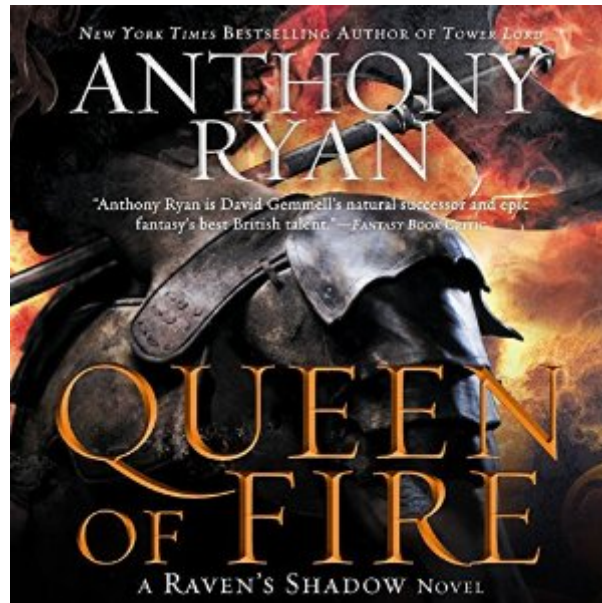


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Queen Of Fire: A Raven's Shadow Novel, Book 3



Synopsis

In the thrilling conclusion to the "deftly and originally executed" (Booklist) New York Times best-selling trilogy, Vaelin Al Sorna must help his queen reclaim her realm. Only his enemy has a dangerous new collaborator, one with powers darker than Vaelin has ever encountered. "The Ally is there, but only ever as a shadow, unexplained catastrophe, or murder committed at the behest of a dark, vengeful spirit. Sorting truth from myth is often a fruitless task." After fighting back from the brink of death, Queen Lyrna is determined to repel the invading Volarian army and regain the independence of the Unified Realm. Except to accomplish her goals, she must do more than rally her loyal supporters. She must align herself with forces she once found repugnant - those who possess the strange and varied gifts of the Dark - and take the war to her enemy's doorstep. Victory rests on the shoulders of Vaelin Al Sorna, now named battle lord of the realm. However, his path is riddled with difficulties. For the Volarian enemy has a new weapon on their side, one that Vaelin must destroy if the realm is to prevail - a mysterious Ally with the ability to grant unnaturally long life to her servants. And defeating one who cannot be killed is a nearly impossible feat, especially when Vaelin's blood-song, the mystical power that has made him the epic fighter he is, has gone ominously silent.

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Customer Reviews

If I had to describe Queen of Fire in one sentence it would be: "It was a-ok?" I would rate QOF 2.5 stars if possible, but on the strength of my man-crush for Vaelin, I'm bumping it up to three. If I

had to guess, most of the "real" reviews will be giving it two stars. And by "real", I mean the reviews with detailed criticisms, and not the upcoming massive flood of one-liners that will be rating it five stars. Let's be clear: This is not a five star novel, but it isn't a one star novel either. I would say mostly twos and threes. Which of course is a PROFOUND disappointment! Like many of you, I fell in love with Blood Song. It still remains the best novel I've ever read. It is the standard to which I compare other fantasy novels and almost all of them fall short. Anyway, I loathe spoilers so I'll try to stay away from anything major. In fact, I'm not going to go into many plot specifics at all. This is simply an honest opinion from someone who knows nothing about what it takes to write a novel or write a thorough review. One of the major problems from Tower Lord resurfaces here in Queen of Fire, and that's the complete and utter lack of character development. It's essentially non-existent, which is a great shame because that's one of the things AR did so well in Blood Song. After 100 pages in Blood Song, who would have thought that pompous jerk Nortah would have turned into the man he eventually became? But we watched it unfold through Vaelin's eyes and it was 100% believable (I picked Nortah because he's an easy example, but anyone will do). There's none of that in Tower Lord, and it's even worse in Queen of Fire. And it's this lack of character development that ultimately led me to the sad realization that I simply didn't care about most of the newer characters. There are so many side characters that I have a hard time remembering them all. Unless your name is Vaelin, Frentis, or a few others, I just didn't care what happened to you. It's almost as if I was in the middle of a cruel joke: I had to read page after page of our POV characters interacting with all these indistinguishable side characters who speak with the same voice and have no traits to set themselves apart from one another, while the ones I do care about (Nortah, Caenis, the Aspects, etc), receive little to no screen time. And when they do, their personalities are a shell of what they once were! Especially Sollis. The Sollis I read about in TL/QOF felt like a completely different Sollis than the one in Blood Song, and that's such a shame. And Reva! Ugh, how I hated reading her chapters. Everything about her is contrived and unbelievable, and I found myself skimming every time I saw her name. The "development" we saw from her was an insult to the work put into crafting the characters in Blood Song. At least there was less of her in QOF compared to TL. I have other criticisms, but to write about them would be to reveal major plot spoilers, which I don't want to do. Suffice it to say that I find it very annoying that characters with unique "gifts" can be created straight from *deus ex machina* land simply to advance the plot. I'm being pretty brutal. Look, there were definitely some things I liked. AR is a very skilled writer, and even with all these criticisms, I still enjoyed reading QOF. He's just beginning his writing career and he has so much room for growth. I've read many fantasy novels and his writing is above average compared to others. I truly am

