



## City of Ruin

*Mark Charan Newton*

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Villiren: a city of sin that is being torn apart from the inside. Hybrid creatures shamle through shadows and barely human gangs fight turf wars for control of the streets.

Amidst this chaos, Commander Brynd Lathraea, commander of the Night Guard, must plan the defence of Villiren against a race that has broken through from some other realm and already slaughtered hundreds of thousands of the Empire's people.

When a Night Guard soldier goes missing, Brynd requests help from the recently arrived Inquisitor Jeryd. He discovers this is not the only disappearance the streets of Villiren. It seems that a serial killer of the most horrific kind is on the loose, taking hundreds of people from their own homes. A killer that cannot possibly be human.

The entire population of Villiren must unite to face an impossible surge of violent and unnatural enemies or the city will fall. But how can anyone save a city that is already a ruin?

## **City of Ruin Details**

Date : Published June 4th 2010 by Tor (first published 2010)

ISBN : 9780230712591

Author : Mark Charan Newton

Format : Hardcover 470 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Science Fiction, Epic Fantasy

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# From Reader Review City of Ruin for online ebook

## Just\_ann\_now says

The sequel to *Nights of Villjamur*. The action has moved to another train wreck of a city, where things are just as bad, if not worse. The worldbuilding continues top-notch, and the plot rolls on, horrifying and fascinating. This reminds me a lot of the *Shadows of the Apt* series, where things are just going terribly all the time, but you're so engrossed in the characters and the world that you just can't stop reading.

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## Jason says

5Stars.. It is a rare find to have a second novel eclipse that of the first, but that is exactly what Mark Charan Newton has done with the City of Ruin.

I love the New Weird and when it is done well by the greats like China Mieville and Jeff Vandermeer, it can be the most memorable of the fantasy genre. Mark Charan Newton has now put himself along the masters and added his own unique twists to it, kind of funny since he himself feels that the genre is dead. This book starts out very fast and has everything in it from a giant spider, golems, crablike monsters, and even the undead. Newton has begone to master his craft adding layers more upon his world building, making it all feel very real. Classical fantasy lines are crossed in that religion, technology, magic, and spiritualism are blended together and tough to pull one from the other. Cultists, priests, relics, and ghosts are all a bit askew from the norm. The world building is top notch.

Where the first book really spent much of its time centering around the city of Villamajur, this one takes place in another city called Villiren. They both play at times like old school detective stories, the first more so than this one. This one is all about the upcoming invasion by the alien race called the Okuns.

I really liked Brynd story line the best of all the major story arcs and feel that his story was the most interesting. Newton does a spectacular job at showing how toxic and pathetic prejudice can be. Tension builds through out this story, as Brynd, returning from the first book as the captain of the Nightwatch, tries to get the citizens, gangs, and leaders of Villiren to join him in defense of the city. People are against him for his digressions and want to bring him down and by doing so the Nightwatch. Brynd does well as to not succumb to the level of those around him and leads the Nightwatch well. I really look forward to the continuing development of him in the next book.

The story with Randur is slightly underdone, but his adventures added great color and flair to this one.

Jeryd, the best overall character that is in both novels and has a fantastic story arc in this one. His story gives the whole series a defective feel. His character is further developed in this one as he has escaped to Villiren to make a new home and to continue his career with the Inquisitors.

My only complaint about this novel was the way that one of the main characters story arc comes to an end. I pretty much hated it, reread it several times in disbelief and cannot see what Newton thinking. Without spoiling anything, I simply feel that the way this happens is far less than we the reader deserved. I actually felt a bit slighted and angry, but I am sure that I will get over it quickly.

The first two books in this epic story should not be missed by all fantasy lovers, new weird enthusiasts, and even science fiction aficionados.

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## **Adrian Faulkner says**

I'd enjoyed Nights of Villjamur but had issues with it. A very good debut novel and a book I'm happy to recommend to people despite my slight issues with dialogue. I was looking forward to City of Ruin. If Newton could build and improve on Nights, then City of Ruin could prove to be a very good book. At Eastercon, there was a group of us chatting about various novels and giving our honest opinion on them, outside the earshot of writers (although to be honest, no-one said anything there, that hasn't been repeated in their reviews). It was there I enquired about City of Ruin to those who had seen early copies.

"It's very good," I was told with a look that said this was a book to get excited about.

And for the last few months I've been eagerly awaiting it. The problem with hype though, is that more often than not it can lead to disappointment. I'm a passionate person, and I try not to let it get ahead of me, but I have to be honest and say I was expecting a lot from City of Ruin.

City of Ruin didn't just meet my already high expectations, it blew them away. This was a novel, I couldn't put down, that ruined my weekend plans, simply because I kept saying "just one more chapter, I have to know what happens next"

The issues from Nights of Villjamur have been addressed, and as a result you have a novel that is not only a fine sequel but a much better book. In fact, such a good book, that within 50 pages it was one of my favourite novels of the year, and then it proceeded to get better and better

Now, I accept that a book can't be for everyone, that one person's favourite is another person's least. I think good books do that because they don't play safe. They take big bold steps that risk alienating the readership. This is why reviews are so subjective. And this book doesn't just throw ideas out there, it incessantly bombards you with them becoming bigger and bigger as it does so.

Many familiar faces return from nights of Villjamur. Brynd is now in charge of the defence of the city of Villiren against the anticipated onslaught of the alien Okun, yet faces another challenge when his homosexuality is uncovered. Jeryd is now an inquisitor in Villiren and is tasked by Brynd to look into a mystery surrounding missing persons. And Randur is still on the run with the Empress and her sister, trying to get to Villiren to enlist the support of Brynd and his Night Guard.

