



Babylon's Ashes

James S.A. Corey

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The sixth novel in James S.A. Corey's *New York Times* bestselling *Expanse* series--now a new original series from the Syfy Channel, coming December 14th 2015.

The final war has started. The protomolecule, fairly quiescent since the opening of the gates, has identified its enemy and is arming itself for battle. Humanity is at most a tool in its post-human arsenal. When people, ships, and even places begin to disappear, Holden and the crew of the *Rocinante* have to face the fact that the thing they've been hauling through the depths of space only appears to be Detective Miller. The time when the protomolecule's agenda and humanity's overlapped has passed.

As the protomolecule takes control of the ancient networks and relays, the final battle begins. Holden and his allies are faced with the decision of whether to blow the gates, trapping humanity in beads of disconnected worlds, or engage in a battle that they can only lose no matter who wins.

Babylon's Ashes Details

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Author : James S.A. Corey

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From Reader Review *Babylon's Ashes* for online ebook

Kevin Kelsey says

Posted at Heradas Review

Let me start by saying, if you're 6 books into an ongoing series like this, then I'm going to assume you're in it for the long haul, and I think you'll enjoy the hell out of this one too.

James S.A. Corey (Ty Franck and Daniel Abraham) refer to their *Expanse* series as 3 duologies and a trilogy (forthcoming books 7, 8, and 9) to cap it all off. *Leviathan Wakes/Caliban's War* tell a fairly contained story about the protomolecule in the style of noir and political thriller respectively. *Abaddon's Gate/Cibola Burn* deal with the expansion out into deeper space as a ghost story/western, but *Nemesis Games/Babylon's Ashes* really read like two halves of the same larger novel. They are much more deeply intertwined than any of the other sets in the series. If each novel is a different genre married into the science fiction backdrop, then I'd call *Nemesis Games* a survival tale, and *Babylon's Ashes* a great russian tragedy a la Dostoyevsky or Tolstoy.

Gone is the simple narrative structure of the first five books, each -- excluding *Leviathan Wakes* -- with four alternating POV characters. Instead we've got nineteen unique points of view. But if you've made it this far, you're ready for that kind of complexity, you're already intimately familiar with most of these characters. Holden, Pa, and Filip are the main ones, but we get lots of tertiary views on the action and plot. I really love this change to the structure, and can't help but think that *The Expanse* television series influenced it in some way. It does feel more like the way that a TV show handles narrative. We get a perspective from nearly every main and secondary character still living, and some new ones as well. This opens up the world even more, something that this series has done so well along the way.

The main story involves the aftermath of the events of *Nemesis Games*, and how those events affect everyone, both inside and outside of the Sol system from here on. The Free Navy is causing havoc all over the place and has essentially taken over several large belter settlements. Holden and crew are caught in the middle, working with Avasarala and Fred, trying to do what they can to clean things up and bring Marcos down. Meanwhile, a splintered remnant of the MCRN is working in the shadows, silently preparing for what's to come. And don't forget the even larger threat looming on the periphery: whatever killed the protomolecule makers.

It's a sad story, ultimately a tragedy, but there are several threads woven throughout that are paving a path to redemption for some, and death and destruction for others. It all makes for a terrific story, and moves at a breakneck pace toward a very tight conclusion. One that comes together so smoothly in fact, that a lot of people have been confused, thinking this was the end of the entire series. Of course, that isn't the case, but I think you could approach this as the penultimate end to some of the earlier narratives begun all the way back in the first novel. Call it a semicolon; the conclusion of the series to follow.

Hannah Greendale says

Babylon's Ashes is a galactic bore. There hasn't been a book this monotonous in the *Expanse* Series since *Caliban's War*.

Lee says

4 Stars!

Oh where to begin?!

