



A Dance of Blades

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“Veldaren aches for a purge, and I will be the one to deliver it. Cry out at me if you wish, but it will change nothing. The gold is spent, the orders are given. Let the blood flow.”

It's been five years since Haern faked his death to escape the tyranny of his father. He has become the Watcher, a vicious killer who knows no limits, and whose hatred of the thief guilds is unrivaled. But when the son of Alyssa Gemcroft, one of the three leaders of the powerful Trifect, is believed murdered, the slaughter begins anew. Mercenaries flood the streets, with one goal in mind: find and kill the Watcher.

Peace or destruction; every war must have its end.

A Dance of Blades Details

Date : Published April 11th 2011 by Amazon Digital Services, Inc.

ISBN :

Author : David Dalglish

Format : Kindle Edition 350 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Epic Fantasy

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From Reader Review A Dance of Blades for online ebook

Jason says

4.5 Stars

A Dance of Blades is the rare middle book in a trilogy in that it was better than the first. This book is better for the writing, the maturing characters, the plot line, the action, and the outcome. I loved this book and this series. Dalglish has done an amazing job at creating a fantasy world that centers on assassins. There is dark magic that is done subtly. There is tons of swordplay. The story hinges on politics and it is done in a manner that is easy to follow. Even though there are many characters and points of view, the reader is never left feeling lost.

I loved the maturity of this book. The Watcher is simply awesome. Deathmask and Ghost are fantastic additions to the story. I wish that Dalglish would have given us more “Dances” as the action was fun and exciting.

A Dance of Blades has a clear plot line that is resolved beautifully and sets up the final book of the series...

A snippet that shows off the writing as well as the Watcher!!!

“Haern went left, Zusa right. He felt every nerve in his body firing, and he gave in to his instincts completely. This was the beast Thren had created over the years, day in and day out with training, practice, lectures, and tutors. This was the monster whose teeth had been sharpened by half a decade skulking in the shadows slaughtering the thieves of the night. His sabers were a blur as he cut down the first, the mercenary’s axe too slow to block. The two closest rushed in, wielding longswords. He parried their thrusts, which felt slow, as if his opponents fought in molasses. Blood soaked his sabers as the rest came rushing in, swinging with their clubs, maces, and swords.”

I loved it!

Tosh says

2.5 stars

This was an improvement from the previous book, but I can't see myself spending money on the series (and apparently neither could my library) so unfortunately this will be as far as I read. I do have to say though, for a series that got its start through self publishing it's not too bad. Could use some plot and character tweaking,

but overall I kind of liked it.

John McDermott says

3.5 stars

Leo (Rahien Sorei) says

Oh, boy! I do love it when I'm right! I finished Dalglish's first book filled with skepticism and my usual persnicketyness when confronted with a book I thought was good, but could have been better. Well, folks, I will gladly eat the words that doubted David's story. The second book reveals all!

Dance of Blades starts off with a bang and a knife to the gut - literally. Action packed and rife with the kind of murderous intrigue Dalglish had mentioned in his first Author's Note, Blades delivers where Cloaks left you hanging. Haern is a fully developed character now, and you can really see the struggle he goes through in growing up. I love nothing like a good Bildungsroman!

Plus, my earlier scruple with Haern's skill is nonexistent here - five years of hard life and killing will make a fighter out of anyone, and in Haern's case it acts as the refining process for his cloakdance. I won't lie, the action and thrill behind the hunt for the Watcher often kept me up late reading!

All in all, I really liked this and I'm supremely excited for what could come next!

Read it, you won't regret it.

Joy says

Having read the original self published story I have to say...the professional editors have taken out all the appeal for me. I'm having a lot of trouble finishing this second book and probably won't continue the series. SAGA PUDDING! Have the book publishers followed the music industry? Cranking out what THEY think a good fantasy should be while disregarding innovation?

I originally liked the story specifically for the character of The Watcher. He was a Batman like character with mad skills in stealth and swords. The mystery of his background was a plus. NOW the books are designed to fit into the bloody religious war present in the other author's series (which were forgettable.) THE WATCHER has become a Peter Parker. Great when doing superhero stuff but a completely unappealing WIMP when his personal life is described ad nauseam. The Mysterious Cloak Dance fighting (as the title of the first books implied and which made him cool) is hardly used.