There are also a few new characters, the most stand out being Melum, a half-vampire leader of the most feared gang in Villiren. He's a delightful 'bad guy' who is really nuanced and detailed, and an absolute joy to read.

What I liked was that each of the story seemed to have it's own pace, meaning that some stories didn't even start until well into the novel, some left hanging for what felt like hundreds of pages. This made the book seem much larger, as if you were reading a 1000+ page trilogy rather than a 466 page single novel.

For me, Jeryd's arc was my favourite and in some ways reminded me of Terry Pratchett's guards series – not when Pratchett is being silly and humorous, but those rare moments of climax when things get serious and the humour drops away to reveal a great story about characters you love. What I especially love about this arc, is the way the reader is one step ahead of Jeryd, you're feeling pretty smug with yourself, waiting for the big reveal, and then a revelation comes out of nowhere and blindsides you. Brilliant, just brilliant.

My least favourite arc was Randur's. My big problem was that it felt, not like a story twisting and turning to conclusion, but a story where it wasn't sure where it was going. That didn't mean it didn't have it's moments, just that compared to the other character arcs, it felt a little lacking.

The result was an overall pace that was morish. “Just one more chapter,” you'd say and then get lost for another four. And when things result in a big battle in the end, there was an epicness to it that I've felt Epic Fantasy has been missing for quite a while.

It was a novel that started well and just kept building. On page 300, with approximately 150 pages to go, I decided to do something evil. This was already now one of my favourite fantasy novels of recent years, so I said to myself “forget how much you've enjoyed this so far, let it prove itself again.” And it did with a brilliant defining moment of Melum that had them doing something that made you cheer without destroying what had made this character great.

Just when I thought I had reached the pinnacle of enjoyment with the novel, it would throw something new in. And it kept doing that for 460 pages, an unrelenting barrage of ideas and twists and turns, from big epic battles that would not seem out of place in a war movie, to giant monsters made of coins or corpses to giant spiders and mad scientists. This novel doesn't just grab your attention, it assaults you.

There's every chance this may not become one of your favourite fantasy novels of all time but this pushed all my buttons, created some new ones I never knew about and pressed them as well.

Without a doubt my favourite novel of recent years and one of my favourite fantasy novels of all time.

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## **Allison says**

hshafbfskjffjdfjff ugh just stayed up way too long to finish this, but that's what you do when your favorite character brushes with death about 2 dozen times

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## **Vincent says**

City of Ruin picks up where Nights of Villjamur leaves off. The city of Villien and the planet that it is on is being invaded. This novel is part steam-punk, part-fantasy and part Sci-Fi rolled into an entertaining story. Humans, reptile beings called “Rummels” and a bird-like race share the world that is faced with threats from these unknown invaders and a mysterious killer within the city. The plot consists of several story arcs interwoven into one overall story, that come closer together as the book goes on. The main character is a Rummel investigator called Rumex Jeyrd. He is not Sherlock Holmes, but neither is he Inspector Lastrade – just a detective doing the best he can under difficult circumstances and faced with everyday prejudices against his species while a world is being destroyed.

The action is fast paced the storyline intriguing and the author does a very good job weaving all the plot line together. If you like your SF story with a strong bit of mystery and a good touch of swashbuckling you will enjoy City of Ruin.

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### **Brenda says**

Book 2 in the series: it wasn't great but it was a little better than the first one. This author somehow thought that throwing together a variety of fantasy characters would make the book great. He forgot that them being in the book actually had to make sense, which it did not. I am still shaking my head at the chaos of this book.

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### **Adam says**

Newton's Nights of Villjamur was a somber moody success, almost like a fantasy novel that read like a Scandinavian crime novel. The second entry is louder, more packed with grotesquerie and invention, and more emotional. Gang wars, bizarre technology, dystopian politics, inter-dimensional war, weird ancient technology, mutant animal/human hybrids, religious fanaticism, homophobia, and vampires are packed in with the somber mood retained from the first book, in this wonderful revitalization of the dying earth sub-genre. The plot tears you from grim set piece and danger to another and then all stops are pulled out are the apocalyptic siege of the city of Villiren. Brutal, relentless, and thunderous this is breathless reading. City of Ruin is a very impressive second entry in this series.

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### **Wortmagie says**

Formell ist Villiren Teil des Imperiums Jamur. In der Realität feiert die Stadt ihre Unabhängigkeit und funktioniert nach eigenen Regeln und Gesetzen. Jeder Hunger, jede Perversion kann befriedigt werden. Diesen Sündenpfuhl muss Brynd Lathraea, Kommandant der Nachtgarde, gegen eine brutale Invasion verteidigen. Nach der Entdeckung der fremdartigen, feindlichen Okun obliegt es Brynd, Villiren auf ihren Angriff vorzubereiten. Verzweifelt versucht er, Autoritäten und Bevölkerung von der Gefahr eines nahenden Krieges zu überzeugen. Ihm begegnen Hass, Unglaube und Ignoranz. Als ein Mitglied der Nachtgarde spurlos verschwindet, wendet sich Brynd an Inquisitor Jeryd, der seit kurzem in Villiren lebt. Jeryd übernimmt die Ermittlungen und findet bald heraus, dass es in der Stadt zahllose ungeklärte Vermisstenfälle gibt. Wird Villiren von einem Serienmörder heimgesucht?

Währenddessen befinden sich Radur und die Schwestern Eir und Rika auf der Flucht durch die Wildnis. In einem Augenblick größter Not erfahren sie von unerwarteter Seite Hilfe und erhalten wichtige Informationen über die drohende Invasion, die Vergangenheit und Gegenwart des Imperiums in einem neuen Licht erscheinen lassen. Erreichen sie Villiren rechtzeitig, könnten diese Informationen den Ausgang der bevorstehenden Schlacht beeinflussen. Wird Villiren standhalten?

