



## Twelve Kings in Sharakhai

*Bradley P. Beaulieu*

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**Twelve Kings in Sharakhai** Bradley P. Beaulieu

The first book in the Song of Shattered Sands trilogy—an epic fantasy in the vein of *A Thousand and One Nights*.

In the city of Sharakhai, Çeda fights in the pits to scrape by a living. She, like so many in the city, pray for the downfall of the cruel, immortal Kings of Sharakhai. Then on the holy night when the powerful yet wretched creatures known as the Asirim wander the city and take tribute in order to protect the Kings, one of them tells Çeda the origin of their dark bargain. And this dangerous secret may be the very key she needs to throw off the iron grip the Kings have had over Sharakhai...

## Twelve Kings in Sharakhai Details

Date : Published September 1st 2015 by DAW

ISBN :

Author : Bradley P. Beaulieu

Format : Kindle Edition 400 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Epic Fantasy, Fiction, High Fantasy, Did Not Finish

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# From Reader Review Twelve Kings in Sharakhai for online ebook

## Karina Read says

Twelve Kings by Bradley P Beaulieu is the first book in a six book epic fantasy series set in the great city of Sharakai, deep in the heart of an oppressive desert landscape. This is the kind of fantasy I've been searching for. A world of sand dunes, fighting pits & kings; tribes, waking gods & monsters. Sex, lies, betrayals: determination, ruthlessness, skill all together makes Twelve Kings one of my favourite reads.

It is wonderful. and I'll tell you why.

Now, I'm the first to admit that I enjoy the traditional medieval Europe sword & sorcery fantasy setting. It's comfortable, familiar. Yet this new (to me!) desert setting really fascinated me. Beaulieu's descriptions of clothing, food and tradition were luscious, sumptuous and kind of breathtaking. The detail was thoroughly immersive without having large paragraphs of information dumping. I felt like I was wandering the very streets the characters tread, I could feel the hot dry air prickle my neck. The whole experience was completely addictive. And that's before we begin to unravel the mysteries hinted at from the first page.

We mainly follow Ceda, a fantastic pit fighter who battles under the guise of the White Wolf to earn money while she tries to fulfil her vow to kill the Twelve Kings of Sharakai. I really enjoyed the writing style, I found it very engaging and it masterfully built tension as the story progressed and the stakes got higher. The varied sentence structures were particularly good at this in the fight scenes. Unusually for me, I didn't hate reading the flashback chapters. Normally I dislike the inclusion of flashbacks or '5 years earlier...' chapters as I find that they halt the pace of the 'present day' narrative but surprisingly this was not the case in Twelve Kings. I found that they were not only necessary to the plot but remained interesting. A new experience for me!

This is quite a character driven fantasy story which I love (hello, Robin Hobb) and the characters here are diverse and complex. Wholly worth my time and patience. Despite some of them coming from similar backgrounds they all had their own stories that shaped their behaviours and beliefs in a realistic way. I liked that we found out about certain events as the story went on rather as suddenly some behaviours made much more sense and it was fun to connect the dots. I particularly enjoyed reading events unfurl and develop from the different 'camps' – the Kings, the Moonless Host, Ceda and Ramahd. I won't explain the motivations and characteristics of these different point of views in order to avoid spoilers, but I will say that I am especially interested to watch Ramahd's storyline progress.

This brings me to my only niggle. Around the middle of the book there was a big revelation for Ceda. This comes after a really interesting chapter with Ramahd where we learn his real motives behind being in Sharakai. The pace was swimming along nicely and I was so ready to see these narratives intertwine at the same pace. Yet, all of a sudden we go to Ceda studying old texts for a few chapters and there are a few time jumps while a couple of weeks pass by. We don't see/hear from him again for a while and I missed him. I was so intrigued by his story and couldn't wait to see him kick off his mission in earnest. I felt it was a little jarring to introduce such a juicy storyline at an integral moment and then put it on a back-burner – & then not expand on Ceda's 'she knew what she needed to do' revelation. Not for a while at least. I felt this let the pace drop, which in the middle of a 580 page book isn't great. However, it soon picked up again and I was invested enough in all of the characters to still turn the pages avidly.

