



Mage's Blood

David Hair

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The Moontide Bridge lies deep below the sea, but every 12 years the tides sink and the bridge is revealed, its gates open for trade. The Magi are hell-bent on ruling this world and have led armies across the bridge on crusades of conquest. Now the Moontide is almost here and the people of the East are ready to fight.

Mage's Blood Details

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From Reader Review Mage's Blood for online ebook

Mpauli says

Imagine a world with two continents separated by a sea so rough that ships can't sail between them. But a powerful mage order was able to build a bridge between them. Every twelve years the waters are shallow enough for the bridge to be crossed for 2 years.

At first the continents of Yuros and Antiopia started trading, but eventually -as humans are- the nations of Yuros under the yoke of the Rondalian empire started crusades against the people of Antiopia.

We enter the story 1 year before the third of those crusades begins.

We have 4 main protagonists, with occasional povs of lesser import.

The first perspective is Alaron Mercer. He is a typical mage in training at a mage academy on Yuros, preparing for the exams. Of course he's bullied by pure-blood mage student, so his life isn't all rosy. His story is a more typical coming of age story.

Another familiar tropes is the girl who is married away against her will to a powerful and mysterious old man. Ramita Ankesharan is an Omali (think indian culture) from Antiopia. She is taken to the holy city of Hebusalim, also on the continent Antiopia.

Her true love Kazim was promised to her from childhood, but now has to let go of her. Of course, he is our third pov in his trials to win her back.

All of those characters are teenagers and you have the typical issues that you might expect from those heroes.

By far the most interesting character is Elena Anborn, one of the very powerful mages from Yuros. Only Yuros has mages, that's why they can dominate the continent of Antiopia.

Elena is a bodyguard on the court of Javon, which is also a nation on Antiopia (think persian culture), which has a special standing, cause their royal family are traditionally half-bloods, half Jhafi from Antiopia, half Rimoni (think italian culture) from Yuros.

But secretly she's an agent for the Yuros spymaster Gurvon Gyle. Cause as the third crusade seems inevitable, the nations of Antiopia believing in the god Ahm (think muslims) are about to declare shihad (you know what to think) on the heathens and Gyle tries to move Javon not to take part in this holy war.

As you can see, there are many nations, an impending war/invasion and so you can expect intrigue and political maneuvering. And with 3 teenage protagonists there is also a lot of character development going on as we see the events of the world shape these 3 characters.

And although all these things are basically typical fantasy cliché-ridden plots, they are presented rather well here. The protagonists are likeable and you wish that they succeed, but they are not annoyingly "good". And in addition you get Elena, who is also Alaron's aunt, who is a very interesting character.

So despite all the cliché, this book is a 4-5 star read. What brought it down to 4 stars for me are the similarities to our own world. Noros, where Alaron lives is a medieval Germany, with a mountain range called The Alps. The Rimoni have all italian names, grow wine and olives and where the predominant empire, before the mages were created, just as the Romans.

The Omali are indians wearing sarees, bathing in holy rivers and praying to gods resembling elephants or multi-armed entities. The list goes on.

All those cultures are researched very well, but for my taste they are too close to home to be a great fantasy

world filled with sense of wonder.

I don't know if the author (the series is planned for 4 books) maybe makes a connection to our world and this is some future version of our own, where the sea has risen, but for now there are no imminent signs for this.

So, long story short, if you're looking for something totally new, Mage's Blood won't be the book you're looking for, but if you like familiar tropes, characters and places that are done really well in addition to a solid plot with interesting twists, then I can recommend this book whole-heartedly.

Ross says

Mage's Blood by David Hair propelled itself to the top of my TBR pile after hearing several promising reviews from some of my most trusted fantasy bloggers. The story was described as a bloody crusade between two sides set in a dark medieval world with heavy hints of Arabic culture, and even a comparison to R. Scott Bakker's Prince of Nothing saga was made. "Crusade, dark, bloody, medieval, clash of nations" okay fine, here's my money. Sounded like it was right up my alley and for the most part I enjoyed the first book in the Moontide Quartet, but unfortunately these dark themes demand mature characters, and the worst thing about Mage's Blood is the undeniable young adult vibe found within.

Many other people have complained about a slow start and while I can see where they are coming from, the first few hundred pages were the best for me. The book lacks a character glossary, (something that I think is going to be essential for book 2) so I had to resort to the old school method of writing down the character names and what their role in the story was. I think I had over 40 characters within the first hundred pages. This isn't a book that can lie around for a few weeks and then be picked back up again; you might find yourself a bit lost.

The West clash with the East after a magical bridge is constructed that connects two separate continents of Yuros (west) and Antiopia (east). This magical bridge is known as the "Moontide Bridge" and it only surfaces once every twelve years. Two crusades have already happened in the past and the third is about to take place. The nation of Yuros has been plagued with civil war but is still considered the stronger of the two nations due to the fact that they caused significant damage during the previous campaigns.

On the western side of the world (Yuros) we get multiple POV characters and also get an inside view into the political decisions that surround the upcoming crusade. Alaron Mercer is studying to become a Mage and we get to see his final months of study at the famed Mage's school. After stumbling across an old man who has lost his memory, Alaron and his two friends attempt to unravel the man's mysterious past, only to find that they have set in motion events that cannot be stopped. Also on the western front we get to meet Gurvon Gyle a Magister of great power. His POV chapters were some of the best but unfortunately his chapters get the least amount of screen time.