Back into the world of The Expanse. It is great to be back reading about our erstwhile crew again and I was interested in seeing how this story developed given that the protomolucule part of the plot was stalled. For me, this is a solid 4 stars but no where near the 5 stars that I come to expect from the series. I can't help feel that some of the writing now is tailoring toward making the tv show easier to portray. I few decisions on team dynamics are interesting and maybe it is because the authors want to freshen up the crew that changes have been made, but a lot of the massive overall picture has been brought in into a pretty tight story now. Bobby on board, Peaches? wtf is going on with that storyline? Just a fill in character? Why is she still there. Fred Fucking Johnsons story? I don't know, it was neatly parceled up and delivered and didn't leave me wondering about anything. As I was reading, I was expecting a solid intro into what the next phase of the story would be and whilst the ending gave us a hint of that, it pretty much just put up a blank canvas and said 'not sure yet'. I still love the series and I can't wait for the next book or the next TV series to start, but I do think that it has lost it's edginess. Once again Avasarala stole the show. It is so sad that they used a 'nice personality brush' on her screen character. Her coarseness and ability to drop scathing one liners on people is what makes her so brilliant. In this book she is in her prime and long may she live.

Rob says

Executive Summary: This is the second book in a row I've given one of my rare 5-star ratings to, and the second year in a row that an Expanse book is my favorite read. If you haven't given this series a look yet, you really should!

Audiobook: Jefferson Mays once again does a great job. He reads with good inflection, volume and pace. He does a few voices for the characters, including an excellent job with Avasarala. This is definitely a series I plan to continue in audio so long as he's the narrator.

Full Review

I imagine that most Sci-Fi fans know the Expanse by now. The SyFy channel's adaptation earlier this year was fantastic. However I think this is one of those series that will have a broader appeal. It doesn't spend too much time focused on the science. Sure there is advanced technology, but it's used in a way as to be commonplace and not necessarily exceptional. This is Space Opera in the vein of Star Trek, Battlestar Galatica and Firefly.

At the core of this series is the conflicts between Earth, Mars and "The belt". Last year's Nemesis Games really ramped that conflict up to a whole new level making my expectations for this book incredibly high. This was my most anticipated book of the year, and I was really bummed when it got delayed. I'm happy to report that James S.A. Corey have once again delivered.

I've seen this series called a "trilogy of trilogies" which would make this the final book in the second trilogy. That seems like a good fit. Many of things set in motion by Cibola Burn and ramped up in Nemesis Games get resolved in this book, all while setting the stage for the next arc to come.

A quick glance at the table of contents may give you some pause. In the past the format has 2-5 PoV's with James Holden as the only recurring viewpoint. This book however has a whopping 19 PoV's (including the prologue/epilogue).

So has the Expanse gone full Game of Thrones? Not quite. I think this book tells a "bigger" story in terms of distance, and it's nice to have a boots on the ground view that doesn't introduce implausible reasons for a small number of characters to be everywhere. I thought it was well done.

Every chapter/PoV felt like a good addition to the story. Many of the PoV's are one-offs, and a few of them are only a handful of chapters, while Holden and two other characters (Pa and Filip) have a large number of chapters throughout. I'll be curious to see if they keep to this format in future books or if this one was a special exception. I typically prefer a smaller (~4) number of PoVs.

I often have a hard time deciding between a really good book (4-4.5 stars) and a really great book (5). I don't have a hard and fast criteria. The one sure fire sign is when I hate to put a book down and make excuses to read/listen longer each day. This book was definitely that. On the very first day I had to make time to squeeze in a few extra chapters because I hit a "no way I can stop here" moment.

The characters in this series are excellent. Avasarala continues to be my favorite, but I love the entire crew of the Rocinate, and Bobbie Draper nearly as much. The main antagonist in the book Marco Inaros can feel a bit 1 dimensional at times, but he still feels very real to me too. His motivations and actions make sense. He never feels like he's doing things simply for the sake of a good story. He's just a bit single minded.

Overall I really enjoyed this book, albeit slightly less than Nemesis Games. I'm really excited for Persepolis Rising (which will hopefully be out next year). In the meantime I can't wait to see Bobbie Draper on screen for the first time with Season 2 of the Expanse in February.

Choko says

*** 4.25 ***

Nothing lasts forever...

"...“We’re not people,” he said. “We’re the stories that people tell each other about us. Belters are crazy terrorists. Earthers are lazy gluttons. Martians are cogs in a great big machine.” “Men are fighters,” Naomi said, and then, her voice growing bleak. “Women are nurturing and sweet and they stay home with the kids. It’s always been like that. We always react to the stories about people, not who they really are.” “And look where it got us,” Holden said.”...”

