



The Thousandfold Thought

R. Scott Bakker

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The apocalyptic holy war comes to a head in this conclusion to the groundbreaking Prince of Nothing series and casts into question all the action that has taken place before.

The Thousandfold Thought Details

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Mike says

Observational aside: I will rarely reread books. Once I finish a book it is usually off to the next one, with few exceptions. In this case the sixth book in the series, The Great Ordeal, is coming out soon, a book I have waited nearly five years for, and I wanted to give myself a refresher on the entire series before it was released. I don't recall the first time I read "The Prince of Nothing" trilogy but Goodreads assures me it was before I joined this website. Since then I have read literally hundreds of books and grown as a reader thanks to those books as well as thinking through those books when I write reviews. Over that time my sensibilities and critical eye has changed as well (I'd like to think for the better) so it was a rather enlightening exercise this return to a time in my reading life from before Goodreads (BGR?). With that rambling out of the way on to the review.

The Darkness That Comes Before review

The Warrior Prophet review

Now I could write about the fascinating happenings of this book, how characters developed, how the world was broadened a bit more, how the climax both brought great closure and opened up exciting new possibilities for the next trilogy. I could write about how this book was the culmination of many well laid plans of the first two books and paid off quite well. I could say how much I enjoyed rereading this book and what new insights it offered. But...

I'm not.

Don't get me wrong, this book is all those things and well deserving of the five stars I gave it. It is just that I would prefer to use this space to ramble about a much more profound theme of the series. That theme is control and choice.

When I first read this book in the BGR years of my life I approached it as just another fantasy book, albeit one with some interesting insights into the human condition and innovative takes on characters. But after many, many more book readings and hours logged writing reviews my perspective was a bit different this time, a bit more critical and a bit more discerning. What I found upon this reread was, yes, a smashingly good and original fantasy series, but also a subtle theme exploring the nature of control and choice. Specifically the control of moral agents by other sentient moral agents (there's that philosophy pseudo-minor I picked up kicking in again) and the presence or absence of choice. Once I noticed this it seemed to permeate the story at multiple levels.

Esmenet: One of my issues with the series upon the reread was how little agency the female characters had, Esmenet especially. She is a prostitute in a culture that both condemns them and uses them, maintaining a double standard where the female body is condemned when exercising its sexuality but also exploited as an object by that same culture. She has little control over her life both because of her sex and her profession.

On a very apparent level she is controlled by the men around her and her culture. She is little more than property that can be bought and done with as they see fit; deviating from her niche within the culture can get her injured or even stoned to death. Even when she is among friends she is only safe because they are men that can provide cover for her from others. While not as overt of a control (nor would they consider it control), she very much has to stay within their orbit for her own protection.

I believe one of the reasons Bakker put Esmenet in such a situation was to cultivate within the reader empathy for Esmenet, to show how crappy it was to be within the power of others with little to no recourse. He wanted to show readers that such a system is fundamentally unjust and perhaps lay the ground work for the other types of control present in the book.

Cnaiür urs Skiötha and Drusas Achamian: Where Esmenet was controlled by an immediate, external agency Cnaiür and Achamain (Aka) are controlled by their own internal beliefs. You may not necessarily think of this as control but a frequently recurring occurrence in this series is Cnaiür attempting to most traditional Scylvendi he could be (Scylvendi being the culture he is from, a proud and traditional steppe warrior society). But as much as he tries he is unable to constrain his thoughts to that of a traditional Scylvendi, always having his desire for revenge and the things he must do to achieve this conflict with what he thinks a proper Scylvendi ought to do. Of course it doesn't help he was ostracized from his tribe for behaving in an un-Scylvendi manner. This conflict drives and controls how he behaves and acts, a invisible chain that constrains what he can and cannot do. It eventually drives him mad and to self-destructive ends.

For Aka, he is forever linked to the memories of a long dead sorcerer and founder of his School. Every night he relives truly terrifying memories of the First Apocalypse, an ancient genocidal conflict that nearly saw all indigenous life on the planet wiped out. It is these memories that drive his fellow Mandate Schoolmen to oppose the forces of the Consult, the ancient evil that came so near to victory once. He pursues his mission at the expense of his love for Esmenet and the love he has for his former students. It is a lodestone he willingly lays about his own neck that keeps him from happiness and fulfillment and is renewed after every night living the horrors of ages past.

Both Aka and Cnaiür bind themselves to the control of otherwise impotent forces: culture and duty. While not as obvious as the control men and society place upon Esmenet, they are also destructive to the health and well being of the characters, levers that move their souls.

Anasûrimbor Kellhus: Which brings us to the lever mover himself Kellhus. Kellhus has many qualities that much suggest he is a Marty Stu: he is attractive, absurdly physically fit, capable of understanding the thoughts of feelings of people by the muscles of their face and tone of voice, nearly unbeatable in a fight, and absurdly intelligent, capable of learning new languages in mere days and easily learning sorcery. But for all his physical and intellectual prowess he is probably the farthest thing from a Marty Stu for he is complete devoid of emotions.