excited about reading his future novels. And what he DIDN'T do in QOF is just as important as what he did do. There aren't any shocking character deaths. Yes a few characters die, but he didn't pull a GRRM on us. And we do get a sense of resolution after the climax. There aren't too many unfinished plot threads. Sure there's a setup for a future installment which will annoy some readers, but I didn't find it a big deal. Another bright spot for me was Verniers. I LOVED reading his POV. Why? Well, say what you want about the guy, but when you're reading his POV, you know it's his POV. Blood Song was so strong because each character had a distinct "feel". But as I discussed previously, that "feel" all but vanished in TL/QOF. Verniers was one of the few exceptions, and that's why I enjoyed his character so much. The dude had personality. The new mental connection between Frentis and his former master was enjoyable to read as well. Also, I'm sure many will disagree, but I enjoyed reading about the Ally and his origins (you will learn everything you want to know). Without going into spoilers, I thought it was entertaining how Vaelin got the Ally to reveal himself. And I enjoyed the role a certain ageless character had to play in all of it. But unfortunately with that praise, comes another criticism. I found the Ally and his motives very weak. We spent all this time reading about the buildup and then this is why you're causing death and destruction? That's it? Come on man! Wow, I am rambling. Let's sum this up: TL:DR - If you didn't enjoy Tower Lord, you probably won't enjoy Queen of Fire, as many of the same issues that plagued the second novel still exist in the third. And while TL/QOF don't even come close to Blood Song, the finale was ok. It could have been worse and it's better than a lot of what's out there. On the strength of Blood Song alone, I will gobble up anything Anthony Ryan releases in the future in the hopes of seeing him return to his former glory.

There is no other way to say this other than this book broke my heart. I have been disappointed before, but when I read the final page of Queen of Fire, I wanted to literally cry and I don't mean that in a good way. I understand that endings are hard, especially in fantasy, but with Blood Song, the first book in this trilogy, Anthony Ryan created something special and although the second book in the series Tower Lord was a slight misstep, I still enjoyed it, but to say that Queen of Fire disappointed me would be the understatement of the year. For the uninitiated, Queen of Fire picks up right after the ending of The Tower Lord. The United Realm has been invaded by the Empire of Volar, a sadistically evil nation who outwardly practices slavery and appeals to the worse base of human nature and cruelty. You think something is barbaric and cruel and dehumanizing, well the Volarians feel that is just the way of doing business. Not only are they evil, but they are ruled in the background by a dark and mysteriously powerful being termed the Ally who pulls the