This volume of the Expanse saga is all about changing and moving on, even when it is catastrophic and painful... Thus, the tone of this book is more subdued, the pace is slower, and we get many points of view with a lot of contemplation, some of them honest and some deluded by the desire for things and motivations to be different from what they are...

"...“Humanity had come as far as it had in a haze of war, sickness, violence, and genocide. History was drenched in blood. But it also had cooperation and kindness, generosity, intermarriage. The one didn’t come without the other, and Holden had to take comfort in that. The sense that however terrible

humanity's failings were, there was still a little more in them worth admiring."..."

The end of the previous book was shockingly painful and Earth has been deeply wounded and disfigured. The separation between the people from the old planets of Earth and Mars, and the belters of the stations around Jupiter is so significant, that the suffering of billions is a cause of celebration among the hereto neglected and forgotten citizens of the outer belt. Either side views the other as the enemy, loosing the representation of humanity in the eyes of its opponent...

Of course, we have the earnest Captain J. Holden to get on the job to fix or completely mess things up, which he has been known to do... It is kind of a gamble with him, since he tends to talk /act first and think later. Thank goodness Avasarala, the grandma with a potty mouth in charge of the UN, is there to keep him in line ?!

"...“Do we have a plan?”

“A couple.” Jim said.

“Either of them good?”

“Oh, no. Not at all. Just different flavors of terrible.”..."

I loved this book, because after what happened to Earth, the characters and we the readers, needed to take the time and orient ourselves in the changed by necessity political and economic climate of our universe. Everyone is fighting for survival, while the more politically savvy are arranging the new power structure. A smart and contemplative what if...

Now I wish you all Happy Reading and may you always find what you Need in the pages of a Good Book!

Renay says

IT WAS WORTH THE WAIT.

I'M NOT CRYING OVER ANYTHING. SHUT UP. YOU'RE CRYING.

Barnes & Noble review: <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/blog/sc...>

Mark Medina says

Stuck in the slow zone

I really liked all the books in this series up until now. Unfortunately, it has come to a grinding halt with this one. The things that made the series great are missing. Previously we had fast paced, almost breathless action. Frightening alien technology, and spooky detective Miller. Morally questionable leaders and political machinations worthy of game of thrones. Ethical dilemmas, mixed in with dramatic set piece battles and Bobbie in power armour beating the hell out of anything that moved. The tag line was 'interplanetary

adventure as it was meant to be written', and it was. Now, we have Holden video recording girls playing with marbles, while singing a song. Oh dear. The plot of this book seems to be spread awfully thin, to try and make a whole book. These events could have been dealt with by extending book 5. The pacing is slow, and not the kind of slow made up for by wonderful dialogue, or sparkling relationships between characters. There isn't that much dialogue, and not much happens for large parts of the book. I found myself skipping parts to get to the end. The final battle was also a bit anticlimactic. Hopefully the authors are saving the good stuff for the next parts of the series.

Kemper says

"My life has become a single on-going revelation that I haven't been cynical enough."

This is the kind of cheery thought one is apt to have when facing a narcissistic megalomaniac who has gained power by convincing some people that all their problems can be blamed on other groups while setting humanity on a self-destructive path it may not be able to recover from.

Geez, I thought I read science-fiction to escape reality.

The Expanse series took an epic dark turn in the last one, and this book is mainly about dealing with the fallout from that as well as trying to resolve the new threat that arose. The short term stakes involve a fight to control the outposts outside of Earth and Mars, but the longer view will determine nothing less than the fate of humanity itself.

Like the other books this has a self-contained story that features all kinds of political intrigue and strategy as well as a healthy dose of interesting characters riding around in spaceships being all **Pew-Pew!**. Which is what *The Expanse* does really well as a general rule. The new wrinkle here is that because this is the aftermath of catastrophic events that there's a tone of shock and even a certain wistfulness in this one. Things will never be what they once were and everyone knows it. This makes the conflict here literally a fight for the future, and all the characters are under enormous amounts of pressure because of it.

There was one element I wasn't entirely happy about. (view spoiler) On the other hand there's still story to be told so I'm trying to set aside any feelings of mild disappointment I have about the ending here because it's likely that there is more pay-off coming.

As always after finishing one of these I'm left wanting more and am already counting the days until the next book releases. It helps that we've got the second season of the TV show coming to fill the gap between books.