Over on the eastern side of the world we get a slew of characters and this is where David Hair excelled in his world building. Combining elements of Indian, Arabic, and even a bit of Chinese culture we get a glimpse into a very rich world. Camels, vast desserts, traveling caravans, and mysterious assassins are aplenty here. If you enjoy a touch of exotic flair in your fantasy then there is a lot to appreciate here.

The first character we get to meet in Antiopia is Elena Anborn, a female mage. Oftentimes the argument of gender tends to come up within the fantasy literature community, and David Hair gives us a great female lead in Elena Anborn. Other than a stereotypical love triangle situation, her story was very refreshing and I

feel confident in saying that she has been the best female POV character I've read since Arya from Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire series.

Ramita Ankesharan is a lowborn citizen from the southern deserts of Antiopa. She is destined to marry a young man named Kazim Makani, who lives in the same village as her. Ramita is set to marry Kazim and live happily ever after until one day a mysterious Mage comes to claim her as a wife. The Mage entices Ramita's father with riches beyond his imagination. Ramita's father decides to break off the marriage between his daughter and Kazim, much to Kazim's dismay. The storyline here is Kazim trying to get Ramita back, and Ramita eventually falling in love with her mysterious husband.

This being David Hair's first foray into "adult fantasy" he succeeds on multiple levels, but unfortunately the majority of characters are young adults and with that comes whiney teenage angst. Alaron's storyline turns into a Hardy Boys novel, and Ramita and Kazim's storyline is something stolen from an ABC family teen sitcom. Another issue I had was the unnecessary changes to modern words for no apparent reason other than this being a fantasy novel. Fucking becomes rukking, Satan becomes shaitan, etc. The magic system here is cool at times, but ultimately disappointing due to the fact that the mages have limitless power. A good magic system needs to be grounded in rules, and these mages seem to have no limitations.

I went into this novel thinking it could be the next great "Grimdark" fantasy series, but instead it falls short but it does fit nicely into most epic fantasy. Fans of Brandon Sanderson, and Peter V. Brett should find A LOT to love about this book, but if you're looking for the next Steven Erikson or R. Scott Bakker keep looking, and let me know when you find it! The novel stands at about 686 pages. (US hardcover edition)

Luke says

Easily the worst fantasy novel I've ever read. There are no redeeming qualities to this book.

First of all - a complete and utter lack of imagination. Most fantasy novels incorporate things like motifs or political structures that exist in real life. Hair has taken that a step further. Basically he's taken already existent places, religions and cultures and given them a slight spelling change (ie Europe is "Yuros", Jesus Christ is "Johan Corin" and so on.) His representation of middle eastern culture strikes me as just as shallow. I can only see 2 good reasons for him doing this 1) He truly does not have an imagination or 2) he does not trust the reader to understand what he's trying to get across. I think it's reason #2 because of the next complaint.

There's no sense of mystery, nothing that really "unfolds." Everything about every concept and character is pretty much explained at the moment of introduction. Not only that, but Hair seems the need to beat you over the head with all these complex concepts. Character development is pretty much non existent, everyone seems to act purely on the shallowest motives, which telegraphs all the "plot twists" from a mile away.

Now deliver all this predictable, unimaginative drivel in writing so flat it would give Stephanie Meyer a run for her money, and you've got Mages Blood in a nutshell. This made me feel insulted as a reader.

Dear David Hair;

Please grow an imagination.

PS - have a little more respect for your readers, we're not all that dumb.

Nick T. Borrelli says

Sometimes I read a book that everyone else seems to love and for some reason it just doesn't resonate with me. Then I wonder, "Is it just me?" or "Did I miss something?" David Hair's Moontide series is one that I kept hearing amazing things about. Hair is a New Zealand author, one of many up and coming talented writers who have been emerging on the fantasy scene recently from that island country. One particular review that I came across regarding this series even went so far as to say that it was a worthy substitute if you are eagerly awaiting the next George R.R. Martin Song of Ice and Fire book to be released. That is high praise indeed! So I felt like I wasn't really taking a very big chance when I picked up the first volume, Mage's Blood based primarily on all of the good publicity. After reading the summary it looked like Hair was attempting to construct a fantasy retelling of the whole Middle Eastern culture vs the western conflict that has evolved in our past and present "real life" history. I have never read a fantasy book that touched on this topic before and it intrigued me to say the least. Hair definitely has some guts to tread into that territory and I thought it was not only a brave move but also a fresh idea to try to tell the story of that history in a fantasy-like setting where magic is involved. I was very eager to get started and had high hopes that I would be deeply engrossed in this book and ultimately the rest of the series going forward. I prepared myself to be blown away, which is always a perilous move when you read something new. Alas, although I thought the book was entertaining and even somewhat captivating at times, there were a few things that stopped me from really liking it and in the end; it didn't click on enough levels to make me want to give it anything more than a slightly above average rating.

