



The Unholy Consult

R. Scott Bakker

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A score of years after he first walked into the histories of men, Anasûrimbor Kellhus rules all the three seas, the first true Aspect-Emperor in a thousand years.

The *Unholy Consult* is the hugely anticipated final novel in R. Scott Bakker's acclaimed Aspect-Emperor series, set in a vivid world of myth, war and sorcery. It is a series that stands alongside the finest in the genre, for its grand scope, rich detail and thrilling story.

The Unholy Consult Details

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From Reader Review The Unholy Consult for online ebook

Patrick St-Denis says

As I mentioned in my review of *The Great Ordeal*, it's been a long time coming. Honestly, it's been a very long time coming. More than six long years, to be exact. Like many fans, I wasn't happy to learn that the book which was meant to become *The Unholy Consult* would have to be split into two installments. My biggest fear was that *The Great Ordeal* would simply be part 1 of 2, and not a work of fiction that would stand well on its own. It's no secret that recent examples of fantasy novels split up unnecessarily (Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson's *The Gathering Storm*, *Towers of Midnight*, and *A Memory of Light*, and Robin Hobb's *City of Dragons* and *Blood of Dragons* come to mind) ended up being disappointments. My main concern was that turning what was originally meant to be one novel into two separate books would hurt them both in the long run.

Ultimately, *The Great Ordeal* was indeed just part 1 of 2. Considering how long Bakker fans had to wait to finally get their hands on that novel, it was a bit disappointing. *The Great Ordeal* definitely set up what would be an unforgettable finale in *The Unholy Consult*. But as part 1 of 2, it did not stand that well on its own. In my humble opinion, had it been released as planned, *The Unholy Consult* would have been to Bakker what *A Storm of Swords* was to George R. R. Martin. It would have been the author's crowning achievement, his best work to date.

Which brings us here. *The Unholy Consult*, the grand culmination of the *Prince of Nothing* and *The Aspect-Emperor* series, will be released in a few short weeks. In many ways, it's everything fans have always wanted. It answers lots of questions that have been plaguing us for years. Some dating all the way back to *The Darkness That Comes Before*. It is also an end, but not the end. Indeed, it brings the *Great Ordeal* story arc to a close. Trouble is, *The Unholy Consult* ends with the mother of all cliffhangers and it leaves a panoply of things up in the air. As such, this final volume doesn't offer as much resolution as people expected, which some fans will find off-putting.

Although the author and the publishers never had problems with my reviews in the past, some Bakker fans were irked by what they considered to be spoilers, minor though they were. So if you are one of those people, please refrain from reading on. For everybody else, here are my thoughts on *The Unholy Consult*.

Here's the blurb:

In this shattering conclusion to *The Aspect-Emperor* books, praised for their “sweeping epic scale and detailed historical world building” (*Grimdark Magazine*), R. Scott Bakker delivers the series’ feverishly harrowing and long-awaited finish.

The Men of the *Great Ordeal* have been abandoned by Aspect-Emperor Anasurimbor Kellhus, and the formerly epic crusade has devolved into cannibalism and chaos. When Exalt-General Proyas, with the Imperial-Prince Kayutas at his side, attempts to control the lost Men and continue their march to *Golgotterath*, it rapidly becomes clear that the lost Lord-and-Profit is not so easily shaken from the mission.

When Sorweel, Believer-King of Sakarpus, and Serwa, daughter of the Aspect-Emperor, join the *Great Ordeal* they discover that the Shortest Path is not always the most obvious, or the safest. Souls, morals, and relationships are called into question when no one can be trusted, and the price for their sins is greater than they imagined.

As I said before, when it originally came out, *The Judging Eye* had all the hallmarks which made the first trilogy such a great reading experience, minus what many considered its shortcomings. Personally, I felt that it featured R. Scott Bakker writing at the top of his game. On the other hand, a lot of fans believed that the philosophical aspects and the inner musings were what essentially made the Prince of Nothing stand out from the rest of the speculative fiction pack, and were thus somewhat disappointed by the first volume in *The Aspect-Emperor* series. In terms of style and tone, *The White-Luck Warrior* was something in between the Prince of Nothing and *The Judging Eye*. Stylistically, *The Great Ordeal* was more akin to the second volume than the first installment. The first portion of *The Unholy Consult* is similar to its predecessor, as the book begins right where *The Great Ordeal* ended. To all ends and purposes, it focuses on the aftermath of the New Empire, *Ishterebinth*, the Great Ordeal, and *Ishuäl* storylines, before the strike on *Golgotterath* can begin. The second part of the book is more akin to Steven Erikson's epic convergences in *The Malazan Book of the Fallen*, and it makes for an exciting and gripping finale.

