



Pale Kings

Ben Galley

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Emaneska is crying out for a saviour

The only question is:

Can they kill a child to save a world?

Emaneska's Long Winter remains as bitter as a blade between the ribs. War is fast approaching. Gods and daemons are hovering on the horizon. Long-lost revelations arrive to haunt the lives of three men.

The Pale Kings are rising.

While Farden busies himself digging up his past in the strange deserts of Paraia, the storm-clouds begin to gather for Durnus, Elessi, Cheska, and Modren.

Together with Farfallen and his Sirens, they must fight to survive against the Long Winter, the vicious machinations of the new Arkmage, and the arrival of something much deadlier than both combined. War, deception, and murder are quickly becoming the only paths to salvation...

Pale Kings Details

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From Reader Review Pale Kings for online ebook

Mihir says

Full review over at Fantasy Book Critic

Overall Rating = 3 & 1/2 stars

OVERVIEW/ANALYSIS: Pale Kings continues the story that began in The Written and is the second part on the Emaneska series. The book begins events in a Malazan like fashion by focusing on events nearly two and half millennia ago. The readers get to witness a birth which seems inconsequential however later on as they learn was of much consequence. Things then begin only a few weeks after the events of the first book.

Unlike the first book wherein the action was centered around Farden, in this book the story's focus is extended to certain intriguing characters of the story. We get to see Farden again and he is trying to find out more of his past which apparently holds the key to his problems in a desert land called Paraia. The other characters who get a spotlight are Durnus, Farden's vampyre mentor-cum-friend, Modren, another Written mage who is introduced in this story, and Towerdawn, Old Dragon and lord of the Sirens who we got to meet in the preceding volume. There are a lot more characters especially older ones who return from their previous roles and further intrigue the readers. There's a lot more backstory that is revealed in this story and we finally get a clue to the amount of world building that has been developed for this series.

The best part about this book can be said that it is the LOTR to the preceding book, while some history and character background was hinted at. This book lays bare the screen on almost all spectrums of the story beginning with his history that is now forgotten mythology, to its characters as newer facets and older secrets are revealed. There's also the multi-character POV approach that gives the story a wider panoramic feel. The characterization done is much better than its predecessor and while it's still not the best but we do get to see Farden in a much more stronger and dangerous image as fostered in book one.

There's also the action which is amped up insanely, be it with Farden or the sirens or the other parts of the book, the action sequences become a particular highlight of the story as the readers is constantly harried from one sequence to another with some rather startlingly plot twists and revelations in between. The reader hardly gets any time to breathe and there's also the issue of character deaths which is rather surprising as the author keeps the story on an even keel by surprising us by dealing death cards at unexpected moments. Lastly I felt that this book had a much better ending than that of The Written, as compared to the first book there are various plot threads in this story however the author competently handles them to bring the story to a resounding and a bit tragic climax.

I was very much impressed by the difference between books one & two. Author Ben Galley showcased talent in his debut effort, in his sophomore offering he builds on that promise and gives the readers an action-packed epic fantasy tale that surprised me nicely. Count me in for this series and I look forward to the books three and four that promise an epic if not proper conclusion to this surprising series.

Amanda says

I read the first book in the Pale Kings series. I think it is every bit as good as the Inheritance series. Whoo hoo Ben Galley.

Damien Black says

This is a great follow-up by one of the forerunners of the self-publishing boom.

Right from the start Ben Galley draws us back into the world of Emaneska with vivid descriptions and rich use of language. Drawing heavily on Norse mythology, the book's well-wrought prose often personifies the elements and natural world: candles gutter shyly, skies cry, and fires bicker as warrior-mage Farden sets out to find his long-lost uncle and fellow Written Tyrfing.

The story is well paced and takes us from the desert southlands and their exotic sorceries and ruby-fingered elementals back to Nelska in the far north - where Farfallen and the rest of dragonkind are preparing for the obligatory world war - and eventually to backwards Albion and occupied Arka for the final denouement against arch villains Vice and Bane, now revealed as demonic demigods bent on global domination.

This is a classic tour de force of high fantasy and sword & sorcery. True, it still leaves something to be desired in its editing (although Galley has definitely tightened up in this area since his debut novel) and sometimes the dialogue is a little clunky. But these are really just quibbles about what is essentially a very well constructed piece of genre fiction, one in which the writer has given free rein to his extensive imagination and vocabulary without oversweetening the pot.