The action of Mage's Blood unfolds on two major continents: Yuros and Antiopia. Yuros is essentially Europe and Antiopia could be considered the Middle East. The continent of Yuros is populated with powerful mages who use their powers to subjugate the lesser populace on their own continent as well as the people of Antiopia. Long ago in the history of the two lands, a Leviathan Bridge connecting the two continents was erected across the ocean by a renegade mage named Antonin Meiros. The bridge would appear every 10 years with the Moontide and was initially designed to promote trade, communication, and understanding between the two vastly different cultures. However, the ruling mages of Yuros quickly became distrustful of the people of Antiopia and decided to launch a violent crusade to occupy it for the purpose of conquest. The last two crusades were devastatingly successful in Yuros' favor and there is a growing fear in Antiopia that when the next Moontide raises the Leviathan Bridge again, the next crusade may spell the final end for Antiopia. A small band of transplanted Yuros citizens who emigrated to Antiopia for peaceful purposes during one of the crusades may be the only hope in turning away the third crusade. These citizens are led by Elena Anborn, former Yuros assassin turned guardian and chief councilor to the most influential royal family in Antiopia. Elena, a powerful mage in her own right, sees that Yuros is only concerned with conquering and exploiting Antiopia and is determined that the continent be ready for the attack when it eventually comes. Will the invaders be thrown back by Antiopia's forces? Or will the mages in Yuros win out again and ultimately conquer the whole of that land, forever enslaving its people under their brutal rule.

This book had so many possibilities that could have made it great for me. The parallel to Islamic/Indian cultures clashing with western culture is something that I was interested in because of everything that is going on in the world today. I definitely thought it was an interesting avenue to pursue for a fantasy book/series. The Crusades mentioned in the first few chapters are obviously a reference to the Christian crusades of the 11th and 12th century in which many Muslims living in that part of the world were forced to either convert or die. So when that part of the story came up, I totally got it and understood what Hair was trying to do. It's only as I read further into the story that I began to see that instead of simply telling the story of the historical conflict between the west and middle-east culture in a balanced way, just in a different

setting, Hair's personal commentary largely overpowered the narrative. Reading it, I was struck by how every single viewpoint character on the continent of Yuros was evil, selfish, conniving, a murderer etc. These people had no redeeming qualities whatsoever. Conversely, the majority of the characters living in Antiopia were just simple people looking to be left alone. They were portrayed as helpless victims of the maniacal mages of Yuros with no counterbalance at all. Let me speak plainly, I have no skin in the game when it comes to the real world conflict happening in our world today. I think that both sides have done some unspeakably horrible things over the years and that there is no good guy in this scenario. My main beef concerns how it was handled in this book. When reading a story where you have two sides, both of which are cookie-cutter portrayals of bad and good, it takes away from any enjoyment that I have regarding the plot. It truly is a shame because Hair is a skilled writer and there were times where I got immersed in the story, only to be put off by yet another vile act committed by the incredibly evil mages of Yuros on the helpless Antiopians. I was expecting more intricate plotting and less "black and white" so to speak. As a result of this, I found myself not enjoying the book for large chunks at a time. I'm not saying that this is a bad book; not by a long shot. I'm simply saying that personally, I need more complexity and less overtly-predictable character descriptions. Simply describing one side as always bad and the other as always good and then never deviating from that template doesn't do it for me. I can only give Mage's Blood average marks, but if you are into fantasies that are a classic good vs. evil plot with a lot of military action thrown in, then this one may be for you. Sadly, it just wasn't for me.

Rob says

Executive Summary: I found this book very uneven. There were parts I enjoyed, but many parts I didn't, and by the end I just wanted to be done with it. 2.5 stars.

Audio book: This is my first audio book read by Nick Podehl. I've heard mixed, though mostly positive things about him as a narrator, especially for the Kingkiller series.

I thought he was excellent here, and really helped me get through the unenjoyable parts of this book. I think if I was reading this rather than listening, I might have quit the book without finishing.

I look forward to listening to other books read by him in the future, just not the other books in this series.

Full Review

I prefer character driven stories, and this is definitely that. So why didn't I enjoy it? The answer for me at least is the characters. I found most of them unenjoyable. If I have no one to really root for, the story has to be that much better or I'll be bored.

Don't get me wrong, there are things to like about Alaron and Elena, but there is a lot not to like. I don't need perfect characters who fall into the chosen one trope, but something about their faults really just rubbed me the wrong way and I often found them frustrating and unlikable.

The best character in the book was Alaron's friend Ramon, who while he was basically a walking trope, was brought excellently to life by Mr. Podehl's narration and added some nice comic relief to the story.

Most of the other characters are flat, or too trope heavy. We have some mustache twirling bad guys, and the helpless Ramita who seems to merely be there to drive the plot as a goal/pawn for the other characters in the book.

The world building here was alright, but seems to borrow too heavily from actual cultures (in particular the Middle East, and religion of Islam) that it didn't feel much like being transported to another world apart from the magic.

And that was another issue I have. I guess Brandon Sanderson spoiled me for poorly developed magic systems, but it all felt just a bit too hand wavy to me.

Overall this book was just too uneven. There were some parts I really enjoyed, and there are questions I'd like to keep reading to get the answers too, but it's just not worth it for me. There is too many other things I'd rather be reading.