Not surprisingly, the worldbuilding is top notch. Bakker's richly detailed narrative continues to create an imagery that virtually leaps off the page. The Middle Eastern setting of the western Three Seas remains a welcome change from the habitual generic medieval environments found in most fantasy sagas. As he did in *The Judging Eye*, *The White-Luck Warrior*, and *The Great Ordeal*, the author takes us to new unexplored locales. After his evocative depictions of the wastes of the *Istyuli Plains*, the primeval forest known as the *Mop*, and the ruined remains of *Kûniüri*, the *Erengaw Plains*, the *Urokkas range*, *Dagliash*, the mysteries of *Ishuäl*, and the Nonmen capital of *Ishterebinth*, this time around we journey across the *Fields of Woe* of *Agongorea*, the *Occlusion*, the *Black Furnace Plain* of *Shigogli*, the vast complex that is *Golgotterath*, and the *Ark-of-the-Skies* itself. The universe of *Eärwa* continues to resound with depth and Bakker's creations remains head and shoulder above all other SFF settings on the market today, second only to Steven Erikson and Ian Cameron Esslemont's *Malazan* universe.

Structurally, *The Unholy Consult* is quite different from its predecessors. With a good third of the book from the beginning focusing on the aftermath of *The Great Ordeal*, it does take a while for the story to get going. I fully understand that Bakker needed to close the show and tie up the loose ends associated with the New Empire, *Ishterebinth*, and *Ishuäl* arcs. Before everything could converge on *Golgotterath*, this needed to be done. Having said that, I feel that way too many pages were "wasted" on the Great Ordeal following the scalding at *Dagliash*. True, Bakker needed to paint a very grim picture as the surviving Ordealmen deal with the psychological repercussions of having consumed *Sranc* and how it messed with their minds. But I do feel that the author spent too much time dealing with these issues. With *Golgotterath* in sight, at times it felt as though it was taking forever for the attack to finally begin. For that reason, the pace for the first third of the novel is extremely slow. Unnecessarily slow, to be honest. Of course, when the proverbial shit finally hits the fan, there are fireworks in every chapter and *The Unholy Consult* becomes well nigh impossible to put down! God knows I'm not always a fan of long-drawn (more than 150 pages) battles, but the battle for *Golgotterath* was probably better than any of Erikson's great convergences! If you thought that the finale that ended *The Thousandfold Thought* was exciting, buckle up because this one is even more awesome! Especially the displays of offensive sorcery, which can be pretty amazing. As a matter of course, such a strike on *Golgotterath* will not be without casualties. The bodycount among major characters is quite high, which came as a bit of a surprise. Somewhere, George R. R. Martin is nodding his head in approval.

The New Empire arc once again features the POVs of *Esmenet* and *Kelmomas*. This storyline pretty much went nowhere until its last chapter in *The Great Ordeal*. Then all hells broke loose and Bakker closed the show of that particular plotline with a bang. It did end with a huge cliffhanger and I thought that it would make for a bigger chunk of *The Unholy Consult*. But no, as resolution comes rather quickly and then the action moves away from the Western Three Seas and never go back. This arc also features a new point of view, one that must remain a secret for now. This POV also appears in the Great Ordeal arc and offers

insight that wouldn't otherwise be available. Unanticipated, to be sure, but at times quite fascinating.

The Ishterebinth storyline once more features the POVs of Varalt Sorweel and Serwa, Grandmistress of the Swayal Sisterhood. But we also get the perspective of Moënghus, which was quite interesting. All three flee Ishterebinth altered in some ways, but none are more scarred than Moënghus. Having him as a point of view protagonist changed the dynamics of that arc, and his personal storyline leads to unexpected and even shocking paths. Serwa also comes into her own in this one, especially in the latter part of *The Unholy Consult*.

The Ishuäl storyline features the POVs of both Achamian and Mimara. High on Qirri, they are desperately trying to escape from the Scylvendi and make their way to join the Great Ordeal so that Mimara can look upon the Aspect-Emperor with the Judging Eye.

The Great Ordeal mostly features the POV of Nersei Proyas, at least for about half of the book. The relationship between Kellhus and Proyas took an startling turn in *The Great Ordeal*, one that will have dramatic repercussions down the line. As the interminable march draws to an end and as the battle of Golgotterath gets underway, a panoply of points of view comprise most chapters and the conflict unfolds through the eyes of various Ordealmen.

Given the structure of *The Aspect-Emperor* series, it should come as no surprise that these four story arcs come together in the shadow of Golgotterath. Exactly how it comes to pass, I will let you read and find out. But amidst all that brutality, depredations, despair, the blood and the gore, R. Scott Bakker offers some extremely poignant moments that really contrast with all the savagery. A pregnant Mimara being reunited with an Esmenet that has lost so much makes for a number of emotional scenes. The same goes for Achamian and Proyas' long-awaited reunion. Although not heartbreaking per se, the encounter between Achamian and Kellhus was also quite special.

