fantasy, played straight. But what use do we have for old-fashioned epic antics in modern fantasy? Nevermind what people often call "epic fantasy" these days. I'm talking about antics which wouldn't be out of place in songs about Charlemagne or something. But here Charlemagne's crew isn't hacking down infidel hordes. The antagonists make sense and treachery prevails. The author works (too) hard to paint his characters as real people, with psychological conflicts that go beyond the usual martial fare (loyalty, pride, honor, courage). The setting makes internal sense too and modern themes such as exploitation are brought up. There are fighting women and weeping men. So why throw in utterly preposterous macho antics? Why is so much of what the main characters do (even the antagonists, to a lesser degree) totally over the top? And I'm not just talking about the combat scenes, though these are the worst. I don't get it.

Something else I don't get is Acacia's intended audience. There are things which say "adult" to me but there's also a whole lot of childish stuff.

I reckon Durham could write some pretty good mythological epics in this setting (which has its own solid mythology). I can figure the likes of Hauchmeinish and Tinhadin standing tall and doing all sorts of over-the-top stuff in the vein of the our ancient and medieval epics. Versimilitude wouldn't be such an issue. But it was my main problem with his halfway modern Acacia. Chapters of internally sensible stuff are interspersed with material with respect to which there's no way I can suspend disbelief.

Epic fantasies are usually conservative (see Tolkien) or worse so my curiosity was piqued when I read people describing Acacia as "progressive". Reviewers wrote that "systemic societal problems" or "economics" were addressed.

But this isn't what I found in the book, merely an acknowledgement that there is such a thing as social and

economic concerns and that's it's not all about military strength and values. The use of children to generate social pathos was somewhat disturbing by the way... is exploitation OK when it happens to adults?

I also found what could be flippantly called divine right vanguardism. Acacia's politics are thoroughly top-down. The plebs have no agency and you only get to see their lives through the aristocratic gaze. A handful of people are empowered by their birth to lead the masses to struggle for their emancipation.

Sometimes the heroes don't even bother leading the masses and simply proceed to emancipate them. It seems Durham didn't get the "you can't blow up a social relationship" memo.

Such politics are right at home in epic fantasy considering the reactionary core of the genre. In this sort of fantasy, magic justifies the power of those who would otherwise rule merely by the virtue of other people's fear or consent. Give such leaders extraordinary magical powers or simply extraordinary abilities and heroic invulnerability and you've introduced an external reason for people to accept their leadership (same as state religions). All manner of anti-democratic practices and institutions are justified in this fashion. In Acacia, magic even justifies patriarchy.

So why did I bother finishing this long book?

It doesn't feel that long to begin with. As in Dune for instance, lots happens and lots of strange background stuff is hinted at. The structure is appropriate to the breadth of the story and the writing is effective so reading Acacia it isn't a chore.

And there are things which make it worth reading. First, the intriguing world with its East India Co, its unknown lands and its aforementioned mythology.

As you've probably read elsewhere, Acacia is a tropefest and in some ways quite derivative. But Durham keeps pulling nice surprises out of his hat anyway.

Also, the three Mein brothers are great tragic heroes and the Tunishnevre is an awesome concept. I was rooting for their emancipation the whole time.

There's gratification peppered throughout the book like the demise of that most grating prince which came out of left field (not much of a spoiler: there's a few princes in there). I was hoping he'd die in a spectacular way but I didn't expect it would actually happen. That was almost as good as Ned at the Sept of Baelor! And it was of course not the only satisfying death, just the most fiery.

I'm usually disappointed by the endings of this sort of book but by the third part I had come to take the author's craft for granted and wasn't surprised when the final twists turned out to be worth having stucked with the book.

Even if Acacia isn't really my thing, I've got to admit it's definitely a cut above the likes of Tolkien.

It's not in Herbert's league but I guess it could please the more patient and perverted among the many who can't seem to get enough violent wish-fulfillment fantasies featuring good-hearted aristocrats and their gifted brats.

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### **Katie says**

Joyless.