Liviu says

I finished Mage's Blood by David Hair; the book itself - action, characters, portrayal of the cultures (Western, Islamic and Indian in barely veiled disguise) and their clash well done with nuanced characters, good and bad guys and girls on both sides - the Sainted Mater-Empress Lucia takes top prize for pure evilness, though it degenerates into cartoonish stuff on occasion - but I had two structural issues that at least for now stops the series from being a top-top level one:

The world itself or at least the known continents are just a shrunken version of Europe and Asia and that makes it feel a little like a small sandbox rather than a real world and second the cultures described have been in isolation one from another for untold millennia before a few hundred years ago when the appearance of magic in the world allowed the West to get to the East so to speak (that would be a third flaw in a way, why not do it the other way, with the East getting the magic and getting to the west first) and I just cannot believe the unitary nature of the cultures as despite surface differences there is a fundamental similarity between the Western, Islamic and Indian cultures in our world and in the world of the novel, which of course is not surprising in our world considering how they interacted and influenced each other forever so to speak (compare to the pre-Columbian Maya, Inca, Mexico or even the North American Native cultures and see what I mean), but it stretches the disbelief thingy in the novel

Still a gripping read, lots of twists and intriguing characters so I am in for the duration; a full FBC rv with Mihir in a few days and I will either c/p my part here or post the link; also a very good ending with a TBC sign but no real cliffhangers and revelations and big promises for the next volume

FBC Rv

INTRODUCTION: "Most of the time the Moontide Bridge lies deep below the sea, but every 12 years the tides sink and the bridge is revealed, its gates open for trade.

The Magi are hell-bent on ruling this new world, and for the last two Moontides they have led armies across the bridge on 'crusades' of conquest.

Now the third Moontide is almost here and, this time, the people of the East are ready for a fight ... but it is three seemingly ordinary people that will decide the fate of the world"

Intriguing blurb, great sample so a novel that became a must read on publication, Mage's Blood is David Hair's first foray into adult fantasy.

ANALYSIS: (Livi) The setup of the series is as follows: the world of Urthe where the irregular orbit of the Moon creates huge tidal differences on a 12 year cycle while making sea navigation all but impossible outside locally coastal; for many centuries, the two main continents in which the action takes place, Yuros and Antiopia/Ahmedhassa have been in complete ignorance one from another despite being separated only by 300 miles of water and developing a Western like civilization in Yuros and Islamic (Ahm) and Indian (Lakh) - like cultures in Ahmedhassa.

However some 500 years before the start of the novel in 927, magic - gnosis - comes to the West when the 1000 followers of a hippie-like prophet, Corineus, are touched by supernatural power in a terrible and unforgettable night. Some few hundred die, including Corineus, some few hundred are unchanged, but some few hundred become extremely powerful magicians called Ascendants whose gnosis gets transmitted linearly by blood - child of mage and non-mage gets 1/2 power and so it goes up to 1/16 mage blood which is lowest where gnosis manifests - with the caveat that mage with mage couples have very few children overall so "pure bloods" remain relatively rare, while mixed bloods abound.

The original Ascendants split into factions - a militant one that forms a mighty empire in Yuros that rules to the present day and a peaceful one led by Antonin Meiros that retreats to the ends of Yuros in Pontus and sets up Ordo Costruo dedicated to improving the lives of people by magic; among other things, gnosis allows magical flying machines to work, so Anthiopia is discovered by air some 300 years ago and limited trade and visitations occur.

Meiros - still living in 927, as Ascendants are very long lived - and his followers want to do good, so some 100 years ago he built a tremendous bridge appropriately called Leviathan Bridge, 300 miles long, connecting Pontus with the nation of Dhassa whose capital Hebusalim is the Holy City of the Ahm religion. The bridge opens for two years, every 12 years due to the tides - we learn more details later from Meiros himself. Trade and some colonization ensue and everyone prospers for about 100 years, but the leading imperial families are not happy as in the words of the evil-supremo of the series to date, Sainted Mater-Empress Lucia:

"‘But Meiros, an Ascendant too craven to join the liberation of Yuros from the Rimoni yoke, left the fellowship of the Three Hundred and built that cursed Bridge, and from that Bridge do all of our woes come! I wonder, does Antonin Meiros even know what he has done?’

He seemed perfectly aware of it last time I saw him, reflected Gyle. He wondered whether Lucia Fasterius truly believed the bigoted dogma she spoke. She seemed intelligent, learned – kindly, even. But in her eyes something fanatic lurked, like a venomous snake.

Lucia came to a halt behind her chair and gripped the wooden back tightly. ‘For a century we have seen the Bridge open every twelve years, when the tides drop to levels that permit traverse. We have seen the merchants pour across then return with all manner of addictive Eastern goods – opium and hashish, coffee and tea, even the silks and other luxuries that entrance our people. They can virtually name their prices on return. The bankers extend credit to merchants whilst squeezing the nobility, the magi-protectors who made Rondelmar what it is.

Who are the richest men in Rondelmar? The merchants and bankers! Fat obsequious slime like Jean Benoit and his merchant cabal. And what have they bought with their ill-gotten gains? Our homes – our belongings

– our art, and worse: they have purchased our sons and daughters, our Blood!’ Lucia was shouting now, spittle flecking her lips. ‘Those scum are buying our children and taking them to wife or husband, so that their misbegotten offspring will have everything, both gold and gnosis, and as a result, we are seeing a new breed, the mage-merchant, nasty, grasping half-breeds.’”