strings of the ruling council while also granting said members near immortality, mysterious abilities and wealth beyond their wildest dreams. At the start of our novel, the people of the United Realm have just crushed a large Volarian army at Alltor, the capital city for one of the provinces of the realm and are now making plans to remove the Volarians from their capital city Varinshold and the remainder of the realm while taking the fight to Volaria itself in order to ensure that the Volarians stay gone forever. The strength of the first book of this series, Blood Song lied in the characterization of the characters. Every character in that book felt unique, believable, and tangible and they spoke with their own voice. The characters all felt real and they grew organically into full-fledged human beings in their own right. I am currently rereading Blood Song, and I can't help but notice that certain characters simply pop and jump out of the page, King Janus and Queen Lyrna jumping foremost to mind. When either of those characters appeared in Blood Song, they stole the scene, with their characterization, the mind games and the verbal jujitsu between them and the main character. Every exchange plays out like a short form of Keschet, which is simply amazing. One reviewer also pointed out the development of Nortah, a character who was simply a jerk at the beginning of the Blood Song, but through the trials of the story transforms into one of the better characters of the series. Like that reviewer if you would have told me that Nortah would become one of my favorite characters in the series, I would have never believed you, but both his character arc and his growth are amazing. Fast Forward and contrast that with Queen of Fire, and there is almost no characterization between hardly any of the characters. Honestly, this phenomena is not entirely unique, as characterization died in this series with Tower Lord, but I digress. In Queen of Fire, every character speaks with almost the same voice and little is given to motivate their actions or why a character is doing anything. This is a problem, because there are A LOT of characters in this book, a lot of side characters as well as POV characters, and while not all the POV characters held my attention, the complete lack of character among any of the side characters made all of them readily forgettable and caused none of them to stand out. This in turn creates a scenario where you simply don't care about any of the characters in the story, except maybe the main characters which leads to a case where an epic cast feels almost like cannon fodder or an afterthought. In this book, it felt like the characterization took a back page so that the author could focus more on his world building. That being said, I would highly advise that you reread Tower Lord before you pick up this book, as you will need a cheat sheet of sorts to keep track of who is who as you read the novel. This could have been alleviated somewhat if ever character felt unique, but among the minor characters you will have to work hard to keep track of who is who so you don't feel lost. Vaelin Al Sorna, ostensibly the main character or the hero of the series, will go down as one of

my favorite fantasy characters to ever grace the written page. However, his treatment in this novel is nothing short of a disaster. To put it mildly, Vaelin in the first two novels was a man that you did not want to cross, he was arguably the best swordsman alive and his Blood Song gave him nigh omniscient. In Queen of Fire, that is pretty much all gone, as he has lost his blood song, which would not be so bad, however, he has lost a lot of his ability to fight. Even though he regains both his confidence and his skills early in the novel, in my opinion the damage had already been done to the character and for me personally he lost a lot of his appeal, as his confidence and sure nature as well as his martial ability was what made him appealing to me in the first place. Add to the fact that his POV chapters on the ice, were tedious to the extreme, incorporating a lot of walking, a lot of mysterious and foreboding innuendo all seemingly building up to a massive crescendo but in the end all being revealed in a gratuitous information dump. In retrospect, it was all a waste of time. However, the biggest sin of this trek was that while the rest of the United Realm was invading Volaria, ostensibly your main character is as far away as he can be from the action. At least in the Tower Lord, Vaelin, got a scene at the end where he was able to effectively break and end the siege of Alltor, but here he shows up at the end after all the fighting is said and done, he pulls another POV character aside, gives an info dump and then kills the main baddie in a totally pedestrian and utterly forgettable manner. It was extremely disappointing to say the least. That brings me to the two villains in this novel. To label them mustache twirling villains would be an insult to the mustache twirling villains association of America. There is absolutely no sophistication to the villains in this book and even when they commit heinous actions it doesn't come across as evil but as crazy or just simply incompetent. The Volarians are just evil with no redeeming qualities, and the two main baddies offer no sense of menace throughout the entire novel. Eleverah was interesting in the Tower Lord, and the Ally was that all powerful force behind the throne of the most powerful nation on the planet, however circling back to the lack of characterization argument, both of these characters are relegated to cartoon villainy in this novel. Eleverah was showing signs of growth in the last book, but all that is thrown away here, as she is just sadistic, cruel, petty and in the most damning quality for a villain proved, she proved to be utterly incompetent. One could argue and the author does imply that she is patently insane, but still insane villains can often be unconventional, unpredictable and dangerous, of which Eleverah was none. It was so bad, that at the end, I found myself wondering, ok, maybe she is crazy like a fox and there is some great stratagem that she has cooked up that will make this final showdown great at the end. Nope, sorry, didn't happen. Also the Ally, while his origins were cool, his motives were weak, and a lot of time was spent building up him as this great tool of death and destruction and then when you find