Thoroughly recommended to any fans of good old fashioned epic fantasy, and I look forward to reading the next instalment.

CF says

A nail-biting and fantastic follow up to the explosive 'The Written', 'Pale Kings' is a treatise on how everyone is not as they seem. Almost every character has an alibi that I didn't see coming, people portrayed as evil are good, good as evil. So interesting and woven as thick as a winter tapestry, Galley's use of words and storytelling is masterful and makes this book hard to put down.

The Pale Kings are coming, and no one could ever know who or why, Farden is charged with saving Emaneska once again but his doubts and human failings are getting in the way. With Cheska in the grips of Vice and Krauslung falling quickly, he doesn't have much time to decide who is on his side and how on earth he is going to achieve such a mountain of a task.

Galley, while using many, many fantastical creatures (which I love) also shows the fragility and two sides to the mind and injects humanity into all his characters. Looking forward to the next installment!

Mitchell says

So, if you read my review of Ben's first book, I mentioned that my rating was on potential, and though I commented on a few areas I thought could use improvements, I thoroughly enjoyed the book overall. Well, this book, the direct sequel to "The Written", really makes good on a lot of that potential. The magic system is expanded upon quite a bit, Farden's vambraces are elaborated upon, and the whole thing felt more confident and polished.

"The Written" finished with only the smallest amount of closure, with more questions and problems than answers. This book picks up as the characters struggle to deal with the aftermath. Farden searches for his exiled uncle while trying to come to grips with the finale of the first book, and the dragons and their riders prepare for the inevitable war. Galley's world building took a big step forward as we are introduced to additional regions and cultures. As I said, one of my biggest questions after the first book was about the magic system and the difference between sorcerers, mages and the Written. Well, Galley makes a conscientious effort to try and explain this a little bit, though it's still not completely clear. There is a lot of explanation about the gods and demons as sort of the underlying motives for all the conflict.

Again, the characters are great. Farden, in particular, is tremendous in all of his flaws and humanity. I really felt for him and the situation that he was put in. The other characters were also very fleshed out; none one was perfect, except for, maybe, the dragons, but the strength of the story was partially in the characters overcoming their flaws to try and work for the greater good.

I really enjoyed this book, and look forward to the finale of the series. I anticipate even more world building and fleshing out of the magic system and the pantheon of gods and demons to come.

Martin Belcher says

Absolutely bloody amazing! I can't speak more highly of this masterpiece of a fantasy epic, I loved every minute of it and even rationed it as I didn't want to finish it too quickly. Damn! I'm finished and now I have to wait until the end of May for the last two books in the Emaneska series, Dead Stars parts one & two to come out. I can't wait!

There is so much going on in Pale Kings and so many important plots and answers that to write too much would spoil it for those of you that have not had the joy of reading this series yet. What I will say is this book builds strongly on the characters you meet in the first book "The Written", the world of Emaneska opens out and you get a feeling of what an epic world this is. So vivid in its portrayal, so masterfully planned and written with such intense description and wonderful characters that you can't help but be drawn in to this world and find it hard to come out again...

This is rapidly becoming one of my favourite fantasy series ever, a classic to stand up there in the bookshelf with the more well known classics. Mr Ben Galley is an incredibly talented author! You have to read this series!

Mieneke says

WARNING: This review contains spoilers for the first book in the Emaneska series and some slight spoilers for this book. If you want to remain unspoiled, please click away or skip to the last paragraph.

A fortnight ago, I reviewed the first in Ben Galley's *Emaneska* series, *The Written*. It was rather an occasion, as it was the first self-pubbed book I've ever reviewed and it was an interesting experiment. While on the whole I'd enjoyed the novel, I did have some issues with it; some of them perhaps due to first-novel-itis, others due to the author's stylistic choices. Still, I started *Pale Kings* looking forward to finding out what happened to Farden and company and to see whether he'd be able to save Emaneska. Unfortunately, while some of my niggles from the previous books were solved, others remained; *Pale Kings* made for another mixed reading experience, because even if there were some major things that bothered me, Galley writes a compelling tale and I did get invested in the characters.