„City of Ruin“, der zweite Band der „Legends of the Red Sun“ von Mark Charan Newton, verlagert die Handlung in die Hafenstadt Villiren. Mir gefiel dieser Schauplatzwechsel sehr gut, weil Villiren ein Ort morbider Faszination ist. Es ist eine Stadt, die sich außerhalb der allgemeinen Gesetze bewegt. Geld und

Macht sprechen Recht; Gerechtigkeit erhält nur, wer über das nötige Kleingeld verfügt. Der Stadthalter fördert die freie Marktwirtschaft, die die alltäglichen Hürden des Kapitalismus verursacht. Es ist eine Stadt der Sünde und des Lasters, in der jedes Bedürfnis befriedigt werden kann. Gangs steigen mit der Politik ins Bett und üben besorgniserregenden Einfluss aus. Jeden Tag kriecht der kriminelle Untergrund weiter an die Oberfläche und vereinnahmt sie.

Ausgerechnet diese Stadt soll Kommandant Brynd Lathraea verteidigen, in der seine Soldat\_innen alles andere als willkommen sind und die dem exotischen Feind kaum etwas entgegenzusetzen hat. Brynds Verzweiflung war deutlich spürbar, ebenso wie die fatale Aussichtslosigkeit des Kampfes gegen die Okun. Ich empfand tiefe Hoffnungslosigkeit und sorgte mich um die Figuren, zu denen ich nun endlich eine stabile Bindung aufbauen konnte. Fluch und Segen zugleich, denn Mark Charan Newton neigt dazu, seine Charaktere äußerst unzeremoniell sterben zu lassen. In einem Moment sind sie noch quicklebendig, im nächsten liegen sie schon mausetot am Boden und man fragt sich, wie das geschehen konnte. Dadurch kippt Newton in unregelmäßigen Abständen die Erwartungshaltung seiner Leser\_innen – offenbar legt er Wert darauf, als unberechenbarer Autor wahrgenommen zu werden. Er überrascht und schockiert, ohne allzu geizig mit Informationen zu sein. Der Handlungsstrang von Radur, Eir und Rika erklärt die Hintergründe des Krieges gegen die Okun, die Motivation ihres plötzlichen, aggressiven Angriffs, und gewährt tiefe Einblicke in die umfangreiche, komplizierte Geschichte des Imperiums. Newton brachte mich in eine der Nachtgarde überlegene Position und ließ mich meine erzwungene Untätigkeit verfluchen. Wie gern hätte ich in die Handlung eingegriffen und Kommandant Brynd mitgeteilt, was ich herausgefunden hatte.

Je mehr ich über die Vergangenheit des Imperiums erfuhr, desto weniger begriff ich jedoch dessen aktuelles Entwicklungsniveau. Obwohl das Imperium Zehntausende von Jahren alt ist, steckt es in einer Art Renaissance fest. Es müsste wesentlich fortschrittlicher sein. Hinweise deuten an, dass sehr viel Wissen verloren ging, aber ich verstehe (noch) nicht, wieso. Was ist passiert? Warum sind Kultisten die einzigen, die sich mit der Technik vergangener Jahrhunderte beschäftigen, mit Relikten, die der Gesellschaft und Kultur Jamurs so weit voraus sind, dass sie wie Magie erscheinen?

Ich zweifle noch daran, ob es in Newtons Universum überhaupt Magie im traditionellen Sinne gibt, habe aber mittlerweile den Eindruck, dass die bevorstehende Eiszeit keines natürlichen Ursprungs ist. Ich glaube, dass das Auftauchen der Okun und die sinkenden Temperaturen zusammenhängen. Vielleicht müssen die Problematiken nicht separat behandelt werden – vielleicht hängt das Schicksal Jamurs davon ab, dass beide Bedrohungen gemeinsam beseitigt werden.

„*City of Ruin*“ ist ein komponentenreicher, gewissenhaft konstruierter High Fantasy – Roman, der besonders mit originellem, vielfältigen Worldbuilding punktet. Dennoch kann ich nicht mehr als drei Sterne vergeben. Die unsäglich Wahrheit ist folgende: das Lesen war eine Qual. Es war dermaßen anstrengend, dass es mich fast zermürbt hätte, obwohl ich durch *Nights of Villjamur* darauf vorbereitet war, dass die Lektüre kein Zuckerschlecken sein würde. Direkt danach war ich völlig entnervt und fest entschlossen, die „*Legends of the Red Sun*“ auf ewig von meinem Radar zu verbannen. Mittlerweile bin ich entspannter und empfinde durchaus eine gewisse Neugier hinsichtlich des nächsten Bandes, das grundsätzliche Problem bleibt allerdings bestehen: ich kann nicht definieren, warum mir Mark Charan Newtons Romane solche Schwierigkeiten bereiten. Es gibt kein Detail, das ich als Übeltäter entlarven könnte. Ich kann nur vermuten, dass Newton und ich nicht auf der gleichen Wellenlänge schwingen, weshalb die Kombination der Elemente seiner Geschichte für mich mittelmäßig funktioniert. Jedes Buch ist eben mehr als die bloße Summe seiner Bestandteile. Ich halte es mir offen, ob ich es mit dem Nachfolger *The Book of Transformations* versuchen werde. Vielleicht siegt die Neugier eines Tages, vielleicht nicht.