Ashley Daviau says

I was really hoping that this book would make me fall in love with this series. Sadly it ended up doing the opposite. I totally lost interest about halfway through this book. It was just long and drawn out and I just couldn't get into it. I didn't connect with any of the characters and couldn't bring myself to care about what happened to any of them. It was a struggle to make it to the end but miraculously I did. I kept hoping it would take a turn for the better and was left sorely disappointed. I will most definitely not be continuing with

this series!

Ryan Mueller says

Once again, Dalglash wrote a book that is good but not great. I enjoy his books for the quick pacing and good action scenes, but I always feel like there's something missing that doesn't put him in the same category as authors like Brent Weeks. An enjoyable read, though.

Rating: 7/10

Paul Nelson says

Another excellent novel, not quite as good as the first novel. The watcher is a really good character and there are also some good additions such as deathmask, ghost and the mage mercenary. Again the action sequences are good and the plot also, I think everyone would agree the story needed more of the watcher and his father thren's relationship. Thren only comes into it in the last couple of chapters and I guess he cannot die due to his story in the half orc series which I really would like to read - the only way to do this is to get a kindle as the books don't seem to be available.

Simon says

A Dance of Blades by David Dalglash is the second book of the Shadowdance Trilogy. After completing A Dance of Cloak, I debated whether to continue with the second book in the series or start the Half-Orc series, which is also written by the same author. I then learned that the Half-Orc series takes place after the events of the Shadowdance Trilogy and so I thought it best to finish the latter first. A Dance of Blades is definitely a worthy sequel to the first and with only one more book to go, I can't wait to read the conclusion.

With A Dance of Blades, the book focuses more on Haern, son of Thren Felhorn. He is a grown man now that practically five years have past since the bloody Kensgold. Although Haern chooses to lead a different life than what his father wanted him to lead, he nonetheless is still out and about in the night killing off thieves in hopes to bring down the guilds. He has experienced a lot during those five years but things are about to get a whole lot more hectic for him. The other main characters the book focuses on is Veliana and Alyssa. I thought the author could have made the former a lot more interesting than what she is. With Alyssa, she's young, rich and a leader of a Trifect family. She plays the typical character I come to expect after having read so many fantasy books. Not a bad thing really but she's definitely not someone I'll remember after reading the book. I expect some readers will be furious to learn that Thren Felhorn takes a complete back seat here in the sequel after having been the focal point of the first. In fact, the author actually gives a brief explanation of why at the end of the book.

By now, I can say that I really like the author's writing style. Fight scenes are done very well and more importantly, he keeps the pace well balanced. Trust me, I have read many a books that promises the allure of assassins and thieves and "non-stop action" but am only left disappointed in the end because the author focuses too much on character development or worst, spend entire chapters detailing what the characters did while traveling from one place to the next. Not that character development isn't needed or wanted but there

has to be a balance between that and action. The author here does a fairly good job. Also, the inclusion of new characters into the story is always a welcome. It seems that the author likes to introduce at least one crazed and fanatic character in at least one of his books. In the first we had Ethric, the devoted paladin. I was actually quite mad that he died rather easily and without much details. Here we have a similar character that goes out of his way to complete his mission at whatever the cost. Luckily, the author didn't repeat the same mistake with him this time around.

A Dance of Blades is definitely a lot more action oriented than the first. Although that's not saying much being that the first was so action packed as well. I guess a more better definition is that this book focuses a little bit more on magic use. In the first, we get a hint of magic but its actual use in battle scenes were almost non-existent. I'm glad to see the author used it here to make some fight scenes toward the end a bit more interesting. In fact, I have to admit that after having read so many fight scenes in the first book and this one that includes either a shortsword or dagger, I grew pretty bored of it. I'm hoping magic will have a bigger role in the last book just to spice things up a bit.

With how things ended here, I'm having a tough time guessing what could be in store for us in A Dance of Death which is the last book in the series. A Dance of Blades had a pretty satisfying conclusion and it seemed that the "bigger" issue was fairly solved. What could be left for the third book that would make an epic finish? Are we going to actually witness a clash between Haern and Thren?