So in an act of treachery, the Imperial legions attack over the bridge in 904 and take Hebusalim in an orgy of blood and destruction while Meiros chooses non-interference rather than breaking his famed bridge and open war with the Empire, so he ensures hatred from both sides...

The Antiopian armies retake Hebusalim once the bridge submerges under the tide as air support from Yuros is not enough, so another round of massacres ensue, while in the second Crusade of 916, the Empire strikes back with ever more force and holds Hebusalim since. In the meantime, the hardships due to the Crusade led to a revolt in a southern province of the Empire, Noros, which while defeated is still shrouded in some mystery today and now in 927, one year before the next opening of the bridge, the Empire prepares the "Crusade to end all crusades", while the Antiopians have declares holy shihad to defeat the invaders...

The main characters of the novel are: Elena Anborn, Norosian half-blood mage and former feared guerrilla fighter in the revolt under the (in)famous Gurvon Gyle who appears in the quote above as an intimate of the ruling Empress Mater as he was pardoned years after the revolt on condition to do the Empire's dirty work from then on.

Ostensibly working as bodyguard for the Nesti ruling family of Javon which is an Antiopian kingdom which was partly settled from Yuros during the peaceful era and is unique in the normal - though tense of course - cohabitation of the two races, Elena is actually under Gyle's orders and unfortunately for everyone living there, Javon is very important strategically for both Empire and the Sultan.

Alaron Mercer, Norosian quarter blood mage and nephew of Elena who is preparing to graduate the college of magic and get his accreditation. His story is in large part the typical coming-of-age one from fantasy, but in a nice twist, Alaron is still a quarter blood mage so not quite the usually powerful "boy of destiny", but he compensates with his agile mind and intense curiosity...

Ramita Ankesharan from a Lakh family in an obscure city but whose father, Ispal, gets an offer he cannot refuse, so Amita's expected life is turned upside down and she will travel far away to a destiny we only start to glimpse for now...

Kazim Makani, Ramita's fiancée, son of an Amteh warrior who became blood-brother with Ispal in Hebusalim during the terrible 904 - as in our history, Lakh is ruled by an Amteh emperor with the majority locals coexisting uneasily with the Amteh invaders and converts. When Ramita is taken away, Kazim goes berserk and later joins the shihad but of course things are not quite as they seem. The time of trials for all is approaching!

Mage's Blood has great action and memorable characters; the portrayal of the cultures and their clash is extremely well done with nuanced characters, good and bad guys and girls on both side.

On the negative side I had two structural issues: the world itself or at least the known continents to date are just a shrunken version of Europe and Asia and that makes it feel a little like a small sandbox rather than a real world.

Then the cultures described have been in isolation one from another for untold centuries before the gnosis

and the airships when the appearance of magic in the world allowed the West to get to the East so to speak - that would be a third flaw in a way, why not do it the other way, with the East getting the magic and getting to the West first - and I just cannot believe the unitary nature of the cultures as despite surface differences there is a fundamental similarity between the Western, Islamic and Indian cultures in our world and in the world of the novel.

This of course is not surprising in our world considering how they interacted and influenced each other forever so to speak (compare to the pre-Columbian Maya, Inca, Mexico or even the North American Native cultures and see what I mean), but it stretches somewhat the suspension of disbelief in the novel. With a very good ending with a TBC sign but no real cliffhangers, while having revelations and big promises for the next volume, *Mage's Blood* is a gripping read with lots of twists and intriguing characters so I am in for the duration.

Kaitlin says

It's been a little while since I read a book which is **THIS GOOD** and has so many ideas and strings which all pull together in a magnificent way. This is the first book in a Quartet which makes me so happy and excited because it means I still have three great, long books ahead of me. It's a story which involves various different influences of culture (both Eastern & Western), has fabulous male and female characters, has intricate, complicated, but interesting magic, and has a massive focus on Politics (without getting bogged down in the politics and losing sight of the actual story and character development). It's a classic example of a book which has been compared to *Game of Thrones* (as so many are these days) but I would actually go so far as to say that this is worthy of a comparison to *Game of Thrones* in terms of the politics and the characters and the world building. It's excellently written and there's so many intricacies and plot twists I didn't seem coming, but loved discovering all the same. An instant new favourite author!

So, what is the story all about?

The story focuses on a world where there's two continents. The Western continent is Yuros, the Eastern is Antiopia and they are separated by a sea and linked by a Bridge. The Bridge is special because it can only be traversed every Moontide (which is roughly 2 years in every 12) and so a lot of the time the two continents are not linked.

The bridge is the connection, but it's also a conduit for war and the way that this world functions revolves around planning for the Moontide and what will happen, the shifting of rulers and politics, and the continual maintenance of order, power and magic.

Who are the main characters?

We have three main characters that we focus on within the book. The first is Elena who is a notorious mercenary working for Gurvon Gyle (a very powerful man who is heavily involved in the manipulation of politics behind the scenes). Elena is in a position of power due to the post she's been holding for many years as a spy on the royal family, reporting back to Gurvon.

Elena is a solid character who is not only ruthless, filled with fury and an excellent assassin and fighter, but also very set in her ways. She would never betray the people she loves, but when her choice of lover and family changes she has to make some tough promises and choices if she wants to protect those she loves.

I found her to be a fascinating character with a great plotline where I was instantly hooked and constantly on my toes, wondering what would happen next. She's a very strong lady with some excellent skills, but she's up against the best too so she has to bring her A-game.