I must admit I am also slightly concerned about Emre. I really like him as a character but I feel like he

blatantly fits a common trope. The one of the 'Good Guy' sucked into controversial/bad actions due to a traumatic past event and insecure feelings etc... I fear I can predict how his story will play out which is a bit disappointing in the first of a six book series. However, I must keep some faith in Beaulieu's writing, he may totally surprise me and twist the trope on its head. I would like that. Although if I had to choose between male leads, I'd pick Ramahd hands down. He is more interesting and more mature. Emre isn't juvenile as such, I just feel that despite all he has gone through he still has a lot of growing up to do. Don't get me wrong though, it's done really well. It's obvious that Beaulieu wants Emre to be like that, I just hope he doesn't continue to fit that trope so well as the series progresses.

But wait, there's more good stuff. I like the murky depths of all these characters. None of them are wholly good, they've all done terrible things and it's just seen as part of their life. There is no 'golden' character that is a shining beacon of goodness which I liked. In some parts it's difficult to know whose side you want to be on, which speaks volumes for Beaulieu's excellent characterisations. I like how dark and twisty the Kings are, I can't wait to discover more about some of them, learn what makes them tick. Something is afoot and I need to know what it is. Another favourite fantasy element of mine is having real gods. Most fantasy worlds have deities whose names the characters use to curse with, or that embody personality traits in them, but I LOVE it when they are actually real and can walk amongst them. We have that here and ooh I am so ready for more. Only two were glimpsed in this first book, a little taster of what's to come I hope! And of course, there is magic. It hasn't been explored too much, naturally something is keeping the Kings alive for hundreds of years and there's something in Saliah's chiming tree but other than that we've only really seen a show of blood magic. Which is interesting, but I'm looking forward to reading more.

Anyway, what are you waiting for? Go read this book!

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### **Marielle says**

I finished this book a month ago and I forgot to leave my thoughts besides a rating. It is quickly becoming hazy so without further ado I'd like you to know I truly enjoyed this book!

I love book with strong female lead characters and even better if they know how to kick ass! I connected to Ceda quickly and love how she can fight!

So we have a strong woman, an intriguing story, an amazing desert city, and secrets.... together they make a fantastic book!

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### **Michael says**

I reserve my 5-star ratings for a VERY few books on the tip-top of my all-time favorite's list, so don't let the lack of a 5th star mislead you. This book was a joy to read and Twelve Kings in Sharakhai is my favorite Bradley P. Beaulieu to date.

Çeda is a wonderful protagonist--beautiful, capable and I enjoyed traveling with her through the sun-scorched streets of Sharakhai while she searches for clues to her past and future.

I highly recommend this book, and predict it will elevate Brad's already successful career.

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## Kevin Xu says

One of the best book I have read in years. Even though this book has flashbacks, which I don't like, I felt like it really adds on to the story since basically the whole book is trying to figure out/uncover the main character's past history.

P. S. I wish more people would read the book.

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## Bradley says

Hi everyone! Please Like this review. I'll be using it to post news about the book.

Please like this review. I'll be using it for various updates as the book heads toward release and beyond!

**Dec 28th, 2016** - With Blood Upon the Sand has ARCs (Advanced Reader Copies). Find out more at my blog. If you're a reviewer and would like a review copy of the book, please send me your name and the site you review for and I'll do my best to get you a copy. NetGalley should have it up next week, and you can request a copy there as well once it's available.

**Oct 19th,2016** - If you're curious to learn a bit more about the series, here's a fun YouTube video that I recorded with Ezekiel Boone (The Hatching) and Mark Stay from Gollancz!

**Oct 19th,2016** - This is and update for Book Two, With Blood Upon the Sand. I'll update here a few more times, but if you want to keep up with news on the second book, please go to its Goodreads page and mark it as Want to read (or what have you).

At this point, we're still on schedule for a February release of With Blood Upon the Sand. The near-final book has been turned in and is being copy edited. I expect to have something back in the next month or so, and then I need to turn around edits quickly for the final run-up to production.

We're also nearing the final cover design. The artwork itself was turned in a while ago, and the artist, I think it's safe to share at this point, is Donato Giancola! It's some pretty stunning artwork, and I can't wait to get it out there for you to see. Hopefully soon!

More as I have it!

**March 1, 2016** - MAPS! If anyone is interested in maps for Twelve Kings, here's the first of two we'll be putting out: <http://quillings.com/fiction/twelve-kings-in-sharakhai/maps-of-the-song-of-the-shattered-sands/>

Twelve Kings has hit twenty-four Best of 2015 lists!