Niki Hawkes - The Obsessive Bookseller says

[3.5 stars] Babylon's Ashes is what I'm calling the "stepping stone" novel of the series. Its purpose was to wrap up fallout from the events that happened in the amazingness that was Nemesis Games and set up for what's to come in Persepolis Rising (which doesn't have a release date yet, but I'm wagering sometime around December 2017). Because it felt more like a transition novel, I didn't rate it quite as highly as others in the series. Comparatively, especially coming off of Nemesis Games (possibly my favorite of the series),

Babylon's Ashes had nothing particularly earth-shattering about it. There was definite plot progression, and a few poignant moments, but overall it was a little underwhelming. I also had a difficult time focusing at the beginning until the story really got going, which is unusual.

To clarify – I think Babylon's Ashes was an important chapter in the saga but it didn't bring as much action and excitement as its predecessors. What it did bring was lots of good character interactions and, as exciting as the plot can get, it's these well developed, relatable characters who keep me coming back for more. My favorite character has always been Avasarala (a snarky politician who always says what she thinks – whom incidentally, I was thrilled to see introduced earlier in the TV series), but there are many great ones to choose from. Any one of them could rank as my favorite depending on the day.

So, overall, compared to most books, Babylon's Ashes was a knockout. Compared to The Expanse series as a whole, it was a little tame. I still love the series though – reading a new Expanse novel feels like coming home. I can't wait to see what happens next!

Other books you might like:

Foreigner – C.J. Cherryh

Grimspace – Ann Aguirre

Trading in Danger – Elizabeth Moon

Beholder's Eye – Julie E. Czerneda

Old Man's War – John Scalzi

Via The Obsessive Bookseller at www.NikiHawkes.com

Veronique says

4.5

“Do we have a plan?” “A couple,” Jim said. “Either of them good?” “Oh, no. Not at all. Just different flavors of terrible.”

As many have commented, this instalment felt like a straight continuation of the previous book. Nothing wrong with that mind you. On the contrary, I very much enjoyed it :O)

The authors bring back characters from all the previous novels in this narration, some only for a chapter or two, but all offering important points of view of the mess that is the Solar system: Earth is literally 'dying' and the consequent threat to the whole of humanity is growing at an alarming rate. All this due to the obtuseness and hunger for power of one man, and the blindness of many following him, believing they will make things better for themselves!!! Stupid and yet so human, sadly.

If some characters keep re-doing the same thing time and time again hoping for a different result (definition of madness), others do learn and move on. Holden, Pa, Filip, but I was particularly impressed by what Corey does with Clarissa Mao. I hated her in Abaddon's Gate and yet ended up warming up to her. Quite a feat! Avasarala was as brilliantly acidic as usual and Amos as 'adorable' as this quote clarifies - *“Because he's Amos. He's like a pit bull. You know he could tear your throat out, but he's loyal to a fault and you just want to hug him”*. :O)

I do love this series and cannot wait for the next book.

Lori says

[
Oh, that poor bear! I know millions dead, the earth dead and millions more will die slowly. The image of that bear sticks. I'm not sure there would be wilderness and wildlife in the world that overpopulated. Hey, why the news shows pictures of people's pets during a disaster. A cocker spaniel stuck the porch of a flooded home. Donations go up.

I'm enjoying this series, but I think they need to move forward. This is not the first round of the love triangle with Earth, Mars and the B

Bradley says

Reading this series is always like coming home to a really wonderful and wonderfully fucked up family. You know, the kind that always seems to sink right into the heart of the whole solar-system's problems and even manages to be held responsible for it's civil war.

Some might even go so far as to indirectly link these guys to the tragedy that befell Earth. I know I would. But I'm kinda hard on my family.

Seriously, these books are great, but I think this one was a huge step in a great direction that I've been half-expecting since the very first in the series. James Holden is a real character. He keeps opening his mouth. And one of these days, someone's going to hold to him.

President Holden. Jeeeezzuuuuuuussssss.

And then there were the deaths. The big one was surprising and sad. I always liked him.

The plot was pretty fantastic and full of action and who doesn't love BOBBIE in the hot seat? Wowie! And even a certain transhuman working closely with the crew. It's like a who's who of my favorite characters all working through dire hells. So nice.