That's what it boils down to. There's nothing wrong with the writing. Or the world building. Or the character development, for the most part. I really wanted to like this, and it is well done, except for the fact that in 700+ pages I don't once remember smiling, let alone laughing. None of the characters ever makes a real joke - one of them is supposed to be known for his sarcastic wit, and others jeer at misfortune, but that's all we get.

I understand it's a war, the empire falls, yadda yadda. I wasn't expecting Terry Pratchett. But people laugh at funerals. People make jokes in trenches and in their deathbeds. You have to have a little comedy in your tragedy - ask Shakespeare (or George R.R. Martin, or Robin Hobb, or...). Everyone in this book is determined and earnest all the time, and I just don't care what happens to them (I *\*almost\** care about Mena. Almost.)

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## Michael says

When it comes to fantasy, I often wonder if writers these days are paid by the pound. Glancing over the spines of the novels in the sci-fi and fantasy section at the bookstore or library, it certainly seems that way. I often wonder if the word "epic" should be translated "book so big you can hurt someone if you dropped it on them from the top of a flight of stairs."

There are a lot of writers who fall into the category of epic being little more than an excuse to have a huge page count and to give readers a severe case of cramps holding the book. Terry Goodkind is the most obvious culprit to me, though I've heard Robert Jordan can be the same (I've not read any Jordan and have no plans to in the near future). But then you've got an author like George R.R. Martin who embraces the term and delivers book that are, for lack of a better term, truly epic, packed with character and world building and a narrative thrust that keeps moving forward and rarely devolves into extended navel gazing.

Somewhere in between those two extremes of Goodkind and Martin is "Acacia," a story that advertises itself as an epic fantasy and certainly has the page count to back-up it up. David Anthony Durham has previously written some historical novels. The attention to detail and creating an authentic sense of time and place is both an asset and a detriment to "Acacia." Durham's attention to detail and world-building is admirable, when it's being done right, but there are times when it brings the entire story to a halt and gets a bit tedious. A lot of these are in the first 200 or so pages as Durham has to laboriously put pieces into place so he can give us the payoff in the next two thirds of the book. It makes the novel difficult to wade into.

Durham's world is an intriguing enough one with various political factions vying for power. Several factions have controlled the world of "Acacia" at various times, each one working to build alliance and overthrow the other for as long as time can recall. It's an old struggle and it's not one that is going to end any time soon. One interesting aspect is the idea that each ruler comes into power with lofty dreams of changing the system of rule only to find the system is far too entrenched to make such radical changes without destroying their grasp on power and the world as it is.

In the universe of "Acacia," the ruling family rules with the help of a hired naval fleet and an interesting pact. Each year, the party in power provides a quota of slaves in return for the continued co-existence with another faction of might and a drug that keeps the rest of the populace sedated and in line. This deal with the devil as it were keeps the status quo and allows the in-fighting amongst factions as each one goes into and out of power. There are different names and personalities to things, but each ruler realizes that this is the system and it's going to take more than political capital and intestinal fortitude to change things they have or are willing to sacrifice.

Durham is clearly trying to follow the example of Martin with a sprawling cast of characters, many of whom you'll like and then dislike and then like again as the story goes along. He's also willing to make sure that no one is safe in the story, giving the story a bit more gravity than other fantasy offerings where you know that certain characters won't die or change too much in the course of the novel or series.

But at close to 800 pages, this is only the opening round of the story. The cover proclaims this is to be a trilogy and while I liked the world here, I'm still not sure I'm anxious to jump into the next book. "Acacia" doesn't resolve everything and is the opening act for a larger tapestry. Whether or not I'll continue the journey remains to be seen.

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### **Bridget says**

3.5 stars. Solid fantasy & decent enough to get me to read the second book. And unlike the Game of Thrones saga this is a trilogy and all three books are already out so if I like the second book I can move right on to the conclusion. The writing is good, lots of political intrigue. My only complaint is I wish there was a character I could really get behind. They all feel a bit flat but the world building is good enough for me to try round two;)

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### **Peggy says**

When I was asked to review this book, I was less than enthusiastic. I've been reading genre fiction for a long time, and there are things I'd decided I was done with. Topping that list was "High Fantasy Quest Novels," followed almost immediately by "Book 1 of a Brand New Series" (with a special amount of "done" leftover for "Book 1's in Excess of 500 Pages"). Still, the book was sent to me by someone I trust, so I decided to give it a go.