So let's start off with the problems I had with the book. As with *The Written* Galley's prose is lavender and he tends to be rather more elaborate with his descriptions than necessary – or desirable in my case – but as mentioned in my previous review, whether you find this a problem is very much a case of personal taste. There is still a lot of head-hopping, though it's less confusing this time around, and Galley still makes the stylistic choices that bothered me in the previous book, but they were less intrusive this time around. One thing that did catch my eye this time around was the way the narrator intruded upon the story more, quite often turning omniscient, instead of limited. The narrator gave summations and foreshadows events in a way that felt intrusive rather than organic and a lot of the time it happened at shifts in the narrative, which made these feel clunky.

One problem that unfortunately carried over from the previous book is again Galley's treatment of the female characters. As before, we have the three characters of Elessi, Cheska, and Svarta, who mostly have the same problems as before. And Cheska, who seemed to gain some agency by the end of the first book, basically loses all of it again in this one, which was disappointing. We also get three new female characters. The first is Lerel, a pupil of Farden's uncle, but her role in the story is minimal and while it turns out she was around in the previous book all along, there is a lot of potential wasted in this character and I really hope she gets to be stronger, or more in the foreground, in the final book in the series. The second is General Agfrey, a Skölgarder, who is basically shown as very ugly, mannish, and cruel. Lastly, there is Lilith, another bad guy, who is introduced as a crone and a seer, but turns into more. She does have agency, but again, like Agfrey feels a little clichéd. In all, I found them disappointing.

There was one line in the book that just completely shook me out of the narrative and when I say it shook me, I mean it picked me up, rattled me until my eyes closed and then closed the book. And wasn't because it was a bad line exactly, but because it so blatantly was an homage to Tolkien that I just blinked. The line? "*Be on the lookout for strangers, and on the dawn of the fifth day watch for dragons in the sky to the north,*" she said." In no other part of either of his books I've read so far does Galley show his influences so blatantly. I mean, I think I could guess at some of his inspirations, but this was just so totally revealing, it really bothered me. Luckily it was a onetime thing and I quickly managed to get back into the story.

Writing this review, it seems as if I really disliked the book, which really isn't the case. The story is good and there were some very interesting plot developments. Galley further deepens his world by showing us some of its history and creation myths, revealing more about the daemons and the gods in the process. We also get a fabulous new creature in the form of Ilios, the gryphon. I loved Galley's incarnation of this beast, the fact that he couldn't speak like a human, that he could only communicate mind-to-mind and mostly through dreams.

He was one of my favourite things about the book. Another great addition is Tyrfing, Farden's uncle. I loved this broken, damaged man and the way he pulls himself together – or rather is badgered into it by Ilios – and takes his place in the ranks of the players allied to save the world from Vice's grip. Durnus' development and the decisions he has to make are fascinating too and I found them quite original.

In reading *Pale Kings*, it turns out that I can forgive a lot of stylistic problems as long as the story is good. Unfortunately, there wasn't as much growth from the previous book to this one and not all of the first novel flaws were gone, but once again, Galley proves he can tell a story. Despite Galley and myself perhaps not being the best fit stylistically, I do want to know how this story ends, so one could say that the author has done his job well. *Pale Kings* is a solid successor to *The Written* and I'm looking forward to finding out how Farden's story ends in *The Dead Stars*, which is expected somewhere in 2013.

This book was provided for review by the author.

Kevin Richard says

Well, did *Pale Kings* deliver the goods that Ben Galley's first novel "The Written" achingly promised? In a word Yes!

Pale Kings continues the story of good versus evil in the world of Emaneska. Set a few months after the happenings in "The Written", Ben's writing style continues to be as descriptive and absorbing as ever.

The story had more unexpected twists in it than *The Written* and Ben is not afraid to kill off his main characters should the storyline call for it. Personally 1 or 2 of the characters killed off in *Pale Kings* I would have liked to have been alive in *Dead Stars* (the next instalment of the trilogy) but this is fantasy so who knows what will happen!

I think where Ben has improved with this book, is the ending. It's a lot more robust and more of the loose ends were tied up or came to their natural conclusions.