Next we have Ramita, a lowly market girl who lives with her family in the middle of nowhere really. She's the daughter of a fairly well off family, and from her early childhood she's been utterly in love with Kazim, the boy she's engaged to marry. The two of them have always been utterly devoted to one another and happy in each other's company, but one day an evil man comes to Ramita's father and gives him an offer he cannot refuse. This offer means that not only will Ramita be forced to leave everything she's ever known, but she'll have to do it alone.

Ramita's story was excellent also and another one where I fell into it easily and was drawn along word by word. She's a sweet girl and an honest character who has never wanted anything other than happiness. When her dreams are ripped away and she's forced to do things she never could have imagined she's tough and resourceful.

I found her story to be one of the most emotional in terms of ups and downs and making me worry for her safety and the safety of those around her. She's a caring and loving character and so she's easy to root for, but she's also not afraid to defend what she loves,

Finally we have Alaron who is a Mage-in-training at the Academy. He's a quarter-blood which means that he has a pretty good chance of passing his exams and helping to get his family out of the financial issues they have been having when he finishes his time there.

Alaron has two great friends, Cym and Ramon, who are also magically inclined. Ramon is his friend within the academy, Cym is a gypsy who Alaron teaches, and together they're the best of friends.

When something terrible happens to disrupt Alaron's chances at passing his exams and becoming a Mage he doesn't quite know how to react. He's surrounded by people who laugh at him and look down on him and he's in a rut. He soon decides on a new course of action and from that point on his story takes some very exciting turns.

Alaron is the character who took a little longer for me to like but that's because his story took a little longer to develop (all the characters, both main and sideline are fantastically well developed). I really liked that he's not your standard 'hero' character, he's actually friends with the others who are far 'better' at magic than he is, but seeing his pov and thoughts was great for the story and I learned, quickly, to like him and his story too.

We also have many other fabulous side characters such as Cera, Kazim, Gurvon, Cym, Ramon, Huyria, Lori and many more. They were all just as convincing and fleshed out as the main characters and I loved seeing how each of them was manipulated, used, dominated or took control themselves and stood up for things they believed in. They're a collection of devoted, sneaky, loving, friendly and harsh characters and they're all fab!!

What about the setting and atmosphere?

The setting is, as I said before, drawing on both Eastern and Western culture for each of the different continents and the various different ethnic groups within the populations. We see white and black people, people with accents and very rich people. People who are poor and rich and somewhere in between. People with power and people with nothing.

We also get to visually imagine the places our characters travel between because the descriptions of markets, castles, towers, spices and scents are all so well described and make you feel fully immersed.

And the magic?

The magic of this book is fairly complicated so I will not explain it all now, but suffice to say the amount of magic and power you can possess depends on your lineage and blood. If you are a pure-blood then you will have immense amounts of power. A half-blood will have a little less, a quarter-blood a little less again and so on, right down to a sixteenth. Any less than a sixteenth and you will not have any magic.

There's also a lot of different types of magic and all magic depends on Gnosis. There's 4 types; Thaumaturgy (to do with elements), Hermetic (concerns living things), Theurgy (concerns the intangible and the animate) and finally Sorcery (concerns the intangible and inanimate). All are powerful, all do different things, all have

different facets and every Mage has an affinity with one of more of them.

Pacing?

This is a 650+ page book so it's not a fast read by any means but it is filled with action and intensity throughout. I would say it probably took me the first 100 or so pages to really get into this story, but after that I was utterly sucked in and all I wanted to do was follow the storylines of the characters and see what would happen next.

It's got some great descriptions, and the various political hierarchies are explained well which means that even though there's a big emphasis on manipulation of politics it's fairly easy to follow and keep everyone straight in your head.

I would say that once you're into the story the pages fly by and it's a fairly fast read overall (for a 650+ pg book anyway!)

In summary, if you've never heard of this or read it go and check it out because it was just wonderful and every element is perfect (remember what a mess Dinosaur Lords was - yeah, this is proof of what a GOOD fantasy should be!!) A solid 5* book and I am very, very happy that I have got the second book waiting for me to read it. This book might easily find itself on my top books of the whole year so far! HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!

Angus says

Wow... I picked this up based on the interesting premise and I'm so glad I did. Despite being 700 pages, I flew through it and that was down to the excellent pacing, as I never once felt bored.

In short we follow three main characters - A training mage, a mercenary hired to spy on the royal family and a market girl greeted by an unusual man. (Definitely read the synopsis though, as that's what hooked me)

These 3 main story arcs are each unique, having their own twist and turns and various intrigue. The way they slowly start to interweave with each other is beautifully crafted and doesn't feel at all forced.

There's 4 types of magic (or 'gnosis') in this world, each split up into 4 sub categories. As the book continued the magic system continued to get more and more interesting. While being slightly confusing at first, I quickly got a grasp of the capabilities of each type of gnosis and how some mages naturally suit certain types better.

This is also the first Epic Fantasy I have read, where there are huge influences from both eastern and western cultures from our world. It was so interesting how the conflict was created, using these cultural differences in a fantasy setting, through this diverse cast of characters.