Unfortunately, I'm disappointed to report that, tough we were promised otherwise, we don't get much as far as the perspective of the Consult is concerned. We do get a bit, and we do find out later on why there is so little in terms of their point of view, yet I would have liked more. Much more. Alas, it wasn't meant to be. Mind you, we do find out a lot about them and what's been going on for the last few centuries. There are quite a lot of revelations that will make long-time fans squee in delight, such as exactly what is the No-God. But do not expect a Perry Mason scene in which everything is explained. Indeed, though Bakker provides a lot of answers throughout *The Unholy Consult*, many questions remain unanswered and the book raises its own fair share of new ones. Fair warning to those crackpot fanatics who have been discussing the metaphysical principles underpinning the *Prince of Nothing* and *The Aspect-Emperor* series for more than a decade, you are bound to be disappointed. Some of this stuff is addressed either in the narrative or the glossary at the end of the novel, but most of it isn't.

I claimed that *The Unholy Consult* was everything that Bakker fans have been hoping for and I stand by that. As the culmination of the vast tapestry of storylines that form the Second Apocalypse, the novel is a great and fitting finale that closes the show with a massive exclamation point! And yet, though it is an ending, sadly it is not the ending. The Great Ordeal story arc is indeed over, with satisfying resolution. The last sentence of the book is quite clear on the matter. But as mentioned above, so much is left up in the air that this mother of all cliffhangers might cause riots among Bakker fans. And since the author is not yet under contract for the next series, the one that cannot be named, well that may not sit well with some readers.

The book also contain an expanded encyclopaedic glossary that should not be read before *The Unholy Consult*, for it could spoil certain plot elements. It also contains two short fiction pieces available on

Bakker's blog, "The False Sun" and "Four Revelations". The first short story is about the early days of the Holy Consult, while the second one deals with a Nonman Erratic. All in all, they represent a nice bonus for fans of both series.

Ultimately, even though the major cliffhanger ending might displease some readers, The Unholy Consult caps off The Aspect-Emperor series with style and aplomb. The strike on Golgotterath was every bit as rousing and captivating as we could have hoped for. And though there is no book deal in sight, whatever comes next will have Bakker fans foaming at the mouth, for it will be impossible for readers not to pick it up to discover what happens next. The slog of slogs has come to an end with a thrilling finale. Expectations were incredibly high, yet R. Scott Bakker managed to live up to them and then some!

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Mike says

The Darkness That Comes Before review

The Warrior Prophet review

The Thousandfold Thought review

The Judging Eye review

The White Luck Warrior review

The Great Ordeal review

If there is one thing this series has demonstrated again and again is that it does not stick to conventional fantasy narratives. Characters can and will die in terrible ways. Good and evil are but labels applied to achieve some other end by those in power. The greatest power is not strength of arms or magic, but the ability to manipulate the beliefs and aspirations of whole peoples. There are no shining heroes, there are no maidens in far away towers, the sum of an individual's achievements is insignificant when arrayed against the tapestry of humanity. Bakker's world is bleak in a way that is both refreshing and a bit transgressive when compared to other fantasy that is out there. I have found the entire series both engaging and challenging, though I will be the first to admit it is not for everybody.

That being said I can see how lot of people who have made it this far in the series could come away from this book feeling disappointed. The series itself has evolved quite a bit from the first installment. In fact what initially caught my attention was how the first book (and indeed the first trilogy) was basically a retelling of The First Crusade set in a really fascinating fantasy world. I am a sucker for good world-building and this series delivers that in spades. It then evolved into this apocalyptic struggle between humanity and genocidal space aliens that sought to save themselves from eternal damnation by closing the world (through said genocide) to the Outside (trust me, it makes sense in context). As you can see, there was a bit of a topical shift between the first book and this one.

In spite of this, however, I think the series holds together very well. What is unfolding in this book is a consequence of the elaborate history and world-building work that was present since the first book. It is the natural by product of following the world and its conditions.

That being said, this particular installment did come up a bit short for me compared to the others in the series.

First off the initial plan was for the Aspect-Emperor series to also be a trilogy. Then Bakker decided to split the last book into two, this one being the conclusion to the installment. The final product, in my opinion, did not need to be split into two books. I think Bakker could have cut some rather graphic and probably unnecessary fluff in this book and merged it with *The Great Ordeal* to deliver a complete and more compelling conclusion to the Aspect-Emperor books.

And this book was short, clocking in at "only" 451 pages with a good chunk of the space between the covers taken up by an extensive appendix (which I loved but acknowledge was probably not necessary) and two previously released short stories which weren't terribly compelling. There was also a section towards the beginning of the book that was as repetitive as it was revolting. So the percentage of the book that comprised compelling reading was lower than previous books.

I also thought a few character's arcs were cut short or just turned out to be sort of pointless. I can certainly understand why somethings turned out the way they did, but that didn't make me feel any less disappointed with the end results.