Mihir says

Full review over at Fantasy Book Critic

ANALYSIS: As with my re-review of A Dance Of Cloaks, I'm attempting to do a similar thing with this one as this book has changed the least with only some minor text changes. I read this book more than two years ago and since then have absolutely loved this series. The story begins nearly five years since the events shown in "A Dance of Cloaks". The city of Veldaren is slowly recovering from the catastrophic night in which the Guilds decided to remove the Trifect from the political equation. Unfortunately, things did not go as planned for Thren Felhorn because of the valor and dedication of a select few. Since then, the Guilds have fractured even further and now fight amongst themselves in an attempt to regain their earlier powers. The Trifect also suffers, but fares slightly better than their rivals. Complicating matters is a new addition to the city: the Watcher.

The Watcher calls himself Haern, and is the son of the most famous and devious guildlord (a secret known to no one). Using his former training, Haern's goal is to sow dissent among the Guilds. Meanwhile, Alyssa Gemcroft, one of the leaders of the Trifect, has successfully taken over the Gemcroft estate and now has a son, Nathaniel, from her dalliance in the previous book. Serving Alyssa as her protector is Zusa, the ex-forsaken of Karak and also a confidante to Veliana. Veliana's mission to save the Ash guild was successful, but she is now subservient to the new Guild master. Readers are also introduced to Deathmask, a character from The Half Orcs series, while Lord Arthur Hadfield and Mark Tullen try to obtain Alyssa Gemcroft's hand in marriage.

The heart of the story unfolds when Haern comes across a devious plot to kill the child Nathaniel. Haern intervenes, but with chaotic results. Word soon spreads that the child is missing, presumably dead, so Alyssa in her grief decides to finish off the Guilds and kill the Watcher, who she believes are the guilty parties

behind her son's death. From here, A Dance of Blades follows Haern as he battles the Guilds, the Trifect, and perhaps his greatest enemy, an odd giant of a man who goes by the title of Ghost...

Compared to A Dance of Cloaks, the prose in A Dance of Blades is remarkably more polished and a major highlight of the book. Pacing is similar to the first novel, meaning thrilling action sequences mingled with intriguing characters that reminded me of Paul S. Kemp and David Gemmell, but Dalglish has definitely turned up the excitement level. The story is more linear and streamlined than its predecessor, but there are still lots of machinations and subplots going on, while a deeper exploration of the world of Dezrel is provided. The grimness, which was so prevalent in the first book, has been toned down a bit, although plenty of killing can still be found in A Dance of Blades. Personally, I was glad for this as the author managed to surprise me a couple of times by killing off a certain character, while saving another. Thematically, salvation is a major theme, with many of the book's characters seeking redemption, with both successful & unsuccessful results.

Characterization remains top-notch giving readers a wide variety of characters to follow, including Haern with his psychological scars, Veliana with her toughness and never-say-die attitude, and Alyssa who now understands her father better than ever. What I love most about the characters is how they are all so unique and interesting, which is important in a book that features so many different POVs. Meanwhile, quite a few characters from The Half-Orcs series make an appearance in A Dance of Blades. With this book, there's a slight increase in the magic or paranormal nature of the world, of course in the previous book there were events and things happening that clarified that magic was present but with this volume, the author starts building it up even more starkly with the presence of Deathmask and his antics.

Negatively, Haern's abilities and vigilante actions reminded me of Batman, which made some things in the book easy to predict. Also, because the Shadowdance series is a prequel to The Half-Orcs series, and features many of the same characters, those who have already finished the Half Orc books know who will survive and who won't. For me, this is the single biggest flaw in reading any prequel series, which is why I have purposefully held off from reading The Half-Orcs novels.

CONCLUSION: Overall, A Dance of Blades is an excellent sequel, further establishing Haern's story, while showcasing David Dalglish's impressive growth as a writer. So now, after having fully enjoyed the first two books in the Shadowdance series, I can't wait to read what happens next in Haern's saga in the third book, A Dance of mirrors...

Nayan Patel says

This was another good book in this series.

This book is set 5 years after the setting of the first book (Dance of cloaks).

What I liked was the world setting and the action sequences. The story is also rightly paced - its not as slow as say Robert Jordan's writing and neither does it suffer from the "lack of depth" when authors try to write a fast paced book.

Would have liked to know more about the "magick" system though. But considering that I am yet to read the next installment in this series, I am prepared to be pleasantly surprised.

Desiree says

This was far better than the first one, although that isn't terribly high praise. It did keep me interested the entire way through. I still can't help comparing it to the Night Angel trilogy because they both have the well developed underworld and thieves guilds, which is maybe why it falls a little short for me. The Night Angel trilogy was so amazing that it would be difficult for anything else to hold up to the comparison.