Let me back up for a second. Kellhus was, for all intents and purposes, raised in a cult, albeit a very, very, VERY successful one. The Dûnyain have existed since the First Apocalypse, more than two thousand years.

The Dûnyain have surrendered themselves to the logos, to what you would call reason and intellect. We seek absolute awareness, the self moving thought. The thoughts of all men arise from the darkness. If you are the movement of your soul, and the cause of that movement precedes you, then how could you ever call your thoughts your own?"

Of course the way they achieve that is truly terrifying. First off they selectively breed within themselves for certain attributes and train the children pretty much from birth. And that training does involve a giant hall of lobotomized people with flayed faces to better allow the children to understand how thoughts ("movements of the soul") correspond with expressions (to mention just one). It is creepy as fuck and as an adult Kellhus is pretty much a super rational vulcan with the capacity perfectly fake emotions and the ability to read people's faces as though he were reading their mind. Couple that with an amazingly sharp intellect and you can see how he is able to manipulate the entire Holy War to serve his own purpose.

"What comes before determines what comes after. For Dûnyain, there's no higher principle."

"And what comes before?"

"For men? History. Language. Passion. Custom. All these things determine what men say, think, do. These are the hidden puppet-strings from which all men hang."

Now while all this may have the makings of a super villain, you have to remember Kellhus isn't evil. He isn't good either, he is merely the ultimate pragmatist, using what tools (people) are available to him to achieve his ends. Just as children are told convenient stories and lies to make them behave in a certain way Kellhus can exert the same sort of control over grown men and women.

But just what is this control? Unlike the control over Esmenet it is not backed by force. Unlike the control over Aka and Cnaiür this control is external, sort of. What Kellhus does it manipulate the passions, history, and beliefs of the people of the Three Seas and fits himself into their sense of the world. He makes them BELIEVE in him as a religious prophet by understanding and manipulating them. They all believe they came to believe in him by their own free will but he is very much adjusting and tweaking their emotions (using his Dûnyain training) to become useful tools to him. It is a control that is both subtle and profound, playing upon the most basic impulses of mankind, the need to believe. Personally I find this sort of control and manipulation just as unjust and terrible as the control exerted upon Esmenet, even if it is infinitely more subtle and less coercive.

But if anything Kellhus's control raises an even larger question: do we have free will? Because all the things Kellhus uses to control men are not created by him, but merely used by him. He utilizes the pre-existing beliefs and cultural patterns to influence people. Without him present people are still influenced and equally controlled by their circumstance. To use the series's phraseology: they are not self moving souls, they are influenced by the darkness that comes before.

If we're nothing more than our thoughts and passions, and if our thoughts and passions are nothing more than movements of our souls, then we are nothing more than those who move us.

Kellhus or no Kellhus the people of these books are the product of their environment. It controls how they perceive the world, what they consider sacred or profane, what they ought to aspire to and the like, just like real humans. If the characters in the books can be moved by the manipulation of these core beliefs can we say that people in the real world would not be as easily manipulated? Are we, like the characters in the book, forever defined by what comes before, unable to step outside the cycle of causality and become self moving souls? It isn't surprising the author of this series nearly finished a PhD in philosophy as some of its most fundamental questions are explored in the series.

The Outside: What, did you think Kellhus was the last link in the chain of control? Nope, there is also the metaphysical space known as The Outside. Think of it as the realm of Gods, Demons, and the Afterlife. Very little is actually known about. Many human religions make claims about it but for the most part it is speculative. Sorcerers are considered damned because of the hideous mark they bear and can see in other sorcerers. They have lost their soul but gained the world.

While this may also seem speculative (afterall, maybe the mark of the sorcerers means something completely different) there is the matter of the Inchoroi, the space aliens that crashed on the planet these books take place on and waged a millennial war with the Nonmen. They believe they are damned not due to sorcery, but due to their proclivity towards... let's say carnal behavior (to put it VERY, VERY lightly). They believe if they can reduce the amount of souls on a planet to 144,000 they can sever the link between the world and the Outside, thereby saving themselves. Considering they have apparently traveled to other worlds to try and achieve this I am willing to give them the benefit of the doubt they may be on to something.

If we grant that they are right, that there is an Outside that will damn some souls to an eternity of torment (oddly there is very little discussion about a heaven analogue) then there is another layer of control that falls upon all souls. This looming threat of damnation affects how a person behaves and what they do. However, because the terms of the Outside are so vague and unsubstantiated, there is really no way to know just what this all powerful moral judge uses as a basis for its judgement.