I'm looking forward with great anticipation to spring 2013 when Ben releases the final 2 books in the Emaneska series, *Dead Stars* parts 1 & 2, although at the same time I will be a little saddened to say goodbye to it. Maybe in a year or two Ben will revisit Emaneska and give his readers another chance to become absorbed in the magical vibrant world that he has created.

James Davis says

Much like "The Written", Ben Galley's second work is a passable and enjoyable story. I plan to read the third when it comes out. For an author Galley's age, this is a very good work. However, I think there is a lot of untapped potential here and I think some of his choices are sloppy. This is not meant to be cruel to Galley. After all, I read his first book when it was a free download on Amazon and it got me to buy his second. There are just a few writing choices that I think could be done differently and make his next work so much better.

I will name two examples in brief and then end on a positive note.

One, there are some bizarrely heavy-handed incidents of foreshadowing. Towards the end of the book, it shows a brief scene from a side character's point of view, and ends it with (paraphrasing and slightly exaggerating) "little did that person know their doom was soon at hand." Then it switches perspective to a main character who kills said side character. This was the worst offender by far. The rest were not bad, merely strange literary choices.

Two, there are a few too many scenes from the point of view of "throw away" side characters. Galley does a good job making his main characters sympathetic, and writes much better scenes when working from their point of view, but uses side characters as a crutch to get around his choice of using limited perspective instead of omniscient perspective. Limited perspective is an excellent and appropriate choice for the type of story Galley tells, but I think he's afraid of not showing certain things happening. If I were to make one recommendation for the third book, it would be try to write a first draft solely from the point of view of a single character and see what happens.

Perhaps I've been overly critical. I enjoyed reading this story and will look forward to the rest. For fans of standard fantasy fare, written with a stylistic flair and doing an excellent job avoiding the crutch of "my orcs and elves are just slightly different from Tolkien's", check out the Emaneska series. Galley is an author who shows a lot of promise and I am certain he will continue to improve as he progresses in his career.

Cathy Villars says

The second book in the series and it didn't disappoint. The proof reading was much better on this one so less distractions for me. I love the fast pace of these books there is always something lurking, with the turn of a page, to twist/turn the plot. Can't wait for the next installment hurry up Mr Galley. :-)

Bev says

This is the authors second book and wow what a difference from the first.

The writing in this has matured and is smoother. Characters are better described and more accessible. The storyline has deepened and I am starting to get little hints of a possibly good story.

It continues the tale of Farden, who appears to be coming to terms with the betrayal of his pregnant girlfriend and the unveiling of his best friend as a daemon. War is coming and even the vampyre is not who he seems.

Looking forward to part 3 although not happy that it is in 2 parts.

Rituranjan Gogoi says

Better than the first book. A strong sequel with tight plotting and trimmed prose. As a self-published book, I would definitely put this on a high pedestal, looking at the cover and the standard quality of work. Galley has definitely improved himself as an author, and he has shown his ability to tell a good story which is a winning

situation for a young writer like him in the genre.

This book shows Galley's imagination with the thrilling pace of the narrative. He has imbued the mythology with more depth in order to widen the scope of the world, and its lore. I liked the change of setting from tge Arka to the deserts. The story shifts from one view to another, and it helps from keeping the monotony of a one dimensional narrative. To make the story more interesting, the gods make an appearance here, and their plans to save the world is intriguing as well as multilayered possibilities in which all the major characters play a role to fit in the grand scheme.

Farden's growth as a character is not much, but, he is given a more tentative touch of the flawed hero. The search for his uncle, and his subsequent meeting with him was a interaction which I enjoyed, though it felt a little clunky on Farden's part. However, I will say this, as you see in the cover, there is a gryphon here, and he is one hell of an awesome character apart from the talking dragons. Lerel the speaking cat was a surprise, and a cute one at that. Tyrfing is badass, more powerful and resourceful than Farden, and I was glad to see him fight. There is an unexpected twist about Durnus which I hope will astonish many a reader.

The action was amazing and bloody, with the dragons, and the antagonist Vice. Galley writes the chaotic situation of a battle nicely, and the magic is as explosive as usual. This is epic sword and sorcery fanatsy with a blast, and I liked it more than the first book. I would definitely read the sequel and see how Galley continues the story.

Sue says

I downloaded the first part of this series (Written) as a freebie, and loved it enough to purchase the second installment. Definitely a great read. This volume is quite a bit shorter than the first, and more focused, but the two books together form a cohesive and complete story, but there's enough loose ends to look forward to in future books.