She always was the smart one.

David Anthony Durham has pulled off something remarkable: a huge, sprawling epic that manages to weave together history, politics, intrigue and thunderous action scenes without ever losing track of the multitudes of finely-drawn characters.

The detail that Durham lavishes on his world is impressive, and it grounds you firmly in this land. The author's previous work as an historical novelist is clear in the care he takes with the backgrounds of the various kingdoms. We learn about myths, religious practices, courting practices, ruling philosophies, and day to day living for a number of different peoples. The truly amazing thing is that this wealth of detail is all germane to the main action of the story, and that, with a few exceptions, the story doesn't grind to a halt while we're getting the background info.

That said, this is book one of a series, which means that there's a great deal of setup for a payoff that, although sensible, seems a bit too abrupt. Or maybe that's just my impatience; this is only book one, after all. I'm sure I'll get the payoff I want eventually, but I want it now!

Much closer to George R.R. Martin than J.R.R. Tolkien, *Acacia* has wonders in store both for those who love epic fantasy and for those who think it's old hat. Once you visit, you'll be as giddy as I am that there are more chapters still to come (and as grumpy as I am that they're not out yet).

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## **Gergana says**

If I wasn't having so much fun buddy reading this book with Cillian, I would've given up on it around half-way through XD

Read in February, 2017

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## **Scott Hitchcock says**

2.5\*'s.

The story was good. I liked the characters. The world was different and robust. So why only 2.5's? I think the axiom show don't tell sums it up. I felt disappointed at many key action points. It was like somebody sent me an email about sitting front row of a performance. Beyond that instead of a scene showing why a character was intuitive or graceful we would get two paragraphs describing why. There was also portions of the book where it seemed there was little to no dialog for too long of a period.

Still I'm torn on going on because as I said the world, characters and general story were good and well thought out.

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## **Phil Tucker says**

I was genuinely excited to read this novel. So much so that it was one of the first Kindle novels I purchased, and it was with pleasure that I planned to lose myself in Durham's incredibly long novel. The first few pages started off well: assassin on the go--great. Descriptions of how he moves through different climes, adapting his clothing and style to each one so as to blend in. Great. And then...? He arrives in his destination city, and suddenly we spin away from him, and begin to follow a host of other characters. Only a few hundred pages later does the assassin re-appear. Not so great.

However, it need not have been a problem if Durham had kept my attention. Don't get me wrong--he does an excellent job of fleshing out an intriguing fantasy world. Sure, you have your standard frozen wastes up north from which the peril to the empire shall come, but still, it was a job well done, with different cultures, an incredibly interesting drug trade problem, and plenty of attention to detail to customs, traditions and more.

However... the characters felt wooden. In the style of George Martin the story focuses on a group of brothers and sisters, and follows their adventures as their family and lives of privilege are sundered. My problem was that the protagonists simply weren't that interesting or unique to hold my attention. If this were the first time that I were reading a door-stopper tale of fantasy about a group of kids then sure, it would have worked, but after Martin's treatment of the Starks you need more than just a rehash.

Where the novel really lost me however was when the bad guys from the North made their big appearance. They felt two dimensional, as if Durham were working too hard to make them seem cool, dangerous, and vicious, and as a result they lacked depth and failed to interest me. When the empire fell I didn't really care too much, since I didn't buy into the bad guys, and when the kids scattered I only decided to keep on reading due to having invested so much time in the novel already.

Flash forward five years or so in the novel's time line, and the kids are all grown up and radically changed. One has become the most daring of pirates, the other a hardened desert warrior, the next the high priestess of a sea cult, etc. The problem was that they changed so radically that I lost my connection to them--it was as if I were being introduced to a whole new cast of characters, and their extreme roles destroyed my suspension of disbelief all over again. With nobody left to follow of interest, I stopped reading.