Clearly the Inchoroi have some idea that their perversities give them a first class ticket to damnation, but other moral prescriptions are very much lacking. Yet by trespassing against these unspecified rules a soul could find an eternity of torment waiting for them. This uncheckable power (unless the Inchoroi plan works) very much controls people, dictating what is and isn't permitted with no recourse or avenue of appeal. It doesn't help that the rules aren't even laid out anywhere since various religions claims different revelations regarding the Outside. What people are left with is an absolute tyrant that is concealed in its moral scales and will only reveal its will after a soul has shuffled off its mortal coil. The Outside controls through its very ambiguity causing people to act contrary to their own souls to conform to an externally applied standard. Religious extremism is very prevalent throughout this series (as to be expected since it was based on the First Crusade) and that is partially driven by the very real existence of The Outside.

So where does all this leave us?

I think with a multifaceted examination of control and choice:

- Esmenet** was constrained by externally applied and enforced social and cultural chains
- Cnaiür urs Skiötha** and **Drusas Achamian** were constrained by internally applied chains of what it meant be the role that had placed upon themselves
- Khelhus** used the pre-existing externally produced but internally applied chains of culture and history to manipulate men and women of all walks of life while he himself was free of such shackles and could stand outside the flow of history and culture
- The Outside** serves as the ultimate stick, threatening eternal damnation to those who stray morally from its unrevealed moral code

All these forces come together to drive the passions and ambitions of men and women in the books. They are also a mirror held up to our own world. We are certainly no more free of the chains that bind the characters than they are. Societies will enforce moral codes and behaviors on its members with violence (see for example honor killings). People will try to live up some image of themselves or their culture in spite of who they really are. And religion has been used for countless millennia to justify and encourage some truly horrible atrocities. Just because we are the reader of this story doesn't make us any more free than the characters on the page. This series holds a mirror up to illuminate the chains of control we face on a day to day basis, chains we may not even be aware exist. We are like the characters, but we have the ability to break these chains to become self-moving souls in our own right.

...

Or maybe I am completely wrong and Bakker just wanted to tell a neat story about crusades and ancient races and magic and genocidal alien invaders and a sociopathic protagonist and giant set piece battle scenes. We may never know.

So yeah, this was a really great series and if you like the dark fantasy genre you should jump on board the Prince of Nothing train.

Redeagl says

This series is life changing. It ruined other books to me. I am lucky that I am easily pleased with books else there would have been a lot of negative ratings for every other book.

KostasAt says

7/10

Coming to the third and final part of the *The Prince of Nothing* series, Bakker sets the bar once again very high, bringing a quite ambitious story that tries to pass much more than what it actually shows as, at the same time, his ideas continuously grow; but even though he partially manages to achieve that, the overall outcome leaves a very “bittersweet” feeling.

After a long march, passing through death and despair, the Holy War, now stronger than ever, is led by a living *God*; a God who will bring mankind against the ancient Shimeh and its gates, and in its unfulfilled vengeance.

At the heart of the Holy War, however, Kellhus prepares to face his father and his secrets - someone who is as powerful as himself and can even see through the “Thousandfold Thought”. But, as an ancient enemy will show its true face, what he will discover along the way will reveal to him something that can prove something much more dreadful than he’d expected - something that may well even bring him and to his own destruction.

On the other side, Achamian, hurt and betrayed by the one he loved most, will find himself in the most difficult time of his life as he will find himself against between his beloved Esmenet and his School; while Cnaiür, as he wants to take his revenge from Moënghus, Kellhus’s father, will get deeper into madness and the only thing that can stop him is death itself.

The Holy War is near its end, but the war that will bring the Second Apocalypse has just begun, and the return of the Ruiner-of-All is closer than ever.

From the beginning till its end, this series proves to be one of the most challenging, though quite provoking, and ambitious attempts that tries to overcome the usual standards of Epic Fantasy and, indeed, Bakker doesn’t fail to do so here too, in the last part of the series, bringing a story that creates so large expectations as, perhaps, no other has ever done before.

The book, however, even though it’s much smaller than the previous two books, fails to completely fulfill these expectations with Bakker bringing a more ... philosophical story than usual - although to tell the truth Bakker is not an ordinary author - and much to be desired in a final book of a series such as this one. Nevertheless, even with this small misstep, his ideas remain strong enough with the last 100 pages or so showing his, very, unique talent - something that continues to impress; as also leaving at the end much promises for his next books.

All in all, the book is certainly much weaker than the previous two, but if we think of what Bakker has brought so far, we cannot but believe that he will be able to overcome this in the next ones and improve himself as an author even more.

Ελληνικ? κριτικ?:
(view spoiler)

Gavin says

This was a good finale to the Prince of Nothing series. I definitely consider this to be one of the best dark fantasy series I've read over the years. Bakker's fantasy world has plenty of depth and his story is engaging and full of twists and turns. It also helps that it is packed with memorable characters and that Bakker has an engaging writing style!

This final book focused on the conclusion of the Holy War story arc as well as Kellhus's confrontation with his father. Outside of that there was plenty of other stuff going on to hold one's attention as the various factions kept up their plotting and intrigue while the Consult continued to make their own presence known to the wider world.