Robert Duperre says

Rating: 5 out of 5

Sequels are tough business, especially when the first book of a series is extremely well written. There's a ton of pressure to put out something equally as good, and there's a good chance readers could walk away disappointed because the author wasn't up to the challenge.

After reading *A Dance of Blades* by David Dalglish, the sequel to last year's *A Dance of Cloaks*, I can tell you with all certainty that this particular writer accomplished just what he set out to do.

Blades starts out five years after the end of *Cloaks*. Early on we find Aaron Felhorn, the son of Spider Guild leader Thren who now calls himself only Haern, living on the streets and waging his own personal war of attrition against the thief guilds of Velderan. Gone is that sliver of innocence that Haern tried so hard to hold onto in the first book, replaced by an undying need for vengeance against the man who sullied his life. And when I say need, what I really mean is obsession, because that's truly what it is. Haern hates his father and all those like him so much that he cannot help but paint every thief he runs across with the same blood-drenched brush.

As for those thief guilds and their never-ending battle with the Trifect, the powers-that-be in the land, all is not going so well. It seemed the aftereffects of the Bloody Kensgold, where Thren tried to wrest power away from the businessmen, has left all parties worse for wear. The guilds are in shambles, shamelessly murdering and stealing from any they wish, while the Trifect, themselves, are struggling. Alyssa Gemcroft, now the leader of the Gemcroft estate after the assassination of her father, is particularly stressed. She's sent her son Nathaniel to the north for protection while she constantly wards herself from poisoned food and the fortune her family has lost to the thieves that surround them at all times.

The thing she most needs, at least according to her advisors, is a husband. She eventually acquiesces after Nathaniel is killed, apparently by the Watcher (Haern), which introduces us to the main villain of the piece, Arthur Hadfield.

Hadfield is a very strange baddie, at least when it comes to Dalglish's work. He's in no way supernatural, he has no otherworldly power or strength, and isn't the face of some great and secret organization. All he is, is an opportunistic scoundrel who wants nothing but more power. That might make him the weakest of Dalglish's villains to some, but to me, he's the best because he's so real. Arthur's like a crooked politician with no moral compass, and he attracts like-minded men to his side, such as his right-hand-man Oric. Let's just say I hated both these characters with a passion, their deeds and thoughts (or lack thereof), and that made

me love them...if that makes any sense.

As for Alyssa, she's come a long way from where we saw her in the first book. She's a strong woman now, leading her people and doing just what leaders are supposed to do – making the tough decisions, even if they turn out to be wrong. After she discovers her son has been killed, she takes it upon herself to personally dispatch every criminal in the entire city, and hires countless mercenaries to carry out her request. What follows are a series of hellish nights as the streets of Velderan are filled with blood.

Let me say this right now – Alyssa Gemcroft very well may be the most brilliant character Dalglish has ever created...and I don't say that lightly. She bucks trends and stereotypes and displays power and weakness in equal measure. Throughout the entire book, there is never once a mention of her beauty – it's simply assumed that she is. As a character she is so well conceived that she almost overshadows the other particulars in this tale of deceit, violence, and woe.

Almost, but not quite.

There are characters aplenty to care about in this novel, just as in the first. We get to see the coming to power of Deathmask (who appeared in the last couple Half-Orc books), and he gobbles up every scene he appears in. We are also reacquainted with Veliana, the lady-behind-the-curtain of the Ash Guild, and Zusa, the mysterious, cloth-wrapped woman who assists both Alyssa and Vel from her place in the shadows (yet two more imminently strong female characters...I have a feeling Dalglish is trying to get to something about women banding together being more powerful than any force in the universe). Also, as readers we get to meet the Eschaton once more, Tarlak and Delysia and Brug, along with Senke, Haern's former mentor. For those who've followed this author's work, it's a wonderful homecoming of sorts; to those who haven't they are introduced to some pretty entertaining personalities that have been sorely missed.

But of course, with all this being said, A Dance of Blades is Haern's show, and he doesn't disappoint. We get to see him evolve as a person throughout the length of the novel, from angry outcast to bitter vigilante to, finally, an accepting adult who comes to understand his role in the world. I think, during parts of the book, I forgot a very important part of Haern's makeup – he's still a child. He's at most eighteen years old, and as a father of a son near that age, I can honestly say that none of them have anything figured out. Life is a big, confusing, sometimes hellacious ball of experience, and it takes time to come to grips with that...especially without an elder guide, which is why I found Haern's progress as an individual to be so profound. Though he does develop friendships by the end, most every decision he makes, he makes on his own, with very little input from others. This shows the strength of character we see when he appears in Dalglish's earlier novels, and also demonstrates just how capable of righteousness in the face of cruelty he can be.