- Amazon's Best of 2015 in Fantasy and Sci-Fi
- B&N Sci-Fi and Fantasy Blog Best of 2015
- BuzzFeed's Best Fantasy of 2015
- SciFiNow's 20 Books You Should Have Read in 2015

- Fantasy Faction's Top 15 Books of 2015
- Nerdmuch's Top 23 Fantasy Books in 2015
- Speculative Book Review's Top Book of 2015
- The Speculative Herald's Best of 2015
- SFFWorld's Best Fantasy and Horror of 2015
- BestFantasyBooks' Top 25 Fantasy Books of 2015
- Bookworm Blues Best of 2015
- Fantasy Book Critic's Top Reads of 2015
- Rob's Blog o' Stuff
- Over the Effing Rainbow's Best of 2015
- The Passionate Foodie's Best of 2015
- Quill to Live Best of 2015
- Bibliotropic's Top Ten SFF Books of 2015
- Smorgasbord Fantasia's Best of 2015
- Bitten by a Radioactive Book's Top Ten of 2015
- Book Frivolity's Top Ten Fantasy Books of 2015
- Lynn's Books Best The Best of the Best of the Best 2015
- Fantasy Book Collector's Top Fantasy Book of 2015 / Male Author
- Galleywampus Favorite Books of 2015
- The Grimdark Files Top 5 Reads of 2015

A few quick notes:

A lot of folks have asked how to pronounce Çeda's name. It's CHAY-da, like mesa, or Aveda.

A new prequel novel is coming for the Shattered Sands series. OF SAND AND MALICE MADE will be released by DAW Books in September of 2016. It shows Çeda as a young woman a few years before TWELVE KINGS IN SHARAKHAI begins. Here's the description:

*Çeda, the heroine of the widely anticipated, just-released novel TWELVE KINGS IN SHARAKHAI, is the youngest pit fighter in the history of the great desert city of Sharakhai. In this prequel, she has already made her name in the arena as the fearsome, undefeated White Wolf; none but her closest friends and allies know her true identity. But this all changes when she crosses the path of Rümayesh, an ehrekh, a sadistic creature forged long ago by the god of chaos. The ehrekh are usually desert dwellers, but this one lurks in the dark corners of Sharakhai, toying with and preying on humans. As Rümayesh works to unmask the White Wolf and claim Çeda for her own, Çeda's struggle becomes a battle for her very soul. This spellbinding tale is sure to strike a chord with readers of Peter V. Brett, Brent Weeks, and Trudi Canavan—as well as fans of TWELVE KINGS IN SHARAKHAI who are eagerly awaiting book two.*

I'm now hard at work on Book 2 of the series, tentatively titled WITH BLOOD UPON THE SAND. The Song of the Shattered Sands is planned as a six-book series. I may also have additional projects, like short stories along the way.

If you want to read more about Çeda, you can pick up a copy of the Blackguards anthology from Ragnarok Publications, which includes my story "Irindai," a tale about Çeda before Twelve Kings in Sharakhai begins.

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## Mayim de Vries says

*“This I vow, O Kings.” She did not whisper; she spoke plainly and clearly, as if the Kings were standing there before her. “I am coming for you. I am coming for you one and all.”*

**You know me, I am the weird one. I love books nobody likes and hate books everybody loves. And this one is not an exception to this rule.**

The first thing is that I must have a **soft spot for desert cities settings** (as you'd know if you remember my love for the City of Bones). Enter **Sharakhai, Shangazi Desert 's amber jewel, an oasis that bloomed on the sea of sands**. If the image of a desert brings to your mind caravans of camels and wading through the dunes, forget it. Here, people sail the desert (how incredibly fantastic is that?!). Also, since Dune, if not before, there has been a certain stereotypical way of presenting this kind of milieu roughly mimicking what we can generally call an Arabic/Islamic culture. You will not find this in the Twelve Kings. What Mr Beaulieu does here is **truly original**. I grant you there are some Arabic sounding names, and elements of food or garments, but that is about it. The theological, legal, societal and cultural framework is anything but. **The worldbuilding is sumptuous, detailed and so imaginative; I can see that it might be too much for some readers, but I relished meticulous worldbuilding and soaked up all the details like a sponge.**

Now, in the very heart of Sharakhai, stand the **twelve palaces of Tauriyat where the twelve kings, one for each of the twelve desert tribes, live and rule the city through their harsh laws** of Kannan enforced by one hundred and forty-four (do your maths!) black-clad Blade Maidens with their deadly ebon blades. This, and their special abilities, each unique for given king. For these kings are ancient and powerful. And when I write ancient, do not conjure an image of a white-haired, bearded grandfather on a throne. Instead imagine someone who looks about forty, and in reality is over four hundred years old wielding magic that borders on the divine.