The story was good. There was plenty of action and intrigue and also a decent amount of interesting social commentary inserted into the story in a way that did not overwhelm it.

Kellhus's and his Dûnyain Logos philosophy have always been the most interesting bits of the story for me. It is a little nihilistic but I do love its acknowledgement of cultural indoctrination in particular.

Not that Prince of Nothing is a series without any flaws. It is a super dark world with very interesting, but quite evil, characters and some fairly dark content so if you are in the mood for a light read this is not the series to go with! That said, I never felt like this series got too bleak in tone and that is due to the way Bakker succeeded in mitigating the horror and darker moments of the story. It helped that he never sold any of the characters to the reader as people they should like or be rooting for and that his somewhat detached narration style kept things bearable.

The biggest flaws of this series for me was the misogyny that was ingrained in every level of the story and the overuse of certain tropes. Bakker claims the misogyny was a deliberate ploy on his part but I've got my doubts. If it was deliberate he was being way too subtle as this guy missed his point! I can see the cultural misogyny present in the worldbuilding as deliberate but I'm less inclined to give him a pass on the stuff we see in the story set up and in places where it has no reason to exist culturally. This series, and this book in

particular, has always overdone the madness trope. Half the characters are insane! I've no problem with any of the characters story arcs individually but when you add them all together it makes the trope feel overused and comes off as a bit lazy.

Not that any of the flaws were things that overly damaged my enjoyment of this series. It was fantastic in a number of ways and very engaging from start to finish. I just feel like with a few tweaks this series could have joined my all time favourites list!

All in all I felt like this was a good conclusion to a memorable series. It wrapped out a number of ongoing story arcs but left plenty of openings to keep me interested in reading the sequel series.

Rating: 4.5 stars. I'll round down to 4 stars on my official GR's rating just to chop one star off a book in this series as a result of its few annoying flaws:) Though it is a bit harsh.

Audio Note: David DeVries did an excellent job with the audio. It is a pity he was not retained for the sequel series!

L says

I normally never really dislike books but this series takes the cake. It's not about it's writing or really it's plot; I absolutely hate these characters.

First off we have Kellhus or should I say Gary Sue to match all of Gary Sues. I get it, he's suppose to be inhuman in intellect and reading people. I get it after being hit over the head after every description that he's like no other man, he's so smart, he's so observant. He has intellect and skill, he talk and he can fight. More toward the third book I started to feel like "What the hell is the point of this story?" The plot comes down to a rather bloody and dramatic roadtrip where everyone just gushes over Kellhus. And I mean EVERYONE. There is absolutely NO ONE who doesn't like Kellhus. And the few that don't are promptly killed off, because, come on, Kellhus is just fantastic right? Xerius? Dead. Conphas? Dead. Cnaiur? Well he got sent off to die but then he came back but really....I'll get to this point later. And at the last page, Achamian finally takes the balls to stand up, for two lines. Too bad I won't read Aspect-Emperor because I'm sure it's just going to be an even longer pissing contest.

Next on our list is actually 2 people, namely Serwe and Esmenet, namely: BAKKER CANNOT WRITE FEMALES FOR SHIT. I was abhorred by how he chose to portray females as tools for fucking, getting pregnant, and getting married to. Absolutely none of the female named characters (which makes a grand totally of 3 counting Xerius' mother) have no higher a role than to fuck and breed with. So let's start of with Serwe, shall we? Her only defining trait that is every mentioned is how gosh darn good looking she is. Seriously. That's all that ever comes up. When Cnaiur meets her: Hurr she's so pretty. Let me devote my whole life to making her my wife because she's pretty. When Esmenet meets her: Aww no wonder Kellhus likes her, she's pretty. I wish I could be like her. When Achamian promptly cheats on Esmenet: Omg, sorry Esmi but she was just so gosh darn hot, what to you expect me to do? And so her role is to create conflict between Kellhus and Cnaiur. Then she gets pregnant. Then she gives birth. Then Bakker kills her off. Fantastic. What a worthless character.

Well then how about Esmenet? She's actually got a personality, right? Bakker keeps describing how intelligent she is, and how much she wants to actually mean something in a world where women are second class citizens. Great! Well great for the first book! And then the 2nd half of the 2nd book it just plummeted.

Oh what's that Akka, you died? Well I guess I'll just fling myself into the arms of the guy closest to me because women have to have a man in their life or else they just fall apart, am I right guys? Oh what? Akka isn't dead? So then Esmenet's role now becomes "Let's create conflict between Achamian and Kellhus for the next book and a half" and stays that way. And what drives up the wall despite all this blatant sexism is that at the end of the 3rd book, when everything's said and done and Achamian STRAIGHT UP TELLS HER that Kellhus is not to be trusted. SHE STILL STAYS WITH HIM because why? OMG AKKA YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, I'M PREGNANT AND THUS I MUST STAY WITH THE MAN WHO IMPREGNATED ME BECAUSE THAT'S ALL I'M GOOD FOR IN LIFE. Are you kidding me?!