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**Ryan Mishap says**

People: An elite military commander who is albino and secretly gay, a rumel (reptilian humanoid) detective hiding out in a new city, on the trail of a killer, a half vampire gang lord having marriage trouble, his wife a cultist (user of ancient technology), a suspicious second in command conferring with a priest who condemns homosexuality, a psychopathic doctor who creates human/animal hybrids, a giant spider, crustacean warriors intent on attacking the city, a princess on the run from the evil person who killed her father and usurped power, her sister and the sword-wielding young rake who loves her, seven foot tall beings from another dimension, and so many more.

Place: The Boreal Archipelago, islands with tens of thousands of years of history, forgotten lore and technology, an empire that decimates and overtakes the tribal peoples, the titular city, the major port town also experiencing the coming ice age even as it readies for siege.

Plot: Twisting like the numerous threads of a cat toy while you try to bat one down and hold it still for a moment.

In short, the sequel to Nights of Villjamur is an overstuffed silly, partly brilliant, violent, gory, sweet mess of a fantasy novel.

A perfect example: it isn't enough to have a gang leader in town who they need to help fight the invaders, no, the gang leader is a half vampire (spelled, annoyingly "vampyr") macho underground fighter with a tragic past, impotence problems, and a witch for a buddy.

I love that Newton parodies our own world's problems and politics in his fantasy world (not enough fantasy books do this, like in good SF), but, whereas in the first book this was done well, here it is bald and nearly didactic.

I think that is my main problem, that this book isn't as crafted as the first, going for gore and shock rather than subtlety. For instance, when our princess and hero are surrounded by a hundred soldiers, a seven foot tall killer drops from the sky to save them by hacking her way through the troops--her ship? The "Exmachina."

I recommend the first book, but you're on your own if you want to read this one.

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## **Clay Kallam says**

Finally, just a warning to those tempted to read "Nights of Villjamur" or "City of Ruin" (Bantam Spectra) by Mark Charan Newton: Though these are the first two books in a tetralogy, Bantam did not pick up the option for the last two, so the only way to finish the series is to order them from Great Britain.

And though the first two are reasonably good – a struggling society set on a world where the environment is collapsing – I don't think they're good enough to go to the trouble of getting books from overseas to see how it all plays out.

The suspension-of-disbelief meter gets pretty high (a woman turns into a huge spider, and then back again, for example, with no mention of where she gets the extra mass, or where it goes when she reverts) and though Newton's explorations of what might happen when an ecological collapse forces hard choices to be made are interesting, he doesn't dig too much deeper than the obvious.



Nonetheless, it does seem that a publishing house has some kind of obligation to those who spend hard-earned, and scarce, disposable income dollars on their books to leave readers high and dry halfway through a series. I expected a little more from Bantam ...

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## **Adam Whitehead says**

The Jamur Empire is riven by internal turmoil and the threat of external invasion. Chancellor Urtica has usurped the throne and seized control of the capital, Villjamur, but the rightful empress, Rika, has fled the city with her sister Eir and their protector, the redoubtable swordsman and con-artist Randur. They decide to head for the far northern city of Villiren, where their potential ally Commander Brynd Lathraea of the Night Guard and his loyal troops have been dispatched, but the journey is fraught with danger and unexpected encounters with both allies and enemies.

Meanwhile, the mysterious Okun are massing on the island of Tineag'l, the population of which they have already slaughtered down to the last man, woman and child. The Jamuran armies are converging on the city of Villiren just across the straits from Tineag'l, ready to make a stand there against a remorseless enemy whose true capabilities and goals remain unknown. As Brynd organises the defence of the city, his own secrets are exposed by a local gang lord and he finds himself open to blackmail. In the city itself Inspector Jeryd does his part for the war effort by investigating the disappearance of dozens of civilians and soldiers in the past few months, a mystery that will lead to unforeseen ends.

City of Ruin is Mark Newton's third novel and the second book in the Legends of the Red Sun series, following on from last year's extremely well-received Nights of Villjamur. City of Ruin directly follows on from the previous novel. Although its central storyline - the defence of Villiren - is self-contained in this book, the character arcs continue from the first novel and some foreknowledge of those events is assumed.

In Nights, Newton deliberately held fire on some of his more fantastical elements for commercial purposes. The ambition of the Legends of the Red Sun series appears to be to fuse the originality and diverse influences of the New Weird with a more traditional epic fantasy narrative. This was evident in Nights of Villamur, but comes much more stridently to the fore in City of Ruin, with several nods to the work of China Mieville (one fairly obvious, the other possibly coincidental given how quickly this book came out after Kraken). The book's place in the 'Dying Earth' subgenre is also made more clear, with references to the shrunken red sun and a minor character who shares a name with one of Jack Vance's most famous characters (which, for those familiar with Vance, may briefly drag you out of the book, but is a very minor issue). Newton successfully achieves a feeling here of a vast history stretching back a quarter-million years with successive waves of civilisations rising and falling until the present day, whilst simultaneously expanding the scope of the world and story to a more cosmic level. This can be risky - Alan Campbell's initially excellent Deepgate Codex trilogy eventually collapsed under the weight of its vastly expanded scope - but Newton handles it well here.

Newton also flexes his full-on, all-out war scene muscles here as a desperate battle for the city of Villiren is mounted in the book's conclusion. Newton's background as an editor for Solaris and their former sister-company, the Black Library, comes to the fore here as a furious urban battle rages which I can imagine Dan Abnett nodding approvingly over. Newton brings together both established and new forms of magic and various creatures to create some very impressive and original combat sequences, and is not afraid to ruthlessly slaughter major characters (from both this and the first book) in offhand ways.

For those less impressed by war porn, there's the complex and convincing characterisation, convincing worldbuilding and increasingly accomplished prose to enjoy. The novel comes close to a maximum score, but falls short only due to the somewhat abrupt ending and a bit too much scene-setting for the third and fourth novels in the series which is not immediately relevant to this book.