**On the other side, there is one woman. Çedaminh Ahyanesh'ala**, daughter of Ayanesh Ishaq'ava and unknown father but the question of whose child she truly is is neither easy nor straightforward.

When we meet her, all we know is that she is a relatively skilled fighter, leads a double life but prefers it to be on the quiet ends of shady businesses and keeps to herself. We also know that her mother, for reasons unknown hated the kings with the vehemence that led her to be hanged for a failed assassination attempt when Çeda was still a small and relatively innocent girl. A before and after moment for her determining the course of her life.

**Oh, right, you want to say, so it is a revenge kind of book. Yes and no.** In theory, there are two tropes mixed in here: the trope of vengeance and the trope of finding the truth. The truth, however, is only means to bringing justice and justice serves as an excuse to have the righteous retribution. It is also **a book about memory and how things are remembered (not)**. This motif is exercised in a masterful way that reminded me of the City of Stairs.

Mind you, history is more than a mere sum of past events. Since there usually is a number of allowed, legitimate, 'objective' and more or less appropriate ways to remember, normally the historical narrative arises organically and simultaneously in different variants. These narratives by defining, redefining and maintaining collective memories, constitute a backbone of a salient group self-identity appropriated for political purposes. The relevance of a managed historical memory to power is quite straightforward. Already in his prophetic 1984 George Orwell showed that he who shapes memories of the past holds real power over

both present and future. Indeed, memory has become one of the most feasible means of exercising political power in the world. The control over memories enables proper control over the sphere of public opinion, not only within one community, but also in the international sphere. Therefore, from the political point of view, it is not without significance **what people, on a mass scale, remember and in what way.**

Twelve Kings tells **a story of manufactured and maintained memories.** A book about lies, about history formed of carefully cultivated falseness, grand tapestry of political, and cultural schemes utterly naked of the truth and integrity. I have read in other reviews that it is not plausible to do this but just think **how easy it is to erase the truth and then write it anew** in a world where illiteracy is high and only few can write and read, in a strictly regulated hierarchical society without the liberties, the benefit of free speech or the social media effect? **The answer is: Frighteningly easy.** (On the side note: This novel also made me reflect on our own fake news civilisation of information wars.)

In terms of design, you will find three different POVs in the novel: Çeda's, own, her flatmate's/one-time lover's/frined's/soulmate's/it's complicated called Emre, and Ramahd shan Amansir's, a lord from Qaimir sworn to avenge the murder of his wife and daughter. Of these, Çeda's chapters are the more frequent but the other two points of that triangle are vital to the story in their own way, particularly that none of these narrators share the same goals. I write **'triangle' not because there is a standard romantic subplot (there kind of is but in a very delicate way, Emre is your boy next door while Ramahd is a Prince Darkly Charming), but because you will find tensions between these protagonists.**

Additionally, Çeda's **narrative swings between the now and the then**, which is a tool quite frequently employed by many writers, and most famously by Mark Lawrence. It tends to irritate me if it is done purely for the sake of bowing to certain flash trends in fantasy-writing that tend to come and go. Or if it is a crude way to deliver some crucial plot-related information buried in the past. In this book, **I didn't mind the retrospections so much because they were not meant to reveal but rather to provide background and context.** The adult Çeda is no more smart or knowing than the young Çeda but some of the seemingly unimportant events, meetings or figures from her past help us to understand why she is the way she is and explain the idiosyncrasies of her behaviour.

I also like the way characters are built and developed in this novel. When we meet Çeda, she has done virtually nothing to fulfil her promise to avenge her mother's death. The way her **character is built and then guided through the maze of plot twists** shows her lost and bewildered, without super prowess in any area, not always victorious, and yet not defined by her flaws or the flaw that would serve as a springboard for some spectacular character breakthrough. **The author is subtle and patient** in this regard. Another thing that **makes it easy to bond with Çeda is that she is terribly lonely.** Those that want to be a part of her life would be either liabilities or potential distractions. Those she would like to have by her side, for different reasons cannot walk her path. And as she grows from a girl entirely unprepared for unravelling mysteries to a woman orchestrating conspiracies, she perseveres not because she has some special abilities but because she is driven. Not even to the point of obsession, like her mother, but strongly enough not to give up half-way through.

And she faces a formidable enemy, you have to admit. One person against twelve individuals backed by the whole system of corrupt power, the more interesting because the Kings are not your typical sinister moustache twirling kind of antagonist. It is the system that is oppressive not the individual selves per se; it is the source of King's power that is revolting, their rationale for grasping it might be even laudable. How do you defeat an opponent like this? Naturally, from within. But the Kings know more than Çeda imagines.