This book clears up so much of the craziness that blew up in the previous one. That setup was amazing, but this one equally so. I can't believe just how crazy the solar system had gotten. :)

If any of you haven't picked these books up yet, then I'm just plain sorry for you. :) These are the gold-standard for system-wide (and now galactic) space-opera. :) It's all so close enough to us that we can taste it. :) Still great stuff.

Nathaniel says

Two stars is not awful, but it's a definite step down from the ratings I gave to earlier books in the series like *Cibola Burn* and *Nemesis Games*. So was this book, sadly. It's not *bad*, but it's not nearly as good as I was hoping for.

What went wrong?

1. The villain is lame

Marko is the bad guy. In the last book, he destroyed the Earth and killed 15,000,000,000 human beings. In this book, he is the world's least competent military commander and basically just an insecure, loser ex-boyfriend. He doesn't have a single tactical insight, he has literally no strategy, he loses every single engagement, he spends quite a lot of time hiding out in his cabin because he can't deal with his own failures, and in the climactic final battle scene he is defeated without firing a shot. (Turns out he was a puppet, more or less, of someone who is actually a credible threat, but they barely show up at all in this book; not even enough for decent foreshadowing.) You can't build a strong book on a weak antagonist, and I can't recall ever reading of such a pathetic excuse for a villain outside of farce.

2. The good guys are lame

With such an incompetent, impotent bad guy there's really nothing for the good guys to do. A couple of battle scenes that *could* have been awesome feel *pro forma* because the stakes are so low. Are we battling for the fate of humanity? Or just trying to deal with Naomi's loser ex-boyfriend stalking her? The fact that you can't really be sure says just how badly Marko warps this book. Holden's really big character breakthrough is uploading cute videos to (the modern equivalent of) YouTube. And, no, I'm not kidding. That's it.

3. The theme is childish

My son's third grade had a play this week. It was about pirates stealing pinatas and forgiveness and brushing your teeth. That's about the level of sophistication in the "people are tribal and demonize other groups" theme in this book. Don't get me wrong: this is true. But it's presented in such a banal, uninteresting, and cartoonish way in this book that it's cringe-inducing. (See above, re: Holden's amateur videos to humanize Belters to Earthers so they will forgive having half their population murdered and their planet destroyed.)

4. The tone is totally wrong

Stuff gets blown up in sci-fi all the time, sometimes entire planets. But in the context of *The Expanse*, bombarding the Earth was *huge*. And the response of the characters in this book is tiny. Partially this is just a repeat of issue #1: it turns out the guy who blew up the Earth is an incompetent loser who never wins another battle. By making him the focus of the book, it turns the devastation of Earth into kind of a sad joke. In addition, none of the bad guys who turn good (I'm oversimplifying) have an ounce of remorse for what they've done. One apologizes to Chrisjen at the end, but it's lame and only for killing her husband. (And son. Never mind 15,000,000,000 other people.) And then Chrisjen is all "It's OK, I understand. We can't hold grudges." This doesn't work. You can't have Bob rape Sue to death and then say the "magic word" (in this book it's "whoops") to Sue's parents and they all sing Kumbaya and that's it. Reconciliation is great, but it has to fit. It didn't. Even a little bit.

There's also the painfully awkward and inappropriate parallels between Marko and the Belters on the one hand and Osama Bin Laden and Muslims on the other. The political analogy doesn't really fit at all, but some specific scenes in the book (especially when Marko shows off traditional Afghan clothes and states he's going to model his military on their tactics) seem to really want to draw that connection. Well, it's a bad one. Bin Laden killed 3,000 people. He didn't wipe out half of humanity, ruin the Earth's ecosystems (all of them), and potentially consign the *entire human race* to starvation and ultimate extinction. The political angle seems to be: "Americans should go easy on Muslims who supported Bin Laden because the West is an evil empire" but it doesn't work because (in addition to Marko being worse than Bin Laden) most Muslims (at least, those outside the Palestinian territories) rejected Bin Laden and his tactics long before his death. In other words: I *already* don't have a problem with Islam. I *do* have a problem with Belters.