And before you feel I'm too biased because I'm female, let me just say, Bakker also does a horrible job with writing men. Seriously, the downfall of most of the male characters is because they're fucking SEX FIENDS. The only reason stopping Cnaiur from slitting Kellhus' throat most times was an unbearable urge to screw Serwe. He just couldn't take that Kellhus was getting some from her and not him. REALLY? Second example. Achamian cheats on the love of his life and probably skews their relationship because why? WELL SERWE WAS RIGHT THERE AND SHE WAS HOT SO YEAH.....Are you kidding me? Look I'm all for sex in books and have no qualms about it but if your plot is just riddled with sex scene after sex scene and all your females' main concern is getting raped in the next chapter (which both Serwe and Esmenet are, of fucking course.) THEN YOU HAVE A PROBLEM.

I seriously could go on, this rant last all three books but I'll spare anyone reading this anymore agony. I picked up this series because of its multitude of good reviews, but now I'm putting it down wondering how can anyone read through this horrendous display of characterization without one moment of "What the hell are these people even doing?"

Jason says

2 Stars

After the brilliance of the first two books, this one should have been a knock out. Even after a second read, I could not get over how boring this one was in comparison. Even with some exceptional battles, I had a tough time speed reading this for a second time. I will still move on to the next trilogy as Bakker is an exceptional author. Hopefully I will come back to loving this complex world.

Almir says

U rangu Malazan serijala . 10 *

Lee says

I feel like I have finished reading the bible. That was huge. I need time to put my thoughts together on this.

Dona says

As was the case with its predecessors, Bakker proved he is a master storyteller yet again with *The Thousandfold Thought*. His prose is almost poetic and the narrative is concise and the way he depicts battle sequences left me in awe.

The philosophical, religious and psychological aspects of this epic adventure undoubtedly blew my mind and set the bar very high for the other books of the dark fantasy genre. As usual, I will refrain from providing a summary because a bare-bones summary of the plot cannot do justice to the complexity of this world. The world Bakker has created in *The Prince of Nothing* series is simultaneously recognizable and alien. Everything is suspiciously familiar but is grotesquely distorted with a pinch of fantasy and sorcery added in.

Bakker's characters are deeply complex and their decisions are extremely difficult to digest at certain points and his plots are beautifully intricate, but not convoluted at all. I really admired how Bakker managed to surprise me at every turn with various unexpected twists and turns in the storyline.

While I admit I was beyond impressed by Bakker's writing, there are some things I struggled to come to terms with, in this series as a whole. Although I understand that misogyny, bigotry, rape and domestic violence are common themes when it comes to this genre and was commonplace in the era that Bakker has based the storyline on, at certain points I felt as though they were overly used.

Though the conclusion was very satisfactory, some things were left ambiguous which paved the way to get the reader to Bakker's next series *The Aspect Emperor*.

Initially, I was going to rate *The Thousandfold Thought* 3 stars but after a long discussion with my read-along buddy Gavin, I decided to rate it 4 stars, purely based on the story I enjoyed and admired so far.

In conclusion, *The Prince of Nothing* series is one of the best I've read in the dark fantasy genre and delivered everything it promised it would.

Daniel Roy says

Ah well, so much for "The Prince of Nothing" trilogy. I loved the first book so much that I suffered through the vastly inferior second, then still forged on with this one. It's not as frustrating as the previous book (for one, the rape has been toned down), but it perpetuates a lot of the same problems.

It's easy to capture all the trilogy's problems in one word, and that word is "Kellhus." This character is so bad, he sucks the fun out of the supporting cast. This was painfully true in *Warrior Prophet*, and it's unfortunately still the case here. Kellhus has this insane superpower where he can read everyone like an open book, and can then choose what to say very precisely and get them to do what he wants. In literary terms, he shits all over their character arcs. Characters with doubts, allegiances, loved ones, suddenly abandon everything to worship his greatness. He also has a high opinion of the gibberish he spews as philosophical revelation, but that's another problem altogether.

Now, I'm not saying such a character is impossible to write in a compelling manner. Manipulation of others

can make for gripping fiction. But Kellhus's method is just too convenient, too absolute, and not believable. Apparently, all he has to do is speak the truth to others and they worship him like a god. Sorry, but if a stranger came up to me and spoke the unblemished truth of my soul, I'd punch him in the teeth, even if a part of me acknowledged what he said. Our self-truths are never absolute, and they are wrapped up in layers upon layers of deception and complications. Absolute truth doesn't beget love; on the contrary, it can provoke hatred because it threatens the very edifice of our personality.

For this reason, I spent most of the book cheering instead for Ikurei Conphas, who's something of a cross between King Joffrey and Julius Caesar. He's a self-absorbed prick, but damn if he's gonna let some messianic Mary Sue wield his almighty ego. You go, you magnificent asshole!