out why he is so evil, you are like, really? That's it? That's all you got? *Sigh. Also, to be the big baddie in the series, he went out in the worst manner you can take out the main evil guy, it was fairly bad. Ahh, Volaria. Paper tigers of the world should stand up and take note, as this is how you create a paper tiger. The empire of Alpira, the nation invaded by our heroes in the first novel has been fighting Volaria for centuries, and Alpira wiped the floor with our heroes in the first novel. However, in this book, Volaria went down like a good old fashioned house of cards. The Empress Eleverah, pulled a trick here or there, but it never felt like the Realm was ever in any serious danger of losing even without the great Vaelin Al Sorna in the forefront. There was some talk with Frentis's POV that, yeah invading these guys may not be a good idea, we will probably all die, but the Volarians never mounted a serious defense. The explanation given in the novel was that they essentially used up all of their best troops trying to invade the United Realm, and slave revolts were stripping their ability to field a decent army but this really was an anti-climactic way to set up a final war. This was utterly disappointing and robbed the novel of any tension or sense of danger in the novel. I never thought one of our heroes would die, even given the dire circumstances they were in, because the Volarians proved utterly incompetent to stop them. The list of disappointments could go on and on, Brother Caenis once again gets short treatment, although his character does get an interesting turn. Sherin does not show up yet again, which I found puzzling. There is some good in the novel however. Blood Song, and ostensibly the entire series could be a referendum on war and what it does to the powerless and those who fight it. That theme is carried on here throughout the novel as Ryan does a great job showing the visceral effects of the Volarian invasion on the United Realm while also showing the cost that liberation from said Volarians has on the Vox Populli, as well as the liberators. The book also raises the question of when in the process of revenge do you become as bad as the people you are reaping your vengeance upon? Does your cause remain righteous even when it causes you to do unrighteous things? The book also shows how the strong the idea of vengeance and even religious fervor can be whipped up by leaders to get a reluctant populace to stand up and fight a war even when their children may starve throughout the winter given the devastation of their homes. The psychological effect of killing is also shown rather well in the novel which was a nice touch. The battles of the novel are also extremely well written, as Ryan has a great idea how to write epic battle scenes whether they be on land or on sea. It also floats some interesting ideas about the origin of the religions throughout the nations in the novel but none of these ideas are really expounded upon. The novel does answer all the lingering questions in the series, but as I outlined above not everything is answered satisfactorily. The novel also does leave open the possibility of more stories

to be shared in this world, which I also found intriguing. Overall though, this book was a supreme disappointment. Though extremely well written, I found parts of it tedious to read through, the characterization was rather poor and the villains were laughable with their worse crime being that they proved to be nonthreatening. I loved Blood Song, and in fact consider that novel one of my favorite books of all time, but Queen of Fire book broke my heart in the worst possible manner, in the end betraying all that I found dear about Blood Song. Excuse me while I go somewhere and cry some more.

It's kind of sad actually. Book 1 in the series was brilliant. I was so excited for the remaining two after I read it. Sadly the last two books, especially this one are absolutely nothing like book one. It pains me to say it, but I found myself terribly bored and frustrated with this book to the point I wish I would have never wasted my time reading it. I am not sure why the author switched up his formula after book one but it did not work. This just feels extremely rushed and incomplete. So many loose ends were not tied up. The resolutions that we do get almost feel cheap. This was not even close to something I would call a fitting conclusion to a trilogy. As crazy as it sounds, I wish that I would have never read books 2 and 3 of this trilogy. The last two are so badly done that all they did was taint the fantastic first book.

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