



# The Two of Swords, Volume One

*K.J. Parker*

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## **The Two of Swords, Volume One** K.J. Parker

The epic opening volume in *The Two of Swords* trilogy by World Fantasy Award-winning author K. J. Parker.

*"Why are we fighting this war? Because evil must be resisted, and sooner or later there comes a time when men of principle have to make a stand. Because war is good for business and it's better to die on our feet than live on our knees. Because they started it. But at this stage in the proceedings," he added, with a slightly lop-sided grin, "mostly from force of habit."*

A soldier with a gift for archery. A woman who kills without care. Two brothers, both unbeatable generals, now fighting for opposing armies. No-one in the vast and once glorious United Empire remains untouched by the rift between East and West, and the war has been fought for as long as anyone can remember. Some still survive who know how it was started, but no-one knows how it will end.

*The Two of Swords* is the story of a war on a grand scale, told through the eyes of its soldiers, politicians, victims and heroes.

## **The Two of Swords, Volume One Details**

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Author : K.J. Parker

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# From Reader Review The Two of Swords, Volume One for online ebook

## Reggie Kray says

4.5\*. You know those books you really don't expect much from? And then....bang! One hell of a ride!

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## Dee says

This is *very* Parker. Quite rambly. (Or are those odd little details of the meadery path actually all not just relevant but important?) Rife with coincidence, usual blackly funny. (Or is there a Sinister Hand behind it all?) Featuring a pair of it's-complicated-but-murderous brothers.

Originally delivered as serial fiction, the story is told in relay, the main character of one chunk passing the narrative baton to the next. Each section also peels back another layer of wrapping around what's *really* going on... or perhaps each section gives the puzzle-cube a turn so we're looking at a new face. Things Are Afoot. All the characters are fascinating and faceted and--of course, for Parker--highly capable.

I feel like I still have no idea what's really going on, but it was great fun to read, and I'm looking forward to more from the second and third volumes.

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## Roy says

Solid fantasy with well plotted story arc. Each chapter is a different character. Might have worked better in the monthly novella release that it originally was. Will read book 2.

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## 15BushellC says

I disliked this book as I found that, because it was so boring, it was hard to read. There was nothing that made me want to read on, the characters were unclear and the plot was all over the place.

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## Neil McGarry says

Although I went into *The Two of Swords* with the highest of hopes, I am finally surrendering to the fact that I am just not that into it.

There are several problems here that dissuaded me from finishing this:

1) I was 40% of the way into the novel and still didn't know the central conflict of the story, and that is *way* too long. I enjoy a slow burn, but, come now. If Tolkien had held back the news about Sauron and the Ring



until Frodo was actually joining the Fellowship, nobody'd still be reading. I get that Parker wants to tell An Epic Tale, and I don't expect a dissertation in Chapter Two, but in the first tenth of the novel I'd like to have an idea of the stakes.

2) Parker isn't a bad writer, but he's not a great one, either. His prose can be so clipped as to be confusing, and I sometimes found myself reading sentences twice before I understood them. He also has this weird thing about rarely using character's names, which is a problem when the reader is trying to learn strange fantasy appellations. It's like he bought stock in pronouns, or something.

Also, his characters almost uniformly talk in a flippant, off-hand style, and it became hard to distinguish between them. If the author has done his job, the reader should be able to tell who's talking without having to be told. Not the case here.

3) As a fan of the sand-beneath-your-feet writing philosophy, I am OK with authors revealing information on a need-to-know basis. The problem with *Swords* is that, evidently, Parker does not feel the reader needs to know--anything. There's a lot going on here, and the reader is expected to sort it out without much assistance from him. I felt I wanted to keep a notebook, and that is too much commitment for a fantasy novel.

Since I didn't even finish *The Two of Swords*, I give it one star. Maybe other, more hardy, readers will have more regard, but I have better things to do with my time.

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## DJ says

**4/5 Rating** Review first posted at MyLifeMyBooksMyEscape

### The amount of planning that went in to telling this story...

\*Disclaimer: I received an review copy of this book from the publisher, in exchange for nothing... yeah, told me I didn't have to read, review, or even make a post I got it!

\*\**The Two of Sword series* was originally a serial novella series from 2015 through the end 2017, with a single novella coming out each month. There were 19 parts in total, and upon collection, they were broken up into a 3 volume set. *The Two of Swords, Volume 1* contain the first 8 novellas.

You ever read one of those books, where when you finish it - or are maybe still reading - you have to take a second and appreciate in awe the amount of time and planning that the author must have put in? That was the exact type of reaction I had after the 6th novella.

There is a war that has been going for longer than anyone can remember, for reasons that nobody seems to know; all that is known that war between the East and West Empires, is fought between two of the greatest militantly minds that have ever lived - and who also happen to be brothers.