City of Ruin (\*\*\*\*½) is an excellent fantasy novel fusing elements of the New Weird and traditional epic fantasy into a satisfying whole. The novel is available now in the UK and will be published next year in the United States.

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## Aidan says

### This review was originally published on A Dribble of Ink

The New Weird. It's that strange little literary movement that, according to Mark Charan Newton, is dead. And yet, he's flying that mantle high, telling anyone who'll listen that City of Ruin, the second volume of his Legends of the Red Sun series, has been let off its leash by virtue of a four book publishing deal; it's going to be weirder, more true to Newton's original vision of the sun-deprived Boreal Archipelago. Nights of Villjamur, Newton's first novel, dabbled in the New Weird, but City of Ruin is meant as a love letter to two ailing genres (it's also very much in the vein of Jack Vance's Dying Earth novels and Gene Wolfe's Book of the New Sun), and promises to be the unrestrained novel Newton wanted to write in the first place (it's not easy to sell giant spiders, floating spaceship islands and geriatric cultists to publishers, I guess.)

The New Weird movement is one I've only watched with vague disinterest from the sidelines. It just wasn't for me. I'm too traditional, too happy to read novels I recognize. Why would I need weird for weirdness sake? At least, that's what I thought. I was worried that the New Weird would take too much to wrap my head around, would be more trouble than it was worth. But, if City of Ruin is such an example of the genre then, well... the New Weird just isn't as weird as the reputation that precedes it. Rather, it's Fantasy with an open mind, Fantasy that steps away from Elves and Dragons and replaces them with smoking, male banshees and corpse golems. My early perceptions of New Weird were that I'd constantly be forced to reevaluate how I approached the place and setting of the novel, to push aside preconceptions and learn again how to listen to a story; but, really, in the end, a hulking, angry coin golem is just a fresh coat of paint on a troll, and a city-stomping cephalopod is just a dragon in disguise.

But I digress, this isn't an essay about my ill-conceived misconceptions, but a review of a novel that draws influences from many genres beyond New Weird. There are touches of Epic Fantasy (cross country travelogues, complete with aloof, drunken swordsmen and tangential encounters with ravenous tribes) and Urban Fantasy (with a few battle scenes that would make the film version of Children of Men jealous), dusty old detective novels (with noirish undertones galore), but most interesting are the ties, intentional or not, to Cyberpunk and near-future Science Fiction. Among the new characters introduced is Malum, a gang leader and Vampyre, who reveals the seedy underbelly of Villiren. His story arc, full of gang politics, cigarettes, smuggling and whores, a constant reminder that this is a tale told not in the past, on some fantastical other world, but in a far future of our own. This isn't your grandma's Fantasy:

*"Under a sleet-filled sky, in a area of the city currently blocked off for renovation, Malum and the banHe had words.*

*The banHe smoked his roll-up nervously, as if paranoid, though there were always a couple of his thugs*

*loitering nearby, their boots crunching on the vacant rubble-patch. This place used to be an educational establishment until the rents got too high, but now it was marked out for being turned into a larger apartment block. At the moment, it made a good place to meet: there were no places to hide a crossbow, not even enough cover behind which someone could crouch with a blade.*

*‘What is it, Malum?’ the banHe enquired, an almost musical quality to his voice.*

*‘Portreeve says there’s going to be a massive march of strikers heading through the northern districts – protests from stevedores on the docks, support from the smaller merchants, that sort of thing.’*

*‘What they angry about?’*

*‘Dangerous working conditions mainly.’*

*‘Why ain’t they taking it up with their employers? What’s Lutto got to do with it? It’s a free market, right?’ Malum smirked. ‘C’mon, you know better than that, Dannan. Private companies in this city means no one takes responsibility for things like deaths occurring at work – mainly from hypothermia at the moment. No one wants to work shit jobs for shit money in the ice, especially when they’re dying all round, but their employers say shut up or they’ll just ship in cheaper workers from off-island. Even talk of slaves coming in to work for next to nothing, though Lutto told me that he’s uncomfortable with that – might spoil his image back in Villjamur. Not even the Inquisition can get involved, in case it sends out a bad signal – that there isn’t much democracy here. Got to create the illusion of freedom just to placate the rest of the masses.’”*

This is balanced by the more traditional stories of Randur and Brynd Lathraea, both returning, rather dubiously, from Nights of Villjamur. Theirs are stories of quests and tactical, large scale warfare, racial tensions, sword fights and invading armies. This balance lends the novel more variety than its predecessor and shows Newton’s ability to tackle large scale stories from multiple angles. That said, the story meanders through the first 2/3rds of the book, dropping storylines and characters for long periods of time while focusing on others, and could have used some tightening and better pacing leading up to the, admittedly, page-turning climax.

The crutch of the novel is Villiren. A Fantasy version of Los Angeles, Villiren lives off the debauchery and sin of its inhabitants. Gangs rule the streets, and inanimate, lifeless sex golems fill the beds of all damned souls waiting for the sun to die. It’s reputed to be the wealthiest city in the archipelago, but lacks a real defined governmental system, instead letting the gangs and a corrupt Port Reeve (whatever that is) run the show. Newton’s proving himself to be adept at creating these Gormenghast-esque settings, infused with as much character and importance as any of the living characters, but forgets that, ultimately, the reader has to invest themselves in the city if they’re supposed to fear for its safety. Villiren is as fully realized as Villjamur, but I often felt it would be better if it were just invaded and destroyed, for there was little worth saving. To Newton’s credit, one of his characters struggles with this very concept, but when most of the story is told through the eyes of outsiders to the city, who struggle with its chaotic personality, it becomes hard to empathize with Villiren’s plight. As the title suggests, Villiren is a city on the edge of ruin, it’s fucked no matter what happens, so why bother to save it? Distressingly, it’s what’s most recognizable in Villiren that makes it so vile. Newton draws upon our world and gets too many of the little details alarmingly right.