Still, for all its faults, there are glimpses of the greatness I anticipated after reading the first book. The final chapter is full of revelation and fury, and many characters regain part of their lost agency. Achamian, as always, was a pleasure to read, even if he had a tendency to wallow in self-pity a *lot*. The book feels more like a setup for the next trilogy, but at least the story of the Holy War came to a satisfying conclusion.

Oh, and by the way: Mr. Bakker, next time you write a book, search for the word "fairly" in your manuscript, and ditch every single one. There are twenty-seven instances of the word in the book--*twenty seven!*--and they were all jarring and perfectly useless and broke my immersion every single time. It's not a style, it's a tic.

Michael Pang says

Disappointing end to the trilogy. As a whole the trilogy is good and Bakker creates a wonderfully rich setting. The series was a bit of a roller coaster for me, the first book I gave 4 stars, the second book a 5 stars and regrettably, 3 stars here. The first 1/2 of the book abandoned the Holy War and it wasn't till the 2nd half did it return to it. I guess I just didn't find the character Kellhus compelling enough to warrant moving away from the events of the Holy War. I will say the 2nd half has some great large scale battle scenes that really paint a vivid picture in the reader's mind. A strong 2nd half finish combined with an average conclusion earns this book 3 stars.

Tammy says

A strong conclusion to this epic series. I really enjoyed this book and i'm a huge fan of Bakker's writing style. The story itself was amazing, the plotlines and plot twists, the unexpected happening's here and there, and these very real characters.

I also just noticed just how many awesome minor characters there are in the series, characters that are not the center of attention but whose deeds have important impacts nonetheless. Some of these are Earl Athjeari (very resourceful in battle tactics, always thinking two steps ahead), King Saubon(self-made king, called the Blond-Beast by his enemies), Yalgrotta(the giant, ever there to encourage his comrades in battle), Prince Proyas...so many more.

Scott Bakker deserves praise and respect for this series as a whole. Its scale is immense, its world is alive. Its by no means a light read, as dark and gritty as it gets, but if you like epic fantasy with an epic scale with flawed and complex characters, a series that challenges your intellect, then you will enjoy this.

The characters of Kellhus, Achamian, and Cnauir are part of my favorite characters I've come across in

fantasy. (The conception and writing of Kellhus on its own is an achievement in my book)
On to the Aspect Emperor series.

Raja says

The first book didn't sell me, but the latter two had me absolutely enthralled. This is a fantasy series that is unabashedly dark -- if you like authors who shy away from the harsh realities of violence, war, and the periods in human history that most fantasy series draw inspiration from, then stay far, far away. If you don't mind that stuff, or if, you find it helps draw you further into the world, I haven't encountered a better dark fantasy series in my lifetime. Glen Cook's Black Company is a close second.

It's also unapologetically intelligent, and not in the "use a lot of proper Nouns without explaining what they mean" way of many fantasy epics. This is intelligent fantasy partly because it tackles complex themes using complex characters, but mostly because it doesn't explain everything. Not every question is answered; not every ambiguity is clarified. If that bothers you, don't read these books.

Me? This might be my favourite fantasy series, actually.

Twierking To Beethoven says

This was a GRANDIOSE epilogue to an amazing saga. Don't expect me to properly review the book because I would end up spoiling the whole thing. Trust me on this one, it was bloody good, that's all.

Oi, Vlad, what do you think mate?

Exactly.

Chris Berko says

What a tremendous letdown. This book seems like it was written by a five year old. Gone is the political intrigue and personal drama of the first one, gone is the coherency of the large scale battles and the flowing of the story as a whole. There were long periods where I was extremely bored but I pressed on hoping for something special because of how much I loved the first two and the trust I was developing in the author but C'mon man, that ending was about as anticlimactic as they come. 1800 pages of buildup and I was left saying, "Really?!?! That's it?"

Terry says

This review applies to all three volumes of Bakker's 'The Prince of Nothing' series. First off, let me say that I'm really impressed with what Bakker achieved here. I'm reminded of something Guy Kay said when asked

why he wrote *The Fionavar Tapestry* about wanting to prove that there was still life in the old tropes of high fantasy, as designed by Tolkien, and that new things could be done with them as opposed to mere slavish imitation. I think Bakker succeeded admirably in this (whereas Guy Kay's actual creation of something really new, in *Fionavar* at least, is debatable).

From the explanation of the Elves' immortality, as well as a really interesting extrapolation of what that would mean for a contingent being, to the depiction of evil so utterly repulsive and frightening that it makes Melkor and Sauron look like Sunday school teachers this series really played with the traditional high fantasy motifs in ways I found very intriguing. Add to that a magic system based on principles from the epistemology of different schools of philosophy and a cast of characters whose flaws make them almost painfully real to the reader and you'd expect to get a smash hit on your hands. Except that doesn't really seem to have happened and I think I know why.