That being said this book did deliver some amazing scenes and developments that I have been waiting for since the beginning. Just about all the characters come together after being separate for the past three books. We see a clash between the Great Ordeal and the forces of the Consult. We get to see the Consult itself!!!!!!! There are lots of payoffs that have been building up both from the Aspect-Emperor series and the series as a whole. And the ending was one of the ballsiest endings I have come across in any fantasy book. I did not for one moment think things would turn out the way they did and I applaud Bakker for his decision on how to end the Aspect-Emperor series.

So while it wasn't the best possible book to end this series* it was still a compelling and engaging read the delivered some really fantastic scenes and revelations. If you have gotten this far you will probably find a bunch of things to like about this book even though it is by no means perfect.

**This is not the end, there will apparently be another two or three books that follow the events of the Aspect-Emperor series. I am really looking forward to them!*

Corey James Soper says

A review came swirling down...

I have now read six gargantuan tomes of the Second Apocalypse - my slog of slogs, my Great Ordeal, and in this final outing we will have our questions answered - let's grab Golgotterath by the horns and get on with it.

I read the first one as it was pitched as a gritty, philosophical Game of Thrones to scratch the Winds of Winter itch. When I was immersed in the fanaticism and butchery of the Holy War, I was hooked. When it transpired that the Cishuarim, Fanim and the whole Three Seas were but pawns in some cosmic chess-game of unparalleled bleakness, I stayed. When we got to the spaceships and rape-alien and wait-a-minute-maybe-Kellhus-actually-is-Jesus, I, eyebrows arched, loins girded, awaited some conclusion. But I was perversely fascinated by the sheer scale of Bakker's imagination, and his ability to treat with deadpan dignity a plot whose premise I cannot explain to people without them thinking this is some 1920s Pulp mash up bullshit about Orcs on Mars. The sheer, dazzling, maddening complexity of his cast of thousand.

An as Ordealsman who has waded through throngs of battles and treatises and the many, many, many engorged phalluses of this series, it was with a hungry eagerness I hoped to see Kellhus crack open Golgotterath, punch the Consult in their engorged phalluses and finally tell us what the fuck is happening in this fucking crazy series.

I have finished almost four thousand pages of purple-prose Bakkerverse and I'm still basically ignorant of his world's metaphysics and rules. And I like that - it's a world of dazzling byzantine detail and soaring mythic tone - a universe of flesh and of the mind, and one of the most believable universes. If you don't like it - and you didn't like it - you will be sadly disappointed by the final conclusion. The unrelenting bleakness and savagery is still there: there are three chapters of unfettered rape and cannibalism that make the Texas Chainsaw Massacre look like the Teletubbies.

If you like the previous outings, this is pure, concentrated Bakker - refined to an arrow-point in his style. I read the whole 482 pages in a single breathless weekend, waiting for the ending.

SPOILERS AVOID RUN AWAY

The ending is shit, isn't it? We marched and massacred our way to here in order for the following things to happen:

- 1) Mimara to never look at Kellhus with the Judging Eye.
- 2) She gives birth to the last baby ever, then presumably is murder-eaten by a trillion Sranc.
- 2) Achaiman to hang out with Esmenet for a bit, neither discussing or acknowledging the situation.
- 3) A brief summary of what the Inchoroi are about.
- 4) Serwa - my favourite Anasurimbor, kills a dragon . This is never mentioned again and achieves nothing. Cynically, this girl-power moment feels like Bakker trying to undo some of the accusations of sexism in the series...
- 5) Kelmomas - the irksome little fucker we all hated in every book because if there's one thing Bakker likes more than engorged dicks its italicised "Mummy!" - is magically invisible to the gods for essentially no reason, and momentarily distracts Kellhus in his moment of triumph and then some random Skin-Spy offs him. They chuck Kelmomas in a coffin and now he's Mog-Pharau and everyone in the world is going to die. sorry. And like a reject from Les Mis, we'll be treated to Mog's soul searching: WHO AM I? whilst he kills everybody, making the entire trajectory - one of the longest bloody paths in fantasy literature - totally fucking pointless.

Do not get me wrong - I loved the majesty and scale and artifice of this series - but I cannot understand the sense of the ending.

Adam Whitehead says

The Great Ordeal has crossed a thousand leagues in its quest to reach Golgotterath, stronghold of the vile Consult, and to destroy it and the abominations it harbours within. It has braved a horde of a million Sranc, betrayal and, in the shadow of the ancient fortress of Dagliash, a weapon unlike any seen before in the world.

Before it lies the Agongorea, an utterly dead land, beyond which lies the fabled Golden Horns of their foe. But the Ordeal is stretched to breaking point, its food gone, its Aspect-Emperor departed on an errand of his own and its greatest heroes missing on dire quests. It falls to King Nersei Proyas to guide the Ordeal over the last leg of its journey...and to a confrontation with history.