*"Carefully, Çeda. Step very carefully indeed."*



Granted, **if you like non-stop action, this book is not for you. But if you can appreciate the slowly rising tension, the incrementally building pressure, the picture that starts simple enough but with each sentence and with each chapter gains depths** of a panoply of shadows among the desert dunes, like me, you will not be able to stop reading. There are the awesome **Blade Maidens**, a mix between a sisterhood of assassins and a religious sect. The **Moonless Host of revolutionaries** coming from all the twelve tribes that once ruled the Shangazi Desert. The incredible **blooming fields of adichara**, a twisted and wickedly thorned plant that, blooms only at night. The **frightening asirim**, beings that hunt for souls (and bodies) during the night of Beht Zha'ir that comes about every six weeks when the twin moons are full (that is to say, quite frequently, I'd rather not pay my taxes in flesh and bone but hey, who cannot say that living in London or New York does not present health and safety hazards) but for this price, defending the city against its many foes. **Pit fights, blood magic, poems and visions, and sand skateboarding (!), and many other incredible things every fantasy-lover will just adore.**

This is an opening to rather long series and at the same time a lifetime wrapped into a handful of weeks. **Things are both discovered and lost, protagonists morph and solidify only to be shattered, the intrigue is sketched in a cunning way so that you are left being unsure why is the evilest of them all and who to ally yourself with.**

I will surely continue this stupendous series whose only shortcoming stems from the fact that it will have been finished only in 2021 (the pain...).

**Note on the rating: rounded up to 5 stars because I feel the book is underrated.**

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Also in the series:

2. With Blood Upon the Sand
3. A Veil of Spears RTC
4. Beneath the Twisted Trees RTC
5. When Jackals Storm the Walls RTC
6. A Desert Torn Asunder RTC

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**\*?Nani\*? says**

?Desert setting.

?Sinister immortals.

?Blade Maidens. Blade maidens!

?Monstrous creatures.

?Secrets, revenge and glorious battles.

I think I've heard enough.

The desert fantasy I've been waiting for has finally landed on my lap.

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## Lee says

I am really not sure if I want to carry on with this series. Definitely split 50/50 on it. A pretty solid three stars, mainly because of the world building. To be honest, I really didn't gel with the characters and at times the writing style annoyed bored me. I felt it was a little too long and that there really wasn't enough plot growth for such a large book. At 25% shorter, the pacing would have felt better.

The premise behind the story, trying to bring down the ruling 12 kings is good and the way it can be done works well and the author does spend a fair bit of time developing the main characters personalities, but I have to say that I just felt like I was ambling along with it. Everything kind of went along and we finally came to the end, which certainly picked up the action, but it was a LONG road to get there.

I will probably wait until I read some other friends reviews on whether the second book is much better than the first, otherwise this will most likely a series that gets put on the indefinite to read at some time in my life list.

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## Bob Milne says

Being a late-comer to the Lays of Anuskaya (the trilogy is still on my TBR list), Twelve Kings in Sharakhai serves as my first real introduction to the work of Bradley P. Beaulieu - and I was not disappointed.

Initially, I was a bit hesitant about the book, based not on Beaulieu's reputation, but on the book's setting. I'm a traditionalist at heart, with a love for the sprawling forests and towering mountains of epic fantasy, so the recent trend towards desert fantasy has presented something of a challenge. Fortunately, Beaulieu knows precisely what to do with that setting, and exactly how to develop it.

The world-building here is quite remarkable - beginning with the sand-locked ports. Yes, he has developed an entire system of sand-sailing ships that skim across the desert, tacking against the wind, and riding out the storms. He pockets the desert with magical oases, populates them trees and flowers that have almost magical herbal properties, and protects them with a mysterious monster known as the asir. As for Sharakhai, it is a proper city, complete with slums, bazaars, royal gardens, fighting pits, and even hilltop castles. It's a setting that's entirely new, but which still feels familiar. In terms of culture, politics, and mythology, the world-building is equally remarkable. It takes a while for those aspects to really develop, but the mystery of the Twelve Kings and their monstrous asir carries much of the story, and I quite liked the slow reveal of the humanity beneath the legends.