In a nutshell the books, and the world they present, are just so unambiguously dark that I think few readers have the stomach to follow Bakker where he wants to lead them. The most redeeming character of the series, the downtrodden wizard Drusus Achamian, is ultimately a loser who seems only to be a relative good-guy in that he's too feckless to be effectively out for himself. Anasûrimbor Kellhus, the character who would be the titular hero of the series as written by anyone else, is more akin to a natural force than a man and the utter vacuity of his moral centre is so frightening that it makes him both more and less human than any other character of the novel. Cnaiür urs Skiötha, another incredibly well-drawn and fascinating character, is also so driven by his broken nature that while what he is capable of is impressive, it certainly isn't anything the reader is likely to relate to. Bakker obviously has a point to make in his story about human nature, and even the nature of reality, but it certainly isn't a point that is likely to sit well with too many readers unless they like their world view leavened with a heaping portion of nihilism. One begins to wonder, as we learn more about this world and the sleeping great evil that is apparently looming on the horizon, why anyone would bother trying to save such an utterly flawed universe anyway. Despite all of this, though, the world as Bakker paints it is an incredibly vivid and interesting one. The hints of 'what has gone before' that are dropped in the story give real texture to this place and the mysteries still left unanswered are as tantalising as those for which we do receive some explanation. It is really fascinating to see how someone using similar tropes and building blocks to Tolkien could have built something so completely different, and yet still so compelling.

The story itself follows the rise of a great crusade between warring nations against the backdrop of the rise to power of an ancient force of evil which most of the world does not even believe in anymore. Behind and within this backdrop are woven the tales of the three main characters (Achaimian, Kellhus, and Cnaiür) as they each pursue their own goals and are inextricably led to one another. The climax of the series could be considered something of an anti-climax, for while each of the characters has, in some sense, found what they were seeking and begun upon a new path, the much larger movements of the story (both the crusade and the rise of sleeping evil) are left in media res for another series to pick up on. Bakker has now released two books in this continuation of the larger story, but many readers may find it frustrating that so much of what could be considered the overarching plot of the novels is left completely hanging by the end of volume three.

Overall I was torn by this series. On the one hand I think Bakker did a commendable job in building a world that did truly new things with the high fantasy genre and I was always fascinated by each new mystery he revealed; on the other hand I ended up feeling like I needed a shower after reading these books. The evil in it is presented so convincingly, and the very nature of the world he created is so bleak, that I just don't relish the thought of visiting the place again. Add to that the fact that the term "sympathetic character" doesn't seem to be in Bakker's vocabulary and you are left with a series that is definitely tailored to the tastes of the minority...but then again, maybe that's a good thing.

Logan says

Oh...this book. Not only did it take me forever to get through it, but it also left me entirely unsatisfied. About halfway through the book I decided it was only getting two stars (a fantastic final scene in which Achamian finds within him the strong, vicious man I always knew he could be made me consider giving it three, but it just doesn't deserve it).

Three books ago, I stumbled upon *The Prince of Nothing* and was immediately intrigued by its promise of wasted kingdoms, dark history, sorcery, long-forgotten royalty, and the doom of a Second Apocalypse. I bought book one for those things; I kept reading for those things; and I am disappointed because I never received those things. Sure, the Second Apocalypse looms in the background, but it is not the driving force of the plot in this trilogy. What drives the plot here is the Holy War and Anasurimbor Kellhus's rise to the title of Warrior-Prophet and Aspect-Emperor.

This isn't necessarily bad (I can see the set-up for the second trilogy, *Aspect-Emperor*), but it becomes incredibly tedious when there is nothing to like about Kellhus. Believe me, I've *tried* to like him. I've never tried as hard to like a character as I've tried to like Kellhus. But I just can't. He's awful. And I don't mean to say that he's got an awful personality (he doesn't have one at all) or that he's awful because he does terrible things (which he does), what I'm saying is that he's awful as a character. I've read three books in which Kellhus plays a prominent role as the trilogy's namesake (Prince of Nothing), but I still know absolutely nothing about what motivates him. I don't understand what he is doing or why he is doing it, which makes it impossible to like him when does things such as use and manipulate the only character in this entire series worth liking: Achamian.

What really hurt this final book, though, is the ending. It jumped from place to place, person to person, and became little more than a jumble of confusing images and events. I'm still not *quite* sure what happened during the last moments of the Holy War, and my brain still hurts from some of the philosophical fluff that filled most of the pages dealing with Kellhus and his father. The ending, as a whole, was rushed and unsatisfying (except for that fantastic scene with Achamian I mentioned earlier). It really seemed like Bakker had already moved on to the next trilogy and suddenly realized he hadn't ended this one.