So, *Acacia*: a beautifully realized world, a great sense of history, myth, diverse cultures and traditions, but peopled with wooden characters, two dimensional villains and unable to hold my attention after the first few hundred pages.

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### **Weylin says**

I hated...yes, strong word....hated the way this book was written. I got mad at myself when I realized that I was reading this book just to read a book and that I wasn't enjoying it at all. Thank God I quit half way through and found a good book to read instead. Anyone interested in this book/series should save themselves the money and get "Winterbirth" instead (similar concept, but better in every aspect).

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### **Terence says**

I'm going to be lazy and direct my following to Ben's review of *Acacia* here. He covers much of what I would have written, though his reaction to the story was at least twice as enthusiastic as mine.

I first attempted to read *Acacia* several years ago and don't believe I got past the first 50 pages or so. I succumbed to impulse at a library used-book sale and plunked down the 50 cents to get my own copy. I can see why I dropped it the first time around. The writing's "clunky." Durham has a tendency to dump information on the reader in appallingly awkward asides; and when he's not, his writing is good but not great. None of the characters made much of an impression on me because I've seen them before and I've seen the plot before.

There's a mild interest to finish out the trilogy if only to have closure but no pressing urgency.

As you might suspect, I can't recommend the book. But...

I think this is a case of taste. If Durham's writing were less unwieldy or the characters more interesting (or both), I'd have more enthusiasm for the work. If you like fantasy and enjoy authors who can shake up the usual tropes, you should try *Acacia*. You might find Durham just your cup of tea.

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### **Danielle says**

Loved it! (Review to come.)

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## seak says

Crazy enough, I actually originally planned on giving this series a pass. There's just so much time and so little to read... or something like that.

But then I read this review of the entire trilogy from a reviewer I highly trust and I decided I should give it a go after all. I'm so glad I didn't stick to the original plan.

Acacia follows the Akaran family, the ruling family of the nation that is Acacia. King Leodan is a devoted and loving father to his four children, Aliver, Corinn, Mena, and Dariel. As noble and even likable as King Leodan is, his conquering nation has many enemies and holds a number of dark secrets which began generations earlier.

One of these nations is that of the Meins. Lead by Hanish Mein and his two brothers, the Meins have been harboring a hatred for the Acacians and their dark secrets for as long as they have been banished to the desolate wasteland that is the far north of the Known World.

Acacia unfolds very gradually as we get to know each of the Akaran children intimately along with Leodan, his chancellor, Hanish Mein, and even a few others. As each has their own point of view chapter, you may begin to see why many complain of the slow start that this book is known for.

Personally, I think the slow burn worth it because you feel a deep connection to each of the children especially and once the story really gets going your joy and anguish for these characters is only enhanced.\*

\*Note: This is also coming from a huge fan of authors such as Susanna Clarke, John Marco, and Janny Wurts.

However, if a slow start is not for you, you'll be happy to know that Mr. Durham has cut out 14,000 words of this volume in the newest release.

This series has been compared to George R.R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire series and I think that is valid. Both deal with young characters, lots of political intrigue, vast scope, and low on magic. I have to admit that Mena is just as cool as Arya in a lot of ways, not the least of which is the fact that she's a sword-wielding noble's daughter.

The characters do grow up about midway through the novel, but the similarities are still there. There's betrayal, reverse betrayal, and some twists and turns that not only come out of nowhere, but make you feel like you should have seen it all along. That's just good writing.

The one big and highly favorable comparison I can make is that at a certain point I was so involved with one pov, I'd flip pages to see when we'd go back to that one, only to get just as involved in the next pov. That's a very good thing.

If you're dying for something to read while we wait for George, Acacia just may be the perfect interlude.

4.5 out of 5 Stars (Very Highly Recommended!)

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## Tiara says

### TL;DR Version:

3.5 stars, despite any grievances.

Read more reviews @ [The Bibliosanctum](#).