Again, like Nights of Villjamur before it, City of Ruin has a detective story at its heart, but Newton lets the spider cat out of the bag on page one. Rather than explore and reveal the mystery through the eyes of Rumex Jeryd, the investigator, we’re introduced to the killers in the prologue of the novel. Sure, their motives are cloudy, and the reveal is genuinely pleasing and twisted, but much of the tension whodunnit fun is stolen from Jeryd’s story when the reader already knows so much more than he does. As he searches for the

identity of the murderer, he seems more like an old, weary, bumbling fool rather than a seasoned pro.

The characters that return from *Nights of Villjamur* are all fleshed out further, but I constantly felt like they (aside from Brynd Lathraea, who has an honest, necessary reason for being in the city) were forced into Villiren's story, as opposed to an natural piece of the puzzle. With Newton returning to Villjamur in the third volume of the series, I would have appreciated if he took a Steven Erikson-like approach, introducing a new cast of characters for us to learn and love, eventually merging their stories with those from the first novel. As it stands, the old faces were familiar, but got in the way of Malum, Lupus and Beami, (newcomers all, and sharing in the most interesting storyline of the novel.)

*"It entered the deep night, a spider reaching taller than a soldier. Street by street, the thing retched thick silk out of itself to cross the walls, using the fibrous substance to edge along improbable corners. Two, then four legs, to scale a wall – six, then eight, to get up on to the steps of a watchtower, and it finally located a fine view across the rooftops of Villiren. Fibrous-skin tissue trapped pockets of air and, as tidal roars emerged from the distance, the creature exhaled.*

*A couple walked by, handy-sized enough to slaughter perhaps, their shoes tap-tapping below – but No, not them, not now, it reflected – and it slipped down off the edge of a stone stairway to stand horizontally, at a point where observation took on a new perspective. Snow fell sideways, gentle flecks at first, then something more acute, adding to the brooding intensity of the streets.*

*Within this umbra, the spider loitered.*

*As people sifted through the avenues and alleyways, it sensed them by an alteration in the chemistry of the air, in minute vibrations, so no matter where they were they couldn't hide. With precision, the spider edged across to a firm overhang constructed from more recent, reliable stone. Webbing drooled again, then the creature lowered itself steadily, suspended by silk alone, twisting like a dancer in the wind. Lanes spread before it, grid-like across a plain of mathematical precision. The frequency of citizens passing below had fallen over the last hour; now only a handful of people remained out to brave the extreme cold.*

*It could almost sense their fear.*

*One of them had to be chosen – not too young, not too old. The world collapsed into angles and probabilities as the creature made a controlled spiral to the ground.*

*Scuttling into the darkness, the spider went in search of fresh meat."*

With the release of *Nights of Villjamur*, Newton's prose was divisive for its loose, stream-of-consciousness style. People either loved it or hated it. Strikingly, especially to those expecting a Fantasy novel (as it's generally marketed as), the prose is very contemporary, a seemingly intentional move on Newton's part to, again, solidify the fact that this tale is being told on a future version of our world, far removed from contemporary times, but with echoes of our language and culture still intact. This anachronistic language fits in the Cyberpunk-esque Villiren much better than it did in the Medieval-esque Villjamur, especially when dealing with the locals; it's like comparing the expectations when a Scottish farmer opens his mouth to a SoCal teenager. Newton is a better writer in *City of Ruin*, but it will likely do little to change the minds of those who were put off by the prose in *Nights of Villjamur*.

It's clear, also, that Newton has things to say. Like his inspiration China Mieville, Newton fills his novel with political and social commentary, reflecting on the state of our world, our culture and our cities through the destruction of those in his novel. Beyond the parallels between Villiren and Los Angeles (with a bit of London thrown in, I expect), Newton explores racism, sexuality and prejudice, though never hits you over

the head with his philosophies. If there's one area where Newton improved immensely, it's this. Unlike *Nights of Villjamur*, much of the commentary and philosophy evolves naturally from the plot, rather than being revealed by blatant internal monologues by the characters.

Rather than being intimidating in its 'weirdness', *City of Ruin* is, instead, an fantastically inventive look at familiar tropes and archetypes, and full of visual marvel. As with *Nights of Villjamur*, *City of Ruin* further proves that Newton's an author worth watching closely. Pulling from its myriad influences, *City of Ruin* takes the best of many genres and blends them together into a refreshing mosaic, never quite letting the reader get comfortable with their preconceptions, and constantly pushes at the boundaries of imagination. If *City of Ruin* is an example of the (New?) New Weird, then it might not be as brain-bending and weird as I'd feared, but it is bloody good.

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### **Daniel Cardoso says**

Very good, lots of anti-homophobia, anti-misogyny, anti-xenophobia.

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### **Mike says**

The ice age that loomed over *Nights of Villjamur* has begun and with it a new, and unprecedented threat has arrived at the empire's edges. Dispatched to the crumbling city of Villiren Commander Brynd, the albino leader of the elite Night Guard, must unite the Jamur military with the desperate, destitute, and shady citizens of the titular City of Ruins in order to stave off the coming invasion. As if things weren't bad enough something stalks the people of Villiren and it is up to the hardworking inspector Jerryd, now relocated to Villiren after his unfortunate discoveries in *Villjamur*, to track down whatever is hiding in the shadows of the disreputable city. Elsewhere Randur, Eir, and Rikka flee the forces of the Empire and run headlong into revelations that will rewrite everything they think they know about their world. Much like the previous book in the *Legends of the Red Sun*, *Nights of Villjamur*, *City of Ruin* is a fascinating mix of fantasy, science fiction, and straight up detective fiction. It is a strange combination that plays both to the novel's strengths and its weaknesses.