Also, I need to add that I am painfully intrigued by the events of the First Apocalypse, the appearance of the Inchoroi, the tragedy of the Nonmen, and the return of the No-God. My desire to know more is what kept me reading this far, but there's not much revealed on these subjects beyond the glossary. I'm tempted to read *The Judging Eye* in hopes of learning more about them and of *finally* getting to the Second Apocalypse, but I've lost faith in Bakker. I'm still just as uncertain as I was after *The Darkness That Comes Before*.

I'm a stubborn optimist when it comes to books—especially fantasy as deep and intricate as this—but I'm just so disappointed. There is such potential, but I don't think I can endure another few books of Kellhus, which is really a shame. The world and races and history Bakker creates in this series are some of the most intriguing I have ever come across, but it's a slow and challenging read that offers up very little reward for your time.

Bryan says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Bakker's style has a number of strengths which I felt were brought to the fore

with this, the last book in the first of three planned trilogies in the world of Earwa. Firstly, the Homeric large-scale battles were depicted quite well, as in *The Warrior-Prophet* (although toward the end, I was a little tired of the phrase "death came swirling down"). Secondly, Bakker's non-Kellhus characters kept developing in real and believable ways, even though I was a trifle surprised by the relative non-lethality of his approach toward his main characters (in this gritty style of fantasy I always sort of half-expect one of the main characters to bite it, and I thought for sure that Cnaiur would be the one, mostly 'cause he's bat-shit crazy). Lastly, Bakker's encyclopedic historical approach to world-building finally gets its chance to shine. The appendix was intensely large, and pretty interesting (it's rare that I'll actually spend the time to read an appendix in a fantasy novel, but I did with this one, and enjoyed it too!).

I also really enjoyed the depth he gave his magic system which, although not fully explained, was given enough detail to help the reader understand the differences between the various styles of magic. I think the magic needs some more fleshing-out, but maybe he does that in succeeding novels.

Achamian's dreams of Seswatha's life were once again a high point for me. I just find everything about the No-God and the First Apocalypse and Golgotterath so cool and foreboding that the dream sequences were some of my favourite parts of this book. I also liked Achamian's transition from sorcerer to wizard.

I've read some reviews which complained about how badass Kellhus is...and he is badass. In fact, he's the MOST badass motherfucker there is (in these books, anyways). I just don't fully understand why this is a problem for so many people. Fiction is full of completely unbeatable dudes, from Conan to Tarzan, Kvothe to Rand al'Thor, Achilles to Beowulf. I think what Bakker is doing differently here is asking "What if the superhero...isn't truly a hero?" This take on the so-called "Marty-Stu" archetype is fresh and interesting to me, and I have the suspicion that what some people may not like about this is that it eliminates a certain measure of wish-fulfillment for them, in that they don't want to imagine themselves to be someone who is so selfish and completely devoid of conscience. Unfortunately though, a conscienceless character is quite a bit more realistic than a pure-hearted, noble paladin. I can imagine that this doesn't sit well with some people.

D. Eric says

What a disappointing ending to an otherwise promising trilogy. Bakker almost abandons the Holy War until the very end then wraps it up in a somewhat disjointed and confusing finale that lacks any depth of understanding. Instead, the reader is subjected to a cerebral cacophony of redundant "mumbo-jumbo" that really seems to beg the question of the story, especially the importance of Kellhus' father. By the end of the story, it seems Bakker is more interested in setting up his next series rather than closing this one satisfactorily. Worth reading if you really want to find out what happens with the Holy War, but don't expect to completely understand how and why things unfold as they do.

Mark says

From the very first book, I suspected that I would reach a point where I could no longer stand the parts that I don't like about Bakker's writing style. I was surprised that I made it through two books, actually, with the second book being excellent in spite of its raging Kellhus-ness.

I plugged away at this third book over several weeks and I still only made it halfway through. I have

abandoned the pursuit. I cannot take it any more. I cannot stand the pretentious philosophical stuff that permeates every time Kellhus is on the screen. This book constitutes literary masturbation to such a strong extent that I feel dirty reading it. My Nook may never be clean again, and neither will I, for having touched it while reading this.

There are characters where you read about them and you aren't supposed to like them. Take a Joffrey Lannister from A Song of Ice and Fire, an obviously loathsome individual from pretty much his first appearance. The reader is not ever invited to be sympathetic to Joffrey, but is also never barraged with paragraph after paragraph, every time Joffrey appears, about his perfection, his ultimate intellect, his flawless schemes and strategies, the way he manipulates and takes over other men, whatever. It was unpleasant to read the words on the page every time Kellhus was on the screen, or every time Kellhus was being talked about, and especially every time that the narration was from the thoughts of Kellhus himself.

For some time during this book, I found myself rooting for the Fanim, rooting for Conphas, rooting for the Consult, just anything to take Kellhus down even a tiny peg. I would prefer the Second Apocalypse to destroy this fictional world than ever read another word about Kellhus again.

I may not be a skin-spy, but I herald a different apocalypse for them. I have closed the book and will never open it again. They are all dead to me.