World-building aside, this is Çeda's story - and she is one of the most intriguing protagonists to cross the page in years. We first meet her as a masked fighter in the pits, before following her home to a life of feigned age and weakness in the slums. She's a study in contrasts, playing up (or down) her strengths and weaknesses as the situation dictates. Weighed down by a tragic past and a difficult life, she lives to avenge her mother's death and take down the Twelve Kings who caused it. Ironically, that single-minded pursuit lives under the shadow of a vision that's promised her the sword of a Blade Maiden - those who protect the Twelve Kings themselves. I guessed at some of the truths behind that impossible mystery, but still appreciated the way Beaulieu brought us to the reveal . . . and developed the story beyond it. She's not alone in carrying the story - Ramahd and Meryam are particularly fascinating additions to the story - but reader reactions will hinge on how they take to her.

If I were to have one complaint about the book, it would be the pacing. The story has a very slow beginning;

it often wanders off on tangents (that, while fascinating, do distract from the narrative); it hits a lull around the mid-point; and it makes frequent use of flashbacks (not just scenes, but entire chapters). All of that does present a bit of a challenge for a reader. It's a book of layers upon layers, and everything eventually settles together, allowing the reader to see through (and between) those layers to appreciate the significance of each. Patience is ultimately rewarded, but there's a risk some readers may be lost along the way.

Twelve Kings in Sharakhai is a story that's dark in theme, ambitious in scope, and intricate in plotting. There are two particular twists that work very well to unsettle the reader, and the emphasis on Çeda's perspective keeps things intimate, even within an epic framework. All-in-all, a solid work of epic fantasy that doesn't just settle for doing something different, but makes those differences relevant.

*Originally reviewed at Beauty in Ruins*

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## **Mogsy (MMOGC) says**

4.5 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <http://bibliosanctum.com/2015/08/31/b...>

I love Epic Fantasy for many reasons, not least of which is the fact every book is a portal to a whole new world. But when you read as much as this genre as I do, you sure get to visit a lot of them. That is why, when every once in a while I come across a setting that truly stands out, I sit up and take note. And Bradley P. Beaulieu's Twelve Kings in Sharakhai made me do just that.

Right from the start I was captivated by the magnificent desert city of Sharakhai, where this novel takes place. Surrounded by a literal ocean of dust and sand, this political and cultural trade center attracts all manner of visitors. From merchants to dignitaries, they sail across the dunes in great sand-ships to treat with the city's kings, twelve immortal men who have held power in Sharakhai since time immemorial. However, not all people are happy with their rule, and many remember the injustices wrought upon them by the kings and their ruthless agents.

The novel's protagonist Çeda is one such individual. When she was eight years old, her mother was a rebel captured and executed by the kings, then hung from Sharakhai's walls as a warning and example to other detractors. Çeda has sworn vengeance ever since. Now more than a decade has passed, and Çeda is still as determined as ever to take down the twelve kings, with the help of a book of cryptic writings left to her by her mother. Unlocking the book's puzzles will not be easy though, and there are many questions about her own heritage that must be solved before Çeda can bring the fight to her enemies.

So many thoughts filled my mind when I finished this book, I'm not even sure where to begin. Beaulieu weaves a complex tale of intrigue, employing devices like flashbacks and bringing in other characters points-of-view to great effect. In many ways, Çeda's story plays out almost like a mystery plot, following her on a journey to uncover clues about the twelve kings' weaknesses while also revealing details about her own past and the secrets her mother kept from her. Flashback chapters are generally tricky to pull off, but I was impressed with the way they were done here, inserted at precisely the best moments to emphasize important events in the characters' lives.

Çeda is also a wonderful main character, one of the best female protagonists I have encountered in years. We open the novel with a scene from the fighting pits, where she is a competitor in the tourney. Right after a

phenomenal combat sequence which ends with Çeda serving her opponent his ass on a platter, she then goes on to engage in an intensely passionate tryst with the fighting pit's owner. If all this was part of Beaulieu's attempt to capture the reader's attention right off the bat, well, it certainly worked on me! More importantly though, I got the sense that Çeda is her own woman. She does what she wants but she's also smart about it, and she is committed to her goals and utterly loyal to those she cares about.

The story also introduces several more major characters, first of which is Emre – Çeda's childhood friend, partner in crime, and brother of her heart. As Çeda's mission takes her down one path, Emre's involvement with the underground resistance takes him down another, leading the two friends to drift apart. But what I love about this story is that nothing about it is black and white, and there's much more to it than simply good versus evil. The twelve kings may be ruthless and cruel, but the rebels – a group calling themselves the Moonless Host – are far from innocent themselves, employing methods that are just as bloody and destructive. The relationship dynamics between Emre and Çeda become a focal point when the two of them end up on opposite sides, fighting for the same cause while driven by different forces. Throw in a third faction, Ramahd and Meryam of the Qaimiri delegation, and it gets even more difficult to tell friend from foe. As with the best and most realistic stories of fluid loyalties and political intrigue, there is absolutely nothing clear-cut about the situation and the plot will keep you wondering who's an enemy and who's an ally every step of the way.