While it has been a while since I read the first book I felt that the various plots in *City of Ruin* did not quite blend enough to create a single cohesive narrative. As mentioned in the above summary there are three main narratives featuring characters first introduced in *Nights of Villjamur*. In addition there is an additional narrative thread featuring several new characters: Mallum (a Villiren gang leader), Beami (his cultist wife), and Lupus (a Night Guard soldier who was once her lover). As a result *City of Ruin*, in a sense at least, shakes fantasy conventions by placing the epic, world-shaking plot on the back-burner and instead focusing on the human element of the story. Thus the majority of the book is given over to the fear laden preparations for battle in Villiren and the search the mysterious killer that stalks the streets. It was this section of the novel, particularly Jerryd's search and the murderer's POV that resonated the strongest with me. The sort of romantic triangle with Beami, Mallum, and Lupus allows us to get a better handle on the flavor of Villiren and, through Beami's cultist technology, expand our knowledge of the world Newton has created.

Of course with the lion's share of the narrative focusing on what's going on in Villiren that leaves the flight of Randur, Eir, and Rikka a bit out in the cold. My major concern with this part of the novel its place in the greater scheme of the story the novel is trying to tell (i.e. not in the greater overarching plot the series at

large); a place that, until the end of the novel, is mostly tangential. It is a concern that is exacerbated by the mix of unanswered questions and unabashed info-dumping that occurs during this section of the novel. Yes, I know what you're thinking, I always complain about the "info-dump" and yes, I never seem able to offer some viable alternative but neither of those facts counter my immediate distaste with pedantic monologues (or dialogues) that occur in these types of scenes. To be fair Newton manages to accompany his info-dumping with a fair amount of showing over telling. This is of course, a good thing but a good thing that only serves to highlight the explanatory conversation that occurs mere moments after we are introduced to a new character in a pretty spectacular way (that would be part of the aforementioned showing). The real problem espoused by this part of the novel is that other than the info-dump this section of novel offers no tangible impact on the rest of the story being told in City of Ruin. That sounds harsh but Newton works hard and successfully at creating an emotional connection between readers and the characters (hero and villain alike) in the Villiren sections of the novel it only makes the lack of connection I felt in the non-Villiren sections all that more apparent.

Villiren is where the action is. Each of narratives in this city is excellent providing a variety of perspectives on threat of war and human experience; perspectives that cover the broad spectrum of legality and morality. There is some real grit here, the fear and desperation are palpable. Revealed in the empty sections of the city and way in which characters both minor and major cling to one another or the jobs and lifestyles that define who they are. That last bit is particularly fascinating for Brynd and Mallum. The former since as the commander of the military he must provide an unassailable bastion of confidence yet his sexuality is a death sentence in the society he fights for; thus he becomes more of a symbol than a man, forced to avoid tangible human connection lest it undermine his ability to lead. Mallum, as the violent inhuman leader of a gang desperately clings to his humanity through his cultist wife. There is a sense of inevitability to his slow slide away from humanity that none-the-less still tragic to watch, equally sympathetic and revolting. Most of the narrative threads intertwined in the Villiren portion of the novel speak towards that monster/human dichotomy and the ultimate fate of many of the characters in the novel's final climactic battle says much about humanity's place in the coming war that looms over the future of Newton's world.

Complaints aside I found City of Ruin a compelling read full of complex human characters (even the inhuman ones were surprisingly human). The setting, while not as vibrant as the gloom shrouded streets of Villjamur, none-the-less offers an oppressive atmosphere where scattered detritus of the past adds to the fear offered by the future; a constant reminder that we do not last. While I could have done without what felt like some heavy handed exposition regarding the history the world of the Legends of the Red Sun it left me excited to see where things go from here and whether or not the version of truth given here is even accurate or something else entirely. City of Ruin relies heavily on knowledge learned in Nights of Villjamur, particularly when it comes to characters, and I don't recommend prospective readers skip that first volume in favor of starting here. Of course, that won't be a problem for US readers since Nights of Villjamur only saw release here on June 29th. City of Ruin definitely throws in a greater mix of weird elements a fact enhanced by certain things we learn in passing the novel and look forward to seeing more of the Newton's fascinating world (emphasis on see ;) ).

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### **Dave-Brendon Burgh says**

Mark was awesome enough to send me a PDF copy of City of Ruin, and although it took me a while to read it (about 3 weeks), I'm really glad I did; not only is it an excellent sequel to Nights of Villjamur, it's also capable of standing on it's own as an excellent Epic Fantasy / New Weird novel. :-)

Nights of Villjamur took us to the central city of the Jamur Empire, showing us a world and characters having to contend with a coming Ice Age and much more besides. This book had an incredible atmosphere, very memorable and intriguing characters, and some very strange (but cool) concepts and ideas – and I'm glad to report that City of Ruin continues this trend and builds on what Mark kicked off his series with.

The first thing that grabbed me was the atmosphere of the novel – where Nights was focused, dark and intense, City of Ruin has a more adventurous feel to it; indeed, Mark shows us much more of the Empire and its landscapes, as well as hints of what came before the Empire, fleshing out his already intriguing world more.

Mark also ramps up the action, thankfully not focusing on faces anymore. :-) Battle scenes are frenetic and tense and I felt as if I was right in the middle of the action, and for those who are squeamish, be warned – Mark makes it clear that war is a violent, gruesome business. There were some very tense moments!