### Long Version:

Narrator: Dick Hill | Length: 29 hrs and 30 mins | Audiobook Publisher: Tantor Audio | Whispersync Ready (as of this posting): Yes

Leodan Akaran is the king of Acacia, which includes all the "known world." The Akarans have ruled over Acacia for many generations with the throne being passed down from father to son. A bitter race called the Mein secretly oppose the Akaran rule and have since their occupation, feeling the Akarans have been disingenuous and underhanded in their rule, including how they dealt with their ancestors. The Mein's version of history recounts how their ancestors were driven to the frozen north for being an earnest people and opposing the practices used to keep up this illusion of perfect.

Things aren't as perfect as they seem on the surface. Leodan is idealistic, but buckled under the pressure of preserving the empire's peace through unsavory means. Leodan hopes that his children will grow up and foster the change that he couldn't. However, he doesn't give his children the knowledge they need to fight for these changes at first, and when we meet the children they're a seemingly clueless bunch whose father still spins tales when they try to question him about their true history. The Akaran children are the heart of this book as a whole, doted on by a troubled father whose only joy comes from loving them and mentally preserving the memory of his deceased wife.

Aliver is the oldest child and heir to the throne. Mena, Aliver's younger sister, describes him as being afflicted with a disease called "boredom" that he hasn't recovered from. He's hot-tempered, given to action rather than inaction. He has a good heart and a naïve view of how the world should work. Corinn is the second oldest. She's cultured, well-spoken, and versed in court behavior. She's a princess' princess. She considers herself the pretty one between her and her younger sister. After Corinn comes Mena, she is astute and curious, often described by others as having a wisdom and intuition beyond her years. Last is Dariel. Like his sister Mena he is curious with a taste for adventure and action. He has a way of getting into things under the noses of the adults.

With the twist of an assassin's blade, the four Akaran children are thrown to the wind, a request made by their dying father to his most trusted adviser as the Akaran rule begins to crumble. He feels that allowing them to live their life unfettered will shape them into the people they're meant to be, and with it, he hopes that the Acacian empire will become the bastion he wasn't able to achieve in his reign.

This book started a little slow for me. It had those Game of Thrones vibes all around it as we meet the Akaran children. Despite that, I found Durham's writing to be lyrical and thoughtful, so I toughed it out a little while longer, hoping it'd become more than a clone. Midway through the first part, Durham pushed off the ledge and began to distinguish this story as his own. It became a story about power, betrayal, redemption,

love, and change coupled with a intriguing mythos that I mostly enjoyed.

One thing I truly appreciated is that Durham tried to present a struggle where the grievances between these two races was not just a simple matter of who's right and who's wrong, who's good and who's evil, summed up succinctly by this quote:

Very little of what he learned of people's actions began or ended with either the noble ideals or the fiendish wickedness he had been taught lay behind all great struggles. There was something comforting in this.

The readers do feel empathy for the Akaran children. Their father has been murdered and their fate has been placed in chance's hands. However, the Mein aren't presented as a despicable race of people. A people who would win a war through some questionable means, yes, but their actions hardly set a precedent in the book, as previous wars have been won through questionable methods and will likely continue to be won in that manner. Nothing about their actions say they're worst than the Acacians. The methods seem brutal because we witness them in "real time" affecting characters in a current situation as opposed to only "hearing" about the actions of the former rulers and how they've affected the Mein in retrospect. It is, after all, war.

Durham doesn't reduce the Mein people to just villain status. Their fears, wants, and needs are the same as any other people's. Even in their war, the goal isn't to annihilate these other people completely. This is seen as unrealistic and foolish. You fight the enemy and assimilate the people. They just want to claim what they feel they lost through treachery and end a dynasty. There isn't needless slaughter of innocent to assert their rule (though there are casualties, of course) and much of life is the same for the people except the name and race of their rulers.

It makes readers question why they oppose the Mein rule so, but I think one character summed up the sentiment when they said they think people forgot the realities of the Akaran rule, that the nostalgia of having an Akaran on the throne tempered their opinions as neither rule is that much worse/better than the other. However, because the Mein aren't some big bad, it does make the upcoming battle feel somewhat anticlimactic, even if the Akaran children are teeming with ideas about how the kingdom should be ruled, which brings me to my next point.