Paul Nelson says

Another excellent cover picture, this time a Gryphon, a legendary creature with the head, talons, and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion.

In the times when God's, Daemons & Elves ruled in Emaneska, humans were nothing more than slaves. The Daemons grew to powerful and a great threat to the world. Orion was the lord of the Daemons and coupled with a human slave, who bore him three human children with Daemon blood.

The gods were in hiding and the humans resigned to a life of slavery but the God's had one last card to play, to save the world and start anew, they sacrificed themselves and flung the Daemons and Elves into the stars never to return along with the God's.

The three children of Orion hid amongst men, shapeshifters and immortal with great power, thousands of years they have planned and plotted to bring the age of the Daemons back to earth. Gradually ascending to positions of power they move to fulfil the prophecy of the dust song.

And one more terrible than Three shall come
one to which the stars succumb

and bring the power of Ragnorak upon the earth.
and leave all to bask in inholy birth.

The three children of Orion are the Pale Kings, the Nefalim's and a Pale King can only be killed by a brother but one is dead and the remaining two work together.

Cheska is pregnant with Fardens child, the result of Fardens infatuation and a child of two Written mages, Farden believes that Cheska still loves him but she is also the daughter of a Pale king and this is the child of the prophecy. Farden faces some tough decisions, stubborn and torn in two, can he prevail and turn the tide.

The story starts with Farden hunting for his Uncle, who was banished by the Arkmage's after succumbing to the madness that can strike a written mage and committing murder. His uncle Tyrfing was tattooed with five key elements, powerful and capable of shapeshifting, he has been lost for over ten years and may hold the key in the battle against the Pale Kings.

Pale Kings is a big improvement on The Written in every aspect, bigger & bolder, well written action sequences interlaced in an excellent plot. Characters who were on the periphery of the story in the first book get much bigger parts, all key to the story.

Durnus the Vampyre, mentor and close friend to Farden has a pivotal role to play but first he must find a release from the curse of the Vampyre and reclaim the power of his birthright.

The story contains extracts from the past, the god's manifest as shadow and attempt to influence the fight, all contribute to excellent world building as the battle reaches epic proportions. Not all survive as the major characters face a battle they can't win and it all makes for a fast paced, action packed, emotional and enjoyable read.

The final book in the trilogy Dead Stars definitely becomes one of my top ten anticipated books of 2013.

Sam Leeves says

It's not always a compliment to say that you read a book in three days. To read something so quickly that took months to prepare doing draft, redraft and further redraft can be quite irksome for an author and, I have to admit, part of my hast in reading this book was due to another obligation to the author. However, another reason for so swift a reading was that this book is simply excellent and I couldn't help but complete it fully and immerse myself once more in Emaneska.

Reading this book reminded me of how much I'd missed the company of Farden. The great anti-hero is developed further in this book and becomes an even greater anti-hero for it. The challenges (both epic and personal) that he face in Pale Kings dwarf everything he faced in The Written and seeing him tackle them (or, sometimes, reluctantly tackle them) expanded his character and made him all the more enjoyable. Furthermore, it was great to see more of Modren (one of my favourite characters from The Written) and the addition of Tyrfing to the clan was welcome. However, my favourite supporting character in this book was Durnus who we simply didn't see enough of in The Written.

So yes, the story is great and the characters perhaps more so, but what of Galley as an author? Obviously anyone who has read The Written knows this author is a master storyteller, the way he can twist and turn a plot and keep his reader guessing for almost an entire book is nothing short of magic(k). But, as a wordsmith,

the reader certainly can't complain either. Although Galley isn't going to rival Proust or (more realistically) Mervyn Peake for wordsmithery any time in the near future, he displays a great vocabulary and picks his words perfectly for each scene and the exciting tone of the book. Some would argue he could learn a thing or two from Cormac McCarthy and his ilk, however, certainly to my mind (and as much as I adore Cormac McCarthy), it could be argued that literature has become too rationed with its words, especially adjectives, and that the Fantasy genre, above all, deserves slightly more embellishment.

Pale Kings is a worthy successor to *The Written* and one that really shows Galley's development as an author. I highly recommend it highly.