What I also enjoyed about City is that it was a larger novel, a larger story, much bigger in scale than Nights; it's shown me that Mark can handle a bigger canvas with ease and aplomb, and that he can tackle an Epic just as well as all the previous and current greats. This bodes well for Fantasy and for all the readers out there who like their stories large and sprawling. :-) I've yet to read Mark's first novel, The Reef, but I have to add, too, that it would be great to see a standalone from him, after finishing the Legends series, of course. :-) I've got a feeling that he and China Mieville would be sharing a crown. :-)

Now to the characters:

Some characters from Nights return in City, and with a vengeance, I might add! Every single one of them has grown, even in the short length of time between novels, fitting more comfortably into their skins; some of my old favorites took paths I would never had guessed at, and a slew of new characters step onto the stage, including one very, very creepy- Nah, I'll let you meet that one. :-) Mark also used these characters to explore many touchy subjects that many readers can learn from, and that created the sympathy in me that really brought the characters to life. Mark really let them live, being much more comfortable with them. :-)

Plot-wise, the story builds like a runaway Maglev. As the story-strands swirled together and clicked into place, I found myself reading faster and faster, skipping words like 'the', 'and' and 'said' just to get to the meat! Mark stepped up the pace in City, sending the plot into a shattering conclusion that sets the scene for Book 3 and answers many questions while leaving many more to ponder. Mark also manages to meld genres in this book, and very bloody well, I might add; I was a skeptic at first, when certain things began happening, but Mark won me over and left me awed; he took a chance, and in my opinion, it definitely paid off. :-)

Another thing that really caught my attention was that I was left wondering even about the numerous walk-on characters; Mark managed to leave me with the feeling that not only the main characters have lives and histories and desires, and that even the walk-ons could feature in novels of their own. There's one in particular, a character that is only mentioned, mind you, that I'm pretty certain will feature in the next book. My point is that Mark left me feeling that the world he had created did indeed have depth and detail and was populated with living, breathing characters, something that was somewhat lacking (in retrospect) from Nights.

All in all I'm once again impressed with Mark as an author and with the tales he writes – he has a great eye for detail, knows how to create characters that resonate with the reader and creates scenes with enough action and tension that I was left breathless at times. This is definitely one of my top reads of 2010, and will definitely cement Mark's place in Fantasy. I'm a huge fan of Mark's worlds and characters and I'm pretty

sure he'll be able to reel you in, too. :-)

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### **Nicole says**

Well done, Mr. Newton. Well done, indeed.

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### **Tudor Ciocarlie says**

Mark Charan Newton continues to infuse the Epic/High-Fantasy genre with New-Weird sensibilities in an excellent sequel to the Nights of Villjamur. And in its weirdness, City of Ruin almost becomes a post-singularity SF novel in the type of Ilium/Olympos by Dan Simmons.

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### **Stephen says**

4.5 to 5.0 stars. This is a fantastic sequel to the excellent Nights of Villjamur. Mr. Newton's world of Villjamur gets bigger and stranger, the fantasy/science fiction elements get even more interesting (reminding me at times of Jack Vance and China Mieville, which is high praise indeed), and the story explodes exponentially. All of the components that were great in the first book are even better here, including some really well thought out ideas and characters. I can not wait for the next installment of this superb series. HIGHEST POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATION!!!!

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### **ChristinaJL says**

This is a great book and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I rank it as one my all-time favourite reads. MarkCN has again written about strong male and female characters, who are complex and interesting. I like the way he brings in ideas from other genres to mix with fantasy. He has created a very imaginative, multi-layered world full of different histories, societies and all sorts of creatures. I am really looking forward to the next book!!!

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### **Sysilouhi says**

Well, this has a pretty cover. Mark Newton's City of Ruin is the second book of Legends of the Red Sun. I reviewed the first book, Nights of Villjamur, couple of days ago and gave it 3. I hoped that that the second book would have gotten rid of couple of annoying factors, but while it did so it also added a considerable number of new ones. City of Ruin is about the same length as it's predecessor, 467 pages.

The storytelling is better than in the first book and at the beginning I felt that this book would be better than Nights of Villjamur. Few annoying narrators (Tryst, Urtica, Tuya...) were replaced by one really interesting one, Malum, and others who were at least a little more interesting than the ones they replaced. To my great delight Rand remained as a POV character. Sadly Rika and Eir lost their narrators though they are still observed via Rand who travels with them. Brynd was also luckily remembered and I really liked his meeting



and dealings with Malum even if they were quite few. Sadly two of the new narrators, Nanzi and doctor Voland (sounds familiar?) turn out to be real pains and Jerryd whom I found boring already in the first book continues emitting the same feeling.

One of the biggest problems of this book was that the world started feeling more made-up. It's never a good sign if you start thinking "What did the author think when he made this?" or "Is the author referring to this thing in the real world?". To take completely spoiler free example I use word Dawnir. Switch couple of letters and it becomes Darwin, which should ring some bells. Other one, Voland, I already mentioned above. As I just finished Master and Margarita about month ago the connotation to the book was disturbingly strong. (Btw. I know that name Woland wasn't Bulgakov's invention, but that is what it brings to my mind.) The plot is only semi-interesting and because Rand's company doesn't provide much entertainment in the end I found this book a little bit more boring than the first.

If you really liked the first one you probably like this one too. But if, like me, you read the book mainly because Rand, Eir and Rika I would actually think twice before picking this up. I have some hopes for the last book, The Book of Transformations, where I hope to see at least Rand (+girls), Brynd and Malum (Though they are not mentioned in the blurb..) if I end up reading it someday. Definitely not going to buy it but maybe I'll borrow it from the library if I see it there...

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