When is the ending not the ending? Thirty years ago, when Scott Bakker first conceived of *The Second Apocalypse*, he planned to conclude it with the events that, finally, conclude this novel. Some time later he reflected that this might not be the best idea, and drafted a plan for (at least) two further novels to wrap up the saga in a different manner.

Having finished *The Unholy Consult* - the seventh and most revelatory novel in the series to date - it is hard to say if this was a good idea or not. For those who read this series (so far comprising two sub-series, the Prince of Nothing trilogy and the Aspect-Emperor quartet) for the warring philosophies, SF ideas such as genetic engineering and quantum theory seen through an epic fantasy prism and the way it inverts so many fantasy tropes to the point where they unhinge, I suspect they would have seen nothing wrong with Bakker dropping the mike on the final line of this book (and it's a humdinger) and walking off into the sunset. I suspect other readers, such as those who enjoy the brainy digressions of the series but still read it as an epic fantasy with cool magic and a mystery-laden storyline, would be more horrified at the prospect. Whilst dropping the series at this point would doubtlessly be more artistic, more bloody-minded and more, well, Bakker, it'd also be, from a mundane narrative standpoint, less satisfying.

Rewinding to the start, *The Unholy Consult* picks up in the tumultuous aftermath of *The Great Ordeal*, which left many of the major characters of the series apparently dead or missing. The novel wastes no time in resolving most of these questions and getting the story back on track. Other events fall away and the story begins to narrow in on Golgotterath as the Great Ordeal, battered, bloodied and compromised by the horrors it has been forced to adopt to survive, finally arrives in the shadow of the Golden Horns. Other factions soon join them and there are moments of reunion as characters compare notes on their experiences and realise that their prior assumptions about what they face may have been erroneous.

From there the book explodes in a titanic battle sequence as Ordeal and Consult finally clash and we realise, in the grand tradition of Tolkien (whose influence lies deeper on this series than I think is often appreciated), that both forces are not what they once were, that evil has degraded and is lesser than it once was even as good faces the same predicament. The battle is long, arduous and packed with individual moments of epic heroism and foul reversals. Bakker, for all of his philosophical preoccupations, is good at blowing stuff up and sets to blowing stuff up in this battle with wild abandon. But the battle outside the foul Ark is matched by another struggle deeper within it, as intellects and ideologies clash in a struggle of viewpoints which is even more important.

Indeed, seasoned fantasy readers may be struck by the structural similarity between *The Unholy Consult* and *A Memory of Light*, the final novel in the Wheel of Time sequence, of the great "last" battle of swords and sorcery being matched by a battle of arguments and semantics that may decide the fate of the world. Bakker is considerably more concise here (in a novel less than half and only a bit more than a third as long as *A Memory of Light*) and of course roots his arguments in considerably more complex concepts.

The Unholy Consult is a striking novel, remarkable for its conciseness given the magnitude of the ending it depicts (similar to *The Thousandfold Thought*, the conclusion of *The Prince of Nothing* trilogy which opened this mega-series, Bakker knows how to drop an effective ending without milking it for a thousand pages) and for the way the author handles his revelations. This series is rooted in mysteries built atop mysteries and it'd be easy for the author to refuse to address them (like *Lost*), or give a nonsensical, pat

answer you suspect they thought of only five minutes earlier (like the latter Battlestar Galactica), but Bakker shows no fear in simply squarely answering questions with answers reached a long time before. He resolves thematic and character arcs begun fourteen years ago in *The Darkness That Came Before* and if you figured out the answer to a particular mystery in a late-night discussion on the Three-Seas, Westeros.org or Second Apocalypse Forums five years ago, well done. Also, hold tight because here come another three revelations which you really didn't see coming. There are some revelations here that will have the reader nodding in approval, others that will be mystifying and several that are surprising in both their content and their elegance (one, extraordinarily important, answer to a vital series-spanning question would even border on the mundane, but the implications of the revelation are far-reaching).

Other issues go resolutely unaddressed: those hoping for Bakker to drop a *Dungeons and Dragons* Manual of the Planes-style explanation of how the metaphysics in his universe work should brace themselves for disappointment, although some concepts are further elaborated upon. The author is careful here to reveal some more of the recipe for this story without giving you a full list of the ingredients.

Events build in the novel to a frenzy of battles, arguments and, yes, death swirling down, and Bakker sticks the landing. Epic fantasies have a rather horrible tendency to blow the ending but *The Aspect-Emperor* gets the payoff it deserves, more *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Crippled God* rather than *Magician's End* or *The Born Queen*, and epic and impressive it is. You not so much read the finale as survive it, and in the nerve-shredded aftermath have to ask the question which will drive a lot of discussion in the months and years ahead: "Now what?"