Normally, I'd go quite a bit more into the set up of the plot with what characters are going to do this and that, but to be honestly... that is actually 100% the plot of volume 1.

The reason I can't go into it anymore than that is because of the way the story is told: rather than a certain number of select POV characters, instead, what Parker does is he chooses a different character for each



novella, and from their POV he tells how the war, the story, is progressing. Don't get confused. This is not, "Oh, DJ. I've read *tons* of novels where they change POV characters back and forth, going bouncing around the timeline." No, not that is NOT what I said. **Each POV character he only uses only *once*.**

How the story goes is we start off with Tuecer, a skilled archer. With him are a group of his friends, that included another man called Musen. The next POV is Mucen. In Mucen's POV we meet another character X, and after Mucen is done, we go with X. With X, we meet Y, and then the next novella is with Y. You see how it goes?

The craziest part about all this? **For each following novella, he always picks up the *second* after the previous POV ended. Not a moment is overlapped or skipped in the timeline between POVs, and it reads smoothers that you could possibly imagine.**

For me to tell you about what each character is like would be a spoil because some characters you meet first in another POV, but when you get their own POV you then learn who they really are. For me to even tell you what characters get a POV (outside of Tuecer and Mucen) would be a spoil, because then you will know which characters are still alive and in which direction the story may be going! Really, one of the only things I want to tell is that, to put it simply, **the main character of this story is the war itself** - for the Volume 1, at least.

The other thing I want to tell you about is the craftsman guild. Which is literally what sounds like. A guild for craftsman. This has a very small role at start, barely noticeable in first few novellas, but by the end, you begin see Parker has something up his sleeve. What the craftsman have, or know how to do, is read Tarot cards. (Wait. Don't go anywhere. Stay with me for a sec.)

I know nothing (shout out to my man up in the North) about Tarot cards, thus I have no idea if the cards he talks about and how to interpret them are the real thing or not. But these decks of cards, while they don't have a major role per say in the first volume, undoubtedly hold secrets, and I'm sure if you could decipher the clues Parker is laying down for the reader in the story, there would be quite a reward at the end. A matter a fact, each chapter titled is named after after one of the cards, and coincides with a specific character.

The biggest issue I had, and it was right about when I had the realization of what Parker was doing that I was able to accept this, is that he is using the characters to tell us about the war. I loved Tuecer. He is still my favorite. But we don't get anymore POVs outside of his first. For someone who is a character-reader first, this can be hard to swallow. When he wasn't back by novella 4, I scanned through the book and saw he was nowhere to be found... but that was also when I began to look to what exactly what Parker was trying to do... and then, after the 6th novella, it suddenly all clicked with me and here I am writing this glowing review for *The Two of Swords*.

One last thing, that I must mention, is the pacing: **this novel can be very slow at moments.** If you have read anything by Parker before, you know exactly what I am talking. I would not call it a slow burn, but its more like little extra facts and world building, that you don't necessarily need to know, but do help develop the world and story. I know some readers LOVE his prose and this aspect of his writing does not bother them. For me personally, it all depends on how caught I am in the story. If I'm glued to it, I read and love every second; if not, I have a tendency to skim over paragraphs.

This is essentially an alt-history story, so for those slow moments, I could see some readers saying it feels like they are reading a history book. Outside of the handful of slow moments, **I am highly doubtful that many readers could have anything bad to say about the plot.**



To tell this story how Parker is: passing it off from one character to the next, as they meet each other; having it so the story is always moving forward, never leaving any gaps out... **the amount of planning that must have gone in to that? I cannot even imagine.**

Breakdown of novellas:

Part One: 4/5

Part Two: 4/5

Part Three: 3.5/5

Part Four: 4/5

Part Five: 4/5

Part Six: 4/5

Part Seven: 4/5

Part Eight: 4/5

4/5 Rating

-DJ

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## **Vincent says**

Ok, but nothing happens.

If you haven't read anything by Parker before then don't start with this one!

This very much feels like a standard Parker novel but nothing happens.

The characters are likeable, if slim on personality, and there is the usual cynicism and occasional humour but the plot is grindingly slow.

So little happens in the book it doesn't even feel like it is building anything the way the first of a trilogy often does; instead it just feels pointless, like the first few chapters of a novel have been stretched beyond all sense.

Hopefully the rest of the series is much much better.

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## **Logan says**

I'll have to wait through the rest of the books to see if this will be a five-star, but it definitely has the potential to be.

I always forget how much I enjoy Parker's writing: crisp, witty, pessimism. And this book's method of setting in motion a vast machine of warfare and players through something of a relay-race handoff of character perspectives was really enjoyable. Empires are in motion. The players are in place, what is the game being played, what are the stakes, and what will be the outcome? Can't wait to find out!

Full disclosure: I did receive a complimentary copy of this from a publishing agent, with no strings attached.