While Beaulieu never stops challenging his characters, the world building in this novel is where his skills really shine. The many distinct cultures that feature in the pages of *Twelve Kings in Sharakhai* provided a diverse setting, which is further fleshed out by its rich history, religions, and various magic systems. The many sights and sounds of the city are brought to life by the stunningly detailed descriptions of important locales, from the decadent halls of the Tauriyat to the blooming fields of adichara plants in the surrounding desert. The world-building also made up for the slower pacing of the first half of the novel, because there were just so many wonderful things to take in.

All told, the payoff was definitely worth it. A promising start to a new series, *Twelve Kings in Sharakhai* offers readers a glimpse into Bradley P. Beaulieu's talent for storytelling as well as his emerging role as a master world-builder. With its many different peoples and cultures, *Sharakhai's* desert setting was utterly spellbinding. I also found myself enthralled by the plot's combination of adventure and intrigue, along with the richness and depth of the characters. Books like this keep the epic fantasy genre fresh and diversified, and I am very excited to see what the future holds for *The Song of the Shattered Sands* series.

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## **Stefan Bach says**

*“The best stories thrived when they contained a kernel of truth. One just needed to know how to prune the falsities and deceits to find the truth lying at their shared center.”*

*Twelve Kings in Sharakai is probably the best epic fantasy book this month you probably won't be reading.*

Actually, I'm not even sure this book even belongs to that genre.

There's no dragons in it. No dwarfs and no elves.

There's no magic and mages, nor epic quests. There's no Tolkien's big bad *Sauron*, and the fate of the world

doesn't hang by a thread.

No one waits for that "chosen one" in a final decisive battle - in manners of Robert Jordan's *Tarmon Gaidon* - to be saved by him.

Gods, even though existing in this world, are exactly there were we are used to find them - absent.

Also, in persistent flourishing of grim-dark as (sub)genre of epic fantasy, in recent years we started kinda guarding ourselves - especially while reading Martin's, Erikson's or Abercrombie's books, or those alike - in a way that we almost instantaneously assume how every character we meet on the streets, castles or slums of their books, are also potential candidates to commit some form of shameless act of violence or evil.

So, it's really refreshing, at least for me, when an author refrains himself from "tricking your instinct", that impression you gain while reading about characters in his book - and all of that which was done for the sake of shock value (Right, Sanderson?).

When a character, character you started caring about, naturally evolves in domain of that which was expected from him, considering the plot he follows in the story, and how author himself presented that character to us.

You know, without needless, uncharacteristically and unfathomable stupidity, right around there, by the end of the second book, closely to its 2000th page of the series (*Right, Sanderson?*).

### *Çedamin 'Çeda' Ayanes'ala*

our protagonist in this book, is exactly that type of character.

A rudimentary type of person of even more basic principles: "**Survive.**"

**"Oh and, if you can - if such occasion presents itself - avenge death of your mother."**

**"But, first survive the day."**

Author succeeded in his effort to present us (seemingly) simplicity of someones eagerness for revenge complexly enough, without the need to intertwine his story with abundance of sub-plots.

He succeeded in building someones personal story and made it more than interesting enough for us to follow.

**Revenge. And how hard is to keep your given word - to yourself, primarily.**

Someone would argue how revenge as a plot is not enough. I disagree. And this book is an example why.

Of course, there's handful of really interesting characters you may find in this book, written equally as good as our main hero, but characters that don't occupy nearly as much space in the book as her, which by itself speaks of authors capability to put his characters in right place, right time, and while coexisting with each other in right amount will become - if not likable - at least clear and understandable.

Even villains. Especially villains.

Sometimes we simply don't need 700 pages of sub-plots in order to understand side character (*Right, Sanderson?*).

City resembling to Aladdin's Agrabah, desert, ships that sail on dunes, discovering mysteries in ancient libraries, ancient history and mythology...

I forgot how this is more than enough.

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## Niki Hawkes - The Obsessive Bookseller says

[3.5 stars] Twelve Kings in Sharakhai is a book I've had high on my priority list ever since that enticing cover came across my radar in 2015. **The cover is actually a pretty good indication of what to expect from this book** – excellent attention to world-building and a main character determined to shake up the status quo using swordsmanship and stealth. It was a very entertaining read, but it did leave a few elements on the table.