My main problem with this novel is that Durham obviously loves the Akaran children. There is nothing wrong with a writer loving their characters. They need to care about them in order to give the readers developed characters. However, the Akaran children don't face many real dilemmas or most of the dilemmas they do face don't give them actual crisis points with the exception of a few key moments. Even these varied situations they find themselves growing up in aren't necessarily challenging them.

Situations that should be particularly prickly for them, they're able to handle better than most people would with some of these outcomes feeling a little bit like Durham was afraid to really test the characters. This is especially true of a character I really loved in the book. For this reason, the novel didn't have as much of an impact for me because, even when a scene got tense, you knew everyone was going to make it out unscathed while brandishing power beyond imagine. The story wasn't tested because it's characters were never truly tested.

As far as the narration goes, Dick Hill is an exceptional narrator for this story. However, I did find him to be a very slow reader, slower than normal. I could easily bump up the narration to two times the speed and he'd

sound like he was reading at a more normal pace. He's one of those rare narrators that I'm comfortable with listening to on three times the speed, which I still didn't do very often. He has such a rich quality to his voice that I didn't want to speed him up too much and lose that full-bodied, strong voice he brought to the story. Two times speed was a reasonable compromise between speed and narration quality for me. While I do think he has a rich, deep reading voice, that didn't diminish the impact of the female characters since, for me, quality of timbre is a better way of portraying male/female characters over decreasing/increasing pitch arbitrarily.

Something I noticed with this audiobook is that it added content to the story. Sometimes, I'd read along with the narrator using the Kindle book, and there would be whole passages added to the story that are not in the book. I'm used to a missing or added word here and there when listening to an audiobook, but this is the first time I'd encounter a great deal of content being added to narration. It's not necessarily a bad thing as it wasn't just filler. The things added really helped to flesh out the story and characters, but it also made me feel a little apprehensive about reading the book without the narration because I felt that I may miss some great passages because the audiobook differed slightly from the book.

There's a part of me that wants to rush into the next book. At the same time, I want to savor the end of this one. I really loved the changes one of the Akaran children went through, as their change defied making them a victim or giving no recourse to be more active in destiny. Now, I'm curious about this particular Akaran's role and how it may or may not align with the other siblings' goals in future books. Despite any grievances I have with this book, there's something truly magical about this in a contemplative type way.

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### **Catherine Ford says**

I really enjoyed this book, and cannot understand why it has such a low rating.

I am going to say something that will probably earn me a lot of derision... this book was loads better than Game of Thrones. I abandoned Game of Thrones at around 85% because I just could not take anymore of it. The War with the Mein has many similarities to Game of Thrones in that each chapter is from a different point of view and in that it is quite political and the rise and fall of empires. But, where as in Game of Thrones I felt like I was watching a slide show of snippets of story go by, in this book I became immersed in the world and the characters. David Anthony Durham is good at explaining the surrounds as well as the emotions of the characters. He managed to make you both like the villans and despise them at the same time. The man also has a talent for describing blood and gore as well as intricate battle scenes. There were many moments in the book where I found myself holding my stomach for fear of throwing up at his vivid descriptions. There is not much magic in the book until the end, but it is eluded to throughout the story. The religious system is also very well thought out.

Okay, yes you can tell that I enjoyed this book, and epic fantasy lovers who enjoy a good long book, should definitely read it.

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### **Cillian says**

Well, my rating should tell you everything you need to know: this read didn't go so well. It was a fucking disaster.

Read with Gergana in her group A Land of Fantasy Addicts, AKA "Don't know how to bike, but books we like."

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### **jane says**

I should have quit reading this one. I kept trying to give it a chance and wondering where it would go. I didn't like the world enough or care about the characters enough to have it be worth the time. Good people are killed off. Realistic I suppose and highly developed but depressing. A long book and it will be a long series, Robert Jordan or George RR Martin like, but I don't need it to be a part of my life. Not recommended.

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