The Unholy Consult (****½) is perhaps less elegantly structured as a novel than some of its forebears, with not much in the way of build up before it starts smashing things asunder (from that perspective, this book feels the lack of *The Great Ordeal* immediately before it far more keenly than vice versa), but it makes up for that with tremendously satisfying character moments, Bakker's best-ever action scenes and, in the final chapter, possibly Bakker's most powerfully effective pieces of prose to date. The novel will be published on 6 July 2017 in the UK and on 11 July in the USA.

Note: *The Unholy Consult* is a relatively short novel, clocking in at around 450 pages. The rest of the book is made up by an encyclopaedic glossary - an expanded successor to that found in *The Thousandfold Thought* - a collection of maps and two short stories previously only available on Bakker's website: *The False Sun* and *Four Revelations*.

Shaun says

From the first time I saw a map of R. Scott Bakker's Earwa, I've wondered about Golgotterath. The name (metal as hell), the location (the middle of crater) -- it has "Dark Lord of Evil" written all over yet. But despite its importance, it's stayed in the background, a threat, yes, but something distant and abstract.

That all changes in "*The Unholy Consult*". After 6 books of teases, R. Scott Bakker finally pulls back the curtain and reveals the nigh-impregnable stronghold of Earwa's enemies. And what a revelation it is.

The book itself is structured in two "acts": the convergence of forces at Golgotterath and the attack on the stronghold itself.

The first details the various groups converging upon the Black Furnace Plain. I don't want to give too much

away about this but I will say that it's an emotional rollercoaster. Long-anticipated reunions, shocking betrayals and acts of unspeakable horror (Bakker outdoes himself here) -- it's a hell of a ride. I've been an avid fantasy reader for 30 years and honestly can't remember feeling so emotionally drained as I did by the end of this section. Tip of the hat to Bakker: by the time you reach the Maw of Golgotterath, you are every bit as blasted as the men and women of the Great Ordeal).

The second act features quite possibly the best battle sequence ever written in the fantasy genre. It is, of course, mind-bogglingly epic. What makes it transcend, however, is how skillfully Bakker weaves a coherent thread through the action. Unlike the closing battles in other masterworks (Wheel of time or Malazan Books of the Fallen), I didn't find myself struggling to remember who someone was or why they were doing what they were doing. And despite being a long sequence (nearly half the book), it somehow felt lean -- excellent work by Bakker and his editors.

The final chapters are as revelatory as you'd expect from Bakker... and then some. There was one particular moment (hint: it involves stairs) where I literally said "are you f***** kidding me" out loud and put the book down for a day to process. But what I really appreciated was that like any great mystery, the surprises made perfect sense within the logic of Bakker's universe and the seeds that he's planted since the opening sentence of *The Darkness That Comes Before*.

And the ending? All I'll say is that it's perfectly "Bakker".

5/5

Malice Amarantine says

I wanted to like this so much. SO much. I love his other books. But it's awful in my opinion, just wretchedly awful.

It's about 30% super gross and repetitive gay snuff porn, maybe more...expect the first 40% of the length of the book to be little else. Bakker repeats the same lines over and over and over with a lot of arbitrary italics to try and lend weight to certain phrases (the Meat! vile angel! argh). Always verbose, he takes it to the next level here, framing scenes of mass gay rape and necrophilia with ponderous musings about the shitty nature of the human soul. Bakker, for some fucking reason, felt the need wax on with not just phallic imagery, but romance erotica language like "his manhood" and "throbbing phallus" and "turgid horn"...too many times to even count. Entire major storylines that have been built up over the last 2-3 books get dropped like red herrings. Major characters die, but not in the George R Martin school of "OMG!". It's more like "what, that's it???" Whole story arcs just fizzle into literary blue balls. And when you come up towards the end and you're still baffled but you've got another 20% to go so your figure there's still time...NOPE! That last 20% of the book is appendixes! Yes, there is good info there, but I shouldn't have to read *The Unholy Silmarillion* to understand the book I just spent days reading.

And as usual, Bakker has issues with writing female characters. They're all dependent on male characters and largely useless outside of their interactions with them, with one exception, which I'm not naming for spoilery reasons. Her character has strong development, but was still pockmarked with dumb things like (when describing her genitalia, because of course he does) "the downy hair of her cursed sex". No reason, it's not cursed in any relevant sense, Bakker apparently just felt like saying that. And while her character is one of the best, she nevertheless feels like fan service, like "look, I can write a strong female...so I'm gonna make

this chick basically a superhero to offset all the whores and pregnant women who depend on men in this series". She still dies in obscurity for what seems like no reason at all. And a dragon literally yells "I LIKE CUNNY!" Imfao

It's a lot of pornographic pontification about blah blah the soul blah blah the holy blah blah ejaculating on a corpse blah blah human nature. That may seem like a given, but this book took it to the nth degree. It wasn't just shocking, it was incredibly boring and repetitive. And most of the book just makes no sense at all.