I recommend this book to any Epic Fantasy lover or even for people looking to get into the genre, as it certainly got me back into reading Epic Fantasy. On to book 2! :D

Blodeuedd Finland says

I was disappointed. I love great worldbuilding. I do not mind if you borrow from cultures in our world, just

by the gods, change some things at least!

This world has the Mafia in Sicily and they even speak Italian there.

There are the roaming Romani.

There is Jerusalem, and trust me, it's not like it's a place call Ach*meh*otu and I just guessed it. No, it's called Hebusalim. Like with the Romani and mafia it's so freaking obvious.

There is the West, and the East and the East is so our East and they have declared Jihad there. There are Emirs, there are camels, there is even the India place with Kama Sutra.

There is a Jesus like guy. There is the Roman empire.

The planet is called Urth *groans*

Fine, could the characters have saved it?

Half and half. Aleron was pretty interesting (even though he was stupid). His aunt Elena was pretty interesting.

That guy following the girl he loves was NOT interesting. I skimmed his parts. The story if the girl he loved and her new man, was NOT interesting. I skimmed her parts.

The only reason I am giving this a 2 is cos of Aleron and Elena. The rest was bad. No originality at all.

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

4.5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <http://bibliosanctum.blogspot.com/201...>

Books like Mage's Blood are extremely hard for me to review, and not least of all because the many comparisons of this to A Song of Ice and Fire are mostly appropriate; this first book of the Moontide Quartet is a sprawling epic indeed! Still, I'm of the mind that George R.R. Martin's epic series stands uniquely on its own...but then so does David Hair's. It would be impossible for me to go into every single thing I liked about this book without having to talk about why, because that would just lead to lengthy explanations into the details of the plot, and if I did that this review will end up being thirty pages long with half of it made up of spoilers. Obviously, we can't have that.

Suffice to say though, this book has it all: nations at war, clashing religions, political intrigue, mages and sorcery, multiple points of view. Yuros and Antiopia are two lands long separated by vast ocean. But every Moontide, the seas part to reveal the magnificent mage-crafted Leviathan Bridge, allowing trade and communication between the two continents. Unfortunately, the passage is also a source of much bitterness and conflict. The last two Moontides have involved crusades of conquest, thanks to the lofty ambitions of the Magi.

Now another Moontide is at hand. As the time draws nearer, the people on both sides prepare for war. Antonin Meiros, a mage of great renown (in fact, it was he who was the intellect behind the Leviathan Bridge) seeks a new wife, and travels to Lahk to wed Ramita. Ramita, however, is already betrothed to the hotheaded Kazim. In another part of the world, Elena Anborn has pledged her life to protect the royal family of Javon, fighting off the assassination attempts and conspiracies masterminded by her former lover Gurvon Gyle, who works for powerful political enemies. Meanwhile in Noros, Elena's nephew Alaron prepares for his mage finals. But during the presentation of his thesis, he unwittingly proposes a dangerous topic that

could mean the end to his hopes and dreams.

Everything and everyone is connected in this massive and intricate web that David Hair has woven. The scale of both setting and story are vast. The continents involved here encompass various nations, many of which are described here with great thought and detail. Their populations, including their cultures, languages, religions, rituals and even food and styles of dress are given the same exacting care. This is a world where both magic and theology form a strong basis for society, and it is diverse.

At the same time, readers will find there is much that is familiar in this fantasy world of Urte. Most of the nations and cultures in this book bear marked resemblances to those in our reality -- even when it comes to religion and geography. The nature of this brought to mind a recent discussion I had with a friend, regarding settings in various epic fantasies and how he usually preferred fictional worlds that he can imagine as our own earth, whereas I tended to prefer the opposite. Needless to say, a book like *Mage's Blood* can appeal to both camps. As well, even I can admit that real-world historical and cultural influences in a fantasy setting can add a lot to a story, a prime example being Jacqueline Carey's original *Kushiel's Universe* trilogy which remains one of my favorite series of all time.

With a book so massive which features a cast so big, it was perhaps no surprise that the first quarter of *Mage's Blood* is the most demanding of the reader. The different characters and their story lines are cleanly organized and separated by chapters, which is why this is my favorite format for epic novels. Nevertheless, it makes for a slower start, when an author has to cycle through the perspectives while introducing all the main players, and the first couple hundred pages were dedicated to this task. Patience pays off though, as the book finishes setting the scene and gradually builds up momentum in the middle chapters. This is the meat of the story, and it is amazing how David Hair manages keep all the plates spinning at once, giving each character and plot thread the attention they deserve, while also meticulously bringing them all together so that they eventually form a much bigger picture.

As *Mage's Blood* features an ensemble cast, obviously I had my favorites (the notable example being Ramita and her story with Antonin Meiros) while others were not as interesting to me. Each person has an important role to play though, and this was made clear by the climax and the ending, which is in a word incredible. It is a conclusion that is positively incendiary, leaving me wondering what else the author has in store. As the series name implies, *Mage's Blood* is only the first in what is meant to be series of four books, and as such there is much left wide open for huge things to come. However, at the same time David Hair has wrapped things up in a way that is straightforward and satisfying, without any abruptness. I think this is a far rarer skill than people realize.

I have a feeling a lot will be happening in *The Scarlet Tides*. *Mage's Blood* may have been encumbered by a lengthy introduction and a slow build-up to the story, which I honestly don't think could have been avoided. I suspect, however, that we will jump right into the action with the sequel. I'm excited, and can't wait to see where things will go.