As the second book in a series, A Dance of Blades loses some of the innocence from the first installment, as I mentioned earlier. However, it more than makes up for that with the amount of brutality and self-sacrifice that is demonstrated within. The three-night battle between the mercenaries and thief guilds is atrocious, and there is very little care for who's guilty or innocent. There is also one particular scene that turned my stomach, as a kind family is cruelly assaulted by Oric and some more of Arthur Hadfield's men. Though Dalglish handles the visuals and presentation respectfully, we still get to witness the horror of these actions, and imagine the repercussions for the victims. So when you add all this in together with Haern's mad fixation on killing every thief he can get his hands on, I guess you can say that this is a book about the loss of innocence...or a fall from grace, if you will.

Which is important in any work of fiction, because of course you have to fall before you can get back up.

In all, *A Dance of Blades* is a more than worthy compliment to its predecessor. In most ways it even surpasses the first book, which I didn't think possible. It's a novel full of treachery, disturbing images, underhanded dealings, war, and desperation, but it also shows the reader how, even in these trying times, there is still a capacity for love and friendship in the world. It says we don't have to be alone, even if we've become monsters to ourselves, because no one worth a salt is ever beyond redemption.

With that, I can honestly say that this is the second-best book Dalglish has ever written, just a fraction of a percentage point behind *A Sliver of Redemption*. Who knows, perhaps when the final book of the Shadowdance trilogy comes out next winter, he might outshine himself again.

Knowing this author's work the way I do, I wouldn't put it past him in the slightest.

Plot - 10

Characters - 10

Voice - 10

Execution - 10

Personal Enjoyment – 10

Overall – 50/50 (5.0/5)

Avery (ThePagemaster) says

I cannot say much about this book, because it is a sequel, but all I can say is that this takes place five years after the events of the first book, *A Dance of Cloaks*. Alyssa Gemfort's son, Nathaniel, is kidnapped and, despite that being the main plot, Haren is still trying to fight off his demons--or demon that is being the son of the most famous and ruthless assassin in the land.

Overall, this was a strong sequel and did not fall flat, or act as a filler for the upcoming finale, like some sequels do. I could not help but feel this Batman-like complex that Haren has, where he wants to do good, but is actually doing more damage. Until he meets Nathaniel. The action sequences, as well as David Dalglish's writing remained strong, as well as fast-paced; the sub-plot are just as interesting, if not more, through certain parts of the book. The introduction of the character Deathmask added some spice and interest to the story.

There is a scene near the end where feels were felt.

Mike (the Paladin) says

This is the second in a series...however since the library didn't have the first and I'm too cheap to buy the book this is the first I've read.

It took me a while to get involved on the story (I don't know if that was due to an expectation that readers would already know the characters or not). I laid the book aside and had a little trouble finding the interest to pick it back up. I did however finally pick the nook back up and found that after the first quarter or so I was

thoroughly interested.

The story here is following several antiheroes along a sort of double story-line that pulls together in the end. Git that? Clear as mud? Well if you're not going to get spoilers I have to be a bit oblique (wow I spelled that without having to use Spell Check).

"Any-who" the story uses a tried and true plot device which is (without a spoiler) a misunderstanding leading to disastrous situation...and of course the action that makes up our story. The characters here are pretty well drawn, not the most knowable I've read but still not simply cutouts. If you're like me you'll find you enjoy one story-line more than the others. That seems to be a recurring thing in "multi-viewpoint" plots.

I've read some people's reviews who "felt" that a certain character was a bit of a "Gary-Stu" but I don't think so. I'm dancing around giving too much detail as to not be "spoilery". That said however the character is what he's designed and described to be. Also if he's a Gary-Stu it's a problem as there is a female counterpart to said character. They are both described to be what they are portrayed to be. So...not a problem so far as I can see.

I considered 3 stars for the rating here...it's close as I did have a little trouble getting into the book and staying with it but in the end I go with what I'd call a "low 4". So, try it for yourself, not a bad read.