Yeah, I'm mad at this book. I am such a big fan, and I feel not only let down, but honestly a bit offended that this was even published in this state.

Peterb says

[EDIT: Now that the book has been released, until I read the book, I have revised this review from 1 to 3 stars. I leave the review in place as an historical Goodreads artifact.]

I was very disappointed in *The Unholy Consult*. This is a book with some major, major problems.

Initially, I was *super excited* because of all the 5-star reviews of it on Goodreads. That's a really good sign! Plenty of the reviews on Goodreads are deep and insightful, and while the whole 'rating' thing can be suspect, surely the fact that so many people liked it was a promising leading indicator, right?

However, once I actually began reading the book, I encountered a serious problem: it doesn't exist. All of the pages I looked at were blank, or, more precisely, existed in an alternate, unreachable universe from the one that I am currently living in. I have spent *literally hours and hours* not reading this book; yet no matter how much I don't read it, it continues to not exist. The characterization, plot, and writing were all extremely flat - perfectly flat, in fact - and as you can imagine the dramatic tension simply wasn't there at all. The book's complete nonexistence is a major problem, and one that I hope the author will address in future revisions.

And the unanswered questions from earlier books are legion. What is the relationship of the Consult to Kellhus? What are the aspect-emperor's end goals? And what about Naomi? Will she love again? *None* of this is addressed in any of the chapters that I could read, which is none of them.

Perhaps I will revise this review once the book actually exists, but for now: two thumbs down. This is perhaps the WORST book that doesn't exist that I never read.

Mike Hillcoat says

The Second Apocalypse forum is **the** place to discuss Bakker's fiction, especially the Second Apocalypse narrative: www.second-apocalypse.com

This is the second rendition of the Second Apocalypse forum.

Past links to the Ch. 1 Excerpt are now down - new links:

Ch. 1 Excerpt

Ch. 3 Excerpt Summary

Cheers.

THIS BOOK CANNOT BE RELEASED SOON ENOUGH! SUPPORT R. SCOTT BAKKER!

Redeagl says

Speechless.

Dezideriu Szabo says

WTF!!!!!! No, really, WTF!!!!!! Really???????? This is it???? Probably the most devastating series finale I ever read.

Joshua Raheim says

I have never waited so intently for ANYTHING!!! No book nor movie has ever had me checking online once a week to see if a release date has been posted. I don't think I was even this excited to lose my virginity. I know it will still be a while, I just really need to know when. I'll save all my paid time off because I will not be leaving the house until Kellhus is dead! Long live the Padiraj!

Michael Sliter says

Despite the wordy source material, I am not going to mince words. The final book of the Aspect-Emperor series was utterly disappointing. Rarely have I been so disappointed in an ending to a series. Note that this is the ending to a SERIES, not an individual book, but more on that in a second.

First, the good. Bakker is a flowery writer, and continues to have a vocabulary the size of the Titanic. Some of the character arcs were interesting, and Kellhus continued to be the reason I pressed on, through the philosophical meandering and the overtly gross, overtly extended, sections of rape and murder. Mind you, I am not squeamish by any stretch of the imagination. But, nearly two full books of such depictions no longer have shock value. It just became violence porn, and too much violence porn makes a man... bored.

My paragraph about the good was overshadowed by the bad. That was the essence of this book. The main character arcs really amounted to nothing. Akka? What was his purpose? Mimara? Esme? Everything that happened would have happened with or without them. And, maybe that was the point. Nihilism, etc. But, that doesn't make for a good story.

And the ending.. Again, the book--the series--just ended. I thought there was more, but, like many others, I

discovered there was just an extended appendix. So, the ending was incredibly unsatisfying. I have no problem with "the good guys lose" endings. Think of the First Law. No one can say that has a happy ending, but it has a great ending. This book just... ended. That, more than anything, is fueling my low review.

With that, I want to end this review as abruptly as *The Unholy Consult* ended. In summary...

Malice Amarantine says

As a fan of this series, the last two books were awful. But especially this one.

About the first third of this book is incredibly disgusting gay porn, necrophilia, and cannibalism, not necessarily in that order. It's incredibly over wordy; Bakker pontificates about philosophy as always, but now it feels like he's talking just to hear himself talk. If a few hundred pages of shock-gore schlock overlaid with endless, super repetitive, needlessly drawn out discussions on the nature of the soul coupled with at least fifty different ways to describe a penis ("throbbing manhood" "turgid horn" "pelvic violence" ad nauseum) and a lot of really gross cumshots sounds like a good time, then this is the book for you. If you want to see things neatly wrapped up, understand tattoos whole series has been about, or want to know what happens to interesting characters, save yourself some time. Everything is epic to the point of just being bloated, nothing happens for a reason, everything is futile, and the book ends with a "what???" and an appendix that's a third the length of the entire book - it's not as long as you think.