For example, the percent of the population with a favorable opinion of Al Qaeda was 21%, 15%, 13%, 6%, and 2% respectively in Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan, Turkey, and Lebanon just before he was killed.. The percent of the population that rejected killing civilians in suicide bombings under *any* circumstances was 87%, 74%, 65% in Pakistan, Turkey, and Indonesia (also from Pew). By contrast, Marko enjoyed the support of 1/2 the Belters for his (far worse) terrorism, and even the "moderates" in the book never really decried the attack on Earth. If the Belters are supposed to be the political analogs of real-world Muslims, that's a pretty horrific view of Muslims.

(If you want another view of how messed up the politics in this book are, consider this: Holden immediately realizes that it is vitally important to get *Earthers* (half of whom have been killed) to empathize with *Belters* (half of whom are celebrating the *largest mass murder in human history*), but it never occurs to anyone in the book that maybe it's the Belters who need to learn some empathy for the Earthers after, you know, dancing on the graves of **fifteen billion innocent men, women, and children**. The first-world self-flagellation is painfully overplayed.)

In short: the tone of this book is totally messed up on its own right, and is even worse if you try to read it as a political analogy. (And hey: maybe you shouldn't! I'd rather not. In which case: maybe don't play up that angle quite so much?)

5. Plot holes are huge

What is the #1 threat to Belters? They can't live in high-G, and so a world full of earth-like planets is one that will leave them behind. What is the most important feature of space-combat in this setting? The ability to withstand prolonged exposure to high-G.

So would someone tell me *how the hell* Belters somehow end up a formidable threat in space battles? Amazingly and utterly ridiculously, the only person in this book to suffer any ill-effects from high-g *is an Earther*.

The idea that Belters are simultaneously too frail to survive 1-g and yet somehow able to go toe-to-toe against Earthers and Martians in sustained, high-g space combat is farcical.

The long-term solution to this problem is also rather *not* (a solution, that is.) Holden decides to give the Belters complete and total authority over all the rest of humanity, with basically total veto rights on which colonies live and which starve to death. Because, hey, turning over the fate of earth-dwelling humans to an unaccountable assortment of terrorists who are only marginally guilty for an atrocity so immense and scope that all other mass-murders pale before it *might* not actually be the wisest course of action. But hey, what do I know?

So, what went right?

Well, Marko's not around, so that's good. (It's almost inevitable that they're going to bring him back, however, and I'm already cursing the day when his incompetent, bumbling ass comes back on-screen.)

They also resolved the whole Belter Rebellion. That's good, too. Maybe we can get back to, I dunno, alien technology that somehow opened a gateway to 1,100 new worlds? Or the alien menace that somehow killed that alien superpower, and what it has in store for Earth? Or, you know, anything that "The Expanse" is actually supposed to be about at this point? (This entire trilogy feels like it should have been an optional tie-in, like the novellas, rather than core to the plot.)

I also really, really, *really* loved the subplot about the researcher on Ganymede. That was amazing, and I loved it so, so much. It was, by far, the best part of the novel.

Finally, the writing was quite good. I feel like it's getting better as we go. There were quite a few turns of phrase or images or metaphors where I was like, "That was quite nice."

So--for that reason--I'm going to stick around for the next book. But not with anywhere near the excitement I had going into this one.

Gary says

Babylon's Ashes has an unusual structure for an Expanse novel, even if you factor in the unusual structure of the previous novel, Nemesis Games. While Nemesis Games is built around a single event that occurs about halfway through, much of the first half is tied to the intriguing mystery that leads to it. There is also the added novelty of the POV chapters including all the members of the Roci, and the opportunity to snatch a glimpse of their inner lives as individuals, rather than simply understanding them from Holden's (and others') perspective. Babylon's Ashes widens the scope even further; no fewer than 18 POV characters are given one or more chapters, from series mainstays (Bobbie, Avasarala, Fred Johnson) to one-off heroes from the previous novels to villains to characters that hung around the periphery of the series to all-new characters. Differing perspectives are central to the whole tapestry of The Expanse, but while it's nice to catch up with Prax and Anna and get a closer look at some of the series' tertiary characters, a huge chunk of the book is eaten up by jumping around from character to character and just relaying their experiences or getting their perspective on events rather than moving forward with any sort of plot.