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### **Thomas Stacey says**

3.5 stars. Some great dry humour in this one - I must have laughed out loud at least a dozen times. Also a bit of mystery, interested to see where this one goes.

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### **James says**

This book is made up of eight of the twenty-four serials that make up the series. Its serial origins are clear apparent in the various inconsistencies and overall poor pacing, they didn't fit together well. I was expecting more from an author I usually enjoy.

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### **Jeremy Jackson says**

4.5 stars. I absolutely love K.J. Parker, and the Two of Swords testifies to every reason why. The story sweeps across the havoc wreaked by two fractured monarchies of a once-united Empire, waging a bloody and lifetime-long war with each other for reasons no one remembers. POV shifts every few chapters, and is never repeated: the plot is carried along like a parcel, character X passing it off to character Y, who transports it for 75 pages or so until handing it to Z, etc. and so we see the war and its effects from every perspective across three kingdoms, gathering snippets of intelligence along the way. Parker's style is exemplified here; one of his greatest strengths is often also the most common criticism leveled against him. Swaths of passages are devoted to detailing the intricacies of various subjects (the making of paper and ink from scratch, musical theory, etc.) Depending on taste, this can result in boredom or fascination. The way he does it leaves me riveted (edge-of-your-seat tarot card painting? That takes writing skill). There were about ten pages mid-way through that began to grow tedious; fortunately I was saved by a timely bloodletting. Aside from that trifle, I was riveted. Highly recommended! Buying volume two today.

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### **Manuel Antão says**

If you're into stuff like this, you can read the full review.

This book in particular, and K. J. Parker's SF in general, reminds me of a quote by Yevgeny Zamyatin:

"It is an error to divide people into the living and the dead: there are people who are dead-alive, and people who are alive-alive. The dead-alive also write, walk, speak, act. But they make no mistakes; only machines make no mistakes, and they produce only dead things. The alive-alive are constantly in error, in search, in questions, in torment."

Zamyatin was referring to the deadening effects of Stalinist oppression on the arts but I think his quote can apply to bureaucratic and warring societies like ours as well. Go and apply for a bank loan or talk to a lawyer



about an insurance claim and experience some treasured moments with the dead-alive.

Despite being fortunate enough to be married with kids and have enough close friends in my life, I like solitude. I've always identified with Graham Greene's protagonists, as well as those appearing in many of Haruki Murakami's stories. Maybe that's why I'll probably never outgrow the teenage thing (SF, AOR music, dabbling in programming, rugby, etc.).

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## **The Idle Woman says**

4.5 stars.

My next step with K.J. Parker should have been to continue the Engineer Trilogy, but it just so happened that I had time to kill on the evening I bought this book, and couldn't resist starting it. In fact, Parker's novels all seem to take place in the same world, so it didn't even feel like straying. The Two of Swords has only confirmed my admiration for him as a writer. I'd go so far as to say I love his books. They're knotty, cynical, pragmatic fantasy without a hint of magic, and the general flavour is what you might get if Machiavelli settled down to write an alternate-universe version of the Byzantine Empire. Stuffed full of double-bluffs and double-agents, this series takes us into the heart of a long-lasting war, spurred on by the personal enmity between the opposing generals – who also happen to be brothers. Two brothers; two armies; two empires; and one secret international fraternity, who may not be as neutral as they've always claimed to be...

For the full review, please see my blog:

<https://theidlewoman.net/2018/04/24/t...>

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## **Mark Redman says**

K.J.Parker originally released the Two of Swords in 19 e-novellas over the course of 18 months starting in 2016. This book brings volumes 1-8 together for the first time. Subsequent volumes will be released in November and December this year.

Two of Swords is about war. The first point to say is there are plenty of characters to get to grips with. In the first third of book we get Teucer and Musen who are conscripted into the army, so we see war from their point of view.

In the second third the focus shifts to Oida and Telamon who are diplomatic spies. In this section we see all the machinations that go into spying.

In the final third we get the two Belot brothers, both unbeatable generals but for opposing armies, by the way they absolutely hate each other.

No one remains untouched by war, this book explores the many issues from these characters perspectives.

As ever Parker deftly weaves an intricate story with skill. The writing can at times be mesmerising. There is also a level of depth to the characters that we've come to expect from Parker. On the whole a brilliantly conceived story. I'm more than sure that Parker will pull one or two plot twists along the way.



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**Jose Torres says**

Amazing wasn't able to set this down. I'm ashamed I don't have volume 2 on it's way to me or on my book shelf. It's a fantasy story which shows the point of view of major and minor characters in a war, so you'll have perspective of things from multiple sides. Very intriguing and semi-complex the twists were well done and this book suprised me multiple times, this arthur seems to have an unique style of writing in my small reading tenure of fantasy books I have not encountered before. Totally refreshing and a definte reccomend.

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