The first trilogy is one of my favorites. After that is slowed a bit but was still fantastic. The book before this one felt like half a book...lots of big events, but not much story progression. This last one just sucks. Ugh.

Ian Vance says

Powerful and perplexing, Bakker's final novel of TAE is a difficult one to fully parse--it certainly displays the author's self-indulgent tendencies like never before-- but there's enough quality in the 2nd half for me to rate it five stars, particularly as I've been waiting like 12 years to find out certain answers. Longer review to come upon a re-read.

EDIT:

The more I contemplate TAE, the more dissatisfied I become, and I've adjusted my rating to reflect my overall impression for the series: three stars. This really should have been a trilogy. Restructuring key scenes in the first two books and cutting the fat (and the glossary) from the last two might have made this an epic to rival the first series; instead, it comes across as a mixture of amazing and occasionally head-shakingly awful. The quality of writing between the first two -- when Bakker had an editor -- and the last two, when it is very obvious he did not, is quite glaring. Unlike some of the others, I liked the ending, but at least 40% of getting there was the Slog of Slogs and someone really, really needs to tell Bakker that excessive use of italics for emphasis does the exact opposite of the intended effect: it makes the prose ridiculous and jars the reader from the story.

Bakkerfans says

The Unholy Consult by R. Scott Bakker crashes into the inevitable contest between the Dûnyain-Prophet, Anasûrimbor Kellhus, and the vile Consult hierarchy. This novel, the fourth and concluding volume of *The Aspect-Emperor* series, chronicles a convergent conflict, millennia in the making, between Men, Nonmen, and Inchoroi abomination. Tekne and Logos will vie for the fate of the world, the fate of souls. The Great Ordeal will traverse the unnatural wastes at the end of the world to face it...the Golden Horror.??

Weaving the narrative threads of *The Aspect-Emperor* into a rope, *The Unholy Consult* hangs from the Horns of Golgotterath. The survivors of Ishterebinth make haste to join the Great Ordeal, which in turn staggers in its last desperate trek through the Fields of Woe. Following the destruction of the Horde at Dagliash, the false Believer-King, Nersei Proyas, struggles to steer the might of Earwa across ashen Agongorea. Stripped to the foundation of their Meat, the Men of the Ordeal find they must overcome themselves to march upon their foe, to achieve the requisite mad ferocity to topple wicked and alien heights. Besotted, crazed with loss and bewildered hope, the old Wizard, Achamian, and the pregnant Prophet, Mimara, draw near to gaze upon the Aspect-Emperor with the Judging Eye. Even the eyes of the damned will stand witness to the Warrior-Prophet's ultimate disputation of war. Gobozkoy like no other. As the Great Ordeal unleashes its collective might on Unholy Golgotterath, Bakker rolls into one all the strategy, tactical reversal, and heartbreak of the battle sequences of his six preceding novels...and the Gods play benjuka across the very the plate of the world.??

Thematically, the darkness that comes before dominates all individuals through every faction. In a contest of this magnitude, none can be sure their cause is righteous truth. Meat and spirit, meaning and its wages compel reason run to the end of sanity—*The Unholy Consult* emerges as the most profuse expression of Bakker's philosophical viewpoint on humanity's frame and substance. Stylistically, Bakker furthers the coiled power of word and verse from *The Great Ordeal*: epic fantasy as adventure and elegy. This novel is word for word, line for line, condensed, packed, loaded. In the end, Bakker sparks a detonation proper to the termination of *The Aspect-Emperor* series. A rebuke of and tribute to the Tolkinesque tradition, a rumination on holy scripture, and prophetic word, *The Unholy Consult* is above all a tale to grasp the heart.??

Included with *The Unholy Consult* is an expanded encyclopedic glossary, elaborating on the glossary of *The Thousandfold Thought*, divulging history, secrets, lies, and promising more. A particular highlight is a short account concerning the Aspect-Emperor, revealing insight into his peculiar magic and snatched, it would seem, while the Anasûrimbor thought no one watching. Bakker's, previously available online *Atrocity Tales*, short stories set in Earwa, "The False Sun" and "The Four Revelations," are also included as Appendices Two and Three. "The False Sun" constitutes an episode from the formation of the Consult and their grudge with the ancient Grandmaster of the Sohonc, mighty Titirga. "The Four Revelations" takes the reader inside the mind of a Nonman Erratic, long-lived beyond all dead glory and sanity.??

Tragedy, tragedy averted, tragedy necessary and inescapable, *The Unholy Consult* marches toward Golgotterath, measuring its path by the suffering of its persons. This is the seventh book in *The Second Apocalypse* series. Apocalypse is revelation. Bakker delivers humanity, character and reader alike, to the revelation of the fate of worlds.

Behold! The Passion of the Warrior-Prophet.