Not that the authors Corey are just diddling about: an event as shattering as the one in Nemesis Games requires that appropriate attention be paid to its aftermath, especially the personal toll it exacts on everyone – Belter, Inner, Free Navy alike. The novel succeeds in this regard, often brilliantly, but can also be exhausting. By the time the action and tension pick up and some semblance of plot arrives beyond the OPA and the Inner planet authorities fishing around for the right response to the threat the Free Navy poses, we are nearly two-thirds of a patience-straining way through the novel's length. That patience is rewarded – the climactic “desperate wing-and-a-prayer gambit” that has become a staple of the series is one of the most nerve-wracking and nail-biting that Abraham and Franck have devised.

At this point in the series, I could read about these people doing their laundry for two hours without losing interest, so any complaints are qualified by the goodwill the series has engendered. Babylon's Ashes is my least favorite Expanse novel, yet still essential.

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

4 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2016/12/13/...>

The Expanse has become one of my favorite series in recent years, and it is no exaggeration to say that it has only gotten better with every new book. Of course, the one problem with this pattern is that it works much like gravity—what goes up must come down, after all. And yet, I say this doesn't necessarily have to be a bad thing. In fact, I'd argue that after a major plot event, it's important to dial things back a bit in order to let your characters regroup, refocus, and rebuild (not to mention give time for the reader to digest the latest bombshell) and this is exactly the way I would describe the circumstances surrounding Babylon's Ashes.

This sixth installment of the series is the immediate follow-up to *Nemesis Games*, directly addressing the events that happened in that book, so I would strongly recommend catching up before reading this review or others to avoid possible spoilers. If you've read the last novel though, then you'll know that a new villain has come onto the scene in the form of the Free Navy, a violent group of rebels fighting in the name of Belters (a term that describes people born in or beyond the Asteroid Belt, a generally exploited and oppressed working class). Their leader, the charismatic Marco Inaros has just orchestrated the biggest, most devastating attack on Earth, killing millions. In the aftermath, he's sowing even more chaos by setting his ragtag fleet on the vulnerable colony ships traveling through the ring gates to the new worlds on the other side.

It's basically a nightmare scenario for Earth and its allies, who are still trying to help survivors and prevent more from dying due to the complete breakdown of infrastructure and governance. In their desperation, they reach out to James Holden, a man who in the past has been as much help to them as a hindrance, but the times are dire and they need all the support they can get. Captain Holden and the crew of the fast-attack ship *Rocinante* have a good track record of completing many dangerous missions and then surviving to tell the tale, so now they are being assigned one more: to break through to Medina Station at the entrance of the gate network and prevent it from falling to the forces of the Free Navy.

So how do you follow up a book like *Nemesis Games*, which is probably my favorite novel of the Expanse series so far? Well, I knew it was going to be tough. That's why I wasn't surprised when *Babylon's Ashes* took a step back from the action, using this installment as an opportunity to take a breather, looking at where everything is and where everyone stands. That's not to say *Babylon's Ashes* wasn't a great book, because it was. However, its focus and pacing were also decidedly less intense and immediate. The first half was heavily dominated by system politics and character relationships.

Babylon's Ashes also broke away from the usual tradition of following a set number of POVs (usually four, I believe), branching out instead to cover a greater number of character perspectives, many of whom we've seen before in the previous installments. There were pros and cons to this. From a positive standpoint, this opened up the book to greater possibilities. We got to see the solar system through many more pairs of eyes, getting a fuller sense of the political climate and state of affairs in the wake of the Earth attack. In addition, favorite characters like Chrisjen Avasarala, Clarissa Mao, and Bobbie Draper get a chance to chime in now and then with their own chapters. However, as a counterbalance to this, the greater number of POVs also served to dilute the focus of the main situation and arguably made the first half of the book a less emotionally engaging experience.

In fact, it wasn't until the halfway point where something finally happened to really shake me up. It was a

good reminder that things in the Expanse universe are always in motion, always changing. Important people die, major worlds are decimated, and yet the characters must evolve and adapt to survive the new reality. There's really nothing negative I have to say about this book, other than the fact that as a villain, Marco was kind of wasted. Having learned nothing from the last book, he falls into the same predictable pattern, and it's always a little disappointing to see a bad guy who suffers repeatedly from the same fatal flaw.

It will be interesting to see where the events of Babylon's Ashes will take us next. Another chapter in the ongoing saga of Jim Holden and the Rocinante has come to an end, and if there's one truth I have learned from my experience with the last six books, it's that anything can happen in The Expanse, anything at all, and that is why I love this series.