Paul Nelson says

Mage's blood starts off a little slowly, however once you get a feel for the cultures, the politics, the magic and the lay of the land it jumps in excitement into an excellent story

Magi are born of *Mage's Blood* and the purer the blood the stronger the mage, Elena is a powerful mage and a skilled fighter in the pay of her former lover, Gurvon Gyle, tasked to protect the Javon monarch and his

family. She grows close to those she is protecting and starts to believe that she has found a home. When the order comes for the assassination of the monarchy she rebels and thwarts Gyle's plans and effectively brings a death sentence on her head.

Alaron is a quarter blood. He has enough power to wield the Gnosis but he can never be as strong as the pure bloods that bully him through college. Thankfully it is nearly exam time and he will soon be free from college and a true mage in his own right, provided he gets through this first of many trials.

Every twelve years the Leviathan Bridge opens joining two lands and two cultures. Antonin Meiros and his allies created the bridge in the time of the first crusade and his actions doomed a nation. Now, seventeen years since the revolt, the third crusade is within sight. The months count down at an ever increasing pace, the Moontide approaches and the world's fate rests on three unlikely heroes.

The story is told from the viewpoint of three main protagonists and several other key characters, all are excellent but it is the detail and depth of the story that captures the imagination. Building up to a tense finale, the author has left the story at a perfect point where you feel the strong desire to see how the story threads progress and how the main characters overcome their current predicaments.

This novel has a wonderful Epic scale and I for one look forward to the next instalment.

James Chatham says

This novel encompasses pretty much everything I look for in an epic fantasy, and then exceeds those expectations. It's got interesting politics, unique cultural influences, well-developed characters, gripping storylines, and a wonderfully descriptive writing style.

Mage's Blood starts one year before the Moontide, which is when the Leviathan Bridge, a bridge that connects the continents Yuros and Anitopia, is passable. The people of Yuros are preparing for the Third Crusade, an attempt to convert the people of Anitopia to the Kore religion.

Although this is the backdrop for the story, this book is mainly a setup novel. The main conflict, the Crusade, doesn't even start in this book. The fact that a book this good is just a *SETUP* novel is incredibly impressive. David Hair weaves the three main storylines together with the preparation of the Crusades masterfully. We have Elena Anborn, a mage who's task is to protect the children of an Anitopian royal; Alaron Mercer, a student at a university preparing for his exams to become a legal mage; and the story of Ramita and Kazim - Ramita is about to marry Kazim before an elderly bachelor pays Ramita's father an immense amount of money to marry Ramita.

The aspect I found most unique about this book is the contrast between the cultures and religions of the two continents. Yuros is more of a Western-like civilization, influenced by Italian and Roman cultures, and their religion, the Kore, is based somewhat on Christianity. On the other hand, Anitopia is very influenced by Middle Eastern cultures, and its religions, the Jhafi and the shihad, are based mostly on the Muslim religion. It is refreshing to see these different influences, instead of the fantasy norm, which is European culture and Abrahamic religions.

The magic in this book is intricate and complicated, but it's explained clearly while keeping the sense of wonder and epicness I feel magic should have. There's different types of magic, called "gnosis" in this book, different mages have an affinity for, which affects the kind of effects they can do with the gnosis.

The writing style is descriptive and vivid; I could visualize the locations and people that were being described in detail. The political scenes were always interesting, and I never felt bored or uninterested in the story at any point throughout this book.

I *highly* recommend this book to anyone and everyone. Fans of A Song of Ice and Fire will enjoy this book immensely - it's got everything that ASOIAF has, but with unique cultures and characters I'm never bored with or tired of.

This book is SO good! It's one of my favorite books I've read this year thus far.

Full review to come.

Shelby M. (Read and Find Out) says

4.25 stars! Will need to think some before reviewing.

Scott Hitchcock says

A fantasy book with a lot of alternate historical fiction interwoven into the story line. Not in the case of characters but more time period. Elements of Europe, Middle Eastern and Northern African culture revolving around the Crusades. The corruption and colonization of an empire, the mythical 300 being the birth of mages, a magical bridge spanning what would be Gibraltar, flying carpets and ships all add to this culturally rich story.

The different story line all touch each other and yet their collisions will be in the future books of the series. I liked that not all the endings were happy and many are in limbo.

This was an audio book for me. The narrator is good.

I will continue the series. 3.75*

Rusty's Ghost Engine (also known as..... Jinky Spring) says

3.5 stars

This was quite an interesting novel that introduced many different cultures and politics as well as a set of unique and flawed characters. I will say thought the things I found most interesting were the Moontide bridge and the close orbit of the moon ... which makes the sea so rough it's impassable by ship. Not much was said on how the moon came to be this way only that the bridge was created to connect two continents. It was made for a good cause but the only thing it did cause was war.

There is definitely a Game of Thrones feel to this book (after all my copy had a sticker on it saying "If you

love Game of Thrones, you'll want to read this!") with a lot of violence, swearing and mature content but that for me makes a book all the more better. The writing was well structured but the characters I felt could have been given more depth and personality as they didn't feel completely real. The story itself was often slow in parts making me lose interest from time to time. But I've read worse and now I'm glad I read to the end....

The full review can be found here: <https://edwardsghostengine.wordpress....>