Pacing was by far the biggest miss for me. This book is riddled with flashbacks that, while interesting, effectively killed momentum for the main story. **Actual forward plot advancement took forever.** It's only saving grace was that the flashbacks contained a good number of "reveals" that I think were supposed to serve as plot advancing tools (where the story moves forward in concept instead of action), but I think it could've done with far fewer (as it was, I occasionally got confused and forgot which timeframe I was reading and had to reorient). Eventually, it all came together, but the lack of momentum made for the type of read I didn't have qualms setting it aside for other reads.

The characters also lacked a little bit of depth. They had great backstory (as was emphasized practically every other chapter), but never really pulled me in more than surface level. Perhaps this issue was also caused by so many flashbacks taking away time from development. Whatever the case, I'm sitting here really liking the characters but not feeling anything for them.

To that effect, other than the occasional language and sex scenes, both **the character profiles and love story came off very YA** (okay, maybe a leveled-up YA), but fantasy readers will probably find it a little thin when compared to the likes of Malazan or even Game of Thrones. I actually think Twelve Kings in Sharakhai could be a great recommend for those in that transition between YA and adult Fantasy, as several elements (the setting and fight scenes) reminded me strongly of Sarah J. Maas' Throne of Glass series (specifically the prequel, Assassin's Blade). When I say something "came off YA" I usually mean that in a disparaging way, but in this case I didn't count it a bad thing.

Overall, this isn't the strongest I've read in the genre, but the world building and story were enough to keep me engaged when the pacing started to lag. **Good drop-in details about a new world always goes a long way with me**, so I definitely came away from this happy to have read it.

Series status: I liked it, but if it wasn't for the scheduled buddy read for the sequel I signed up for, I wouldn't be in a huge hurry to continue. Especially since discovering that it's planned for a six book series instead of what I thought completed as a trilogy. Even so, I'm hopeful for the best in the next one.

**Recommendations:** I'd hand this to fantasy readers in the mood for something light and creative, or to YA fantasy fans who want a good translation series from Throne of Glass to adult fantasy. The world building was easily the biggest selling point for me, so if you like to immerse in new places, give it a try. :)

Via The Obsessive Bookseller at [www.NikiHawkes.com](http://www.NikiHawkes.com)

Other books you might like:

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## **Mpauli says**

This was a really great book that kept me on my toes with exactly the right amount of sense of wonder and plot revelations.

The desert city Sharakhai is brought to life amazingly and it is a lot of fun to run through the streets with main protagonist Ceda, who is not only a small time message runner, but also a pit fighter in disguise. But all this is nothing compared to her thirst for revenge upon the twelve kings, the mystical rulers of the great city.

Bradley P. Beaulieu finds a good mix of familiar elements for a desert fantasy setting and some very unique world-building blocks. On every corner there is something new to discover, sometimes important, sometimes just for flavor.

The main character Ceda is very interesting and next to her plot, her relationships and her shift in relationships with other characters drive the book forward.

Next to her, we get 3 minor perspectives. One is Emre, Ceda's best friend since childhood. There's is a relationship of many layers, which make for an interesting and believable read.

The next point of view belongs to Ramahd, a mysterious man from outside of Sharakhai with a revenge story of his own.

Last but not least we're getting glimpses of Ishan, one of the twelve kings.

Overall I was very impressed with the first book in this new series by Beaulieu and I was really immersed in the world of Sharakhai. I'm really looking forward to see how that series is going to progress.

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## **Terence says**

In the city of Sharakhai the people hope to see the Immortal Kings overthrown. Çeda, a young woman with a sad past, fights in the pits to make a living. Çeda as much as anyone prays for the downfall of the Kings and on one holy night she may have just received the hint she needs to overthrow them.

Twelve Kings in Sharakhai from the outside seemed so appealing. It has an interesting cover and the premise was promising. The first chapter of Çeda fighting in the pits as The White Wolf enveloped me with excitement, but unfortunately the story meandered past mediocrity to the point of drudgery from there.

In many ways this book is centered around mystery, but for me it missed one crucial aspect necessary to make a good mystery...I need to care. I was unconcerned with the Kings secrets of immortality and Çeda's secret was painfully obvious. Page after page of mystery I wasn't concerned with and tangents that were no more interesting left me drained whenever I tried to read the book.

In the end Twelve Kings in Sharakhai just wasn't a story for me.

1 out of 5 stars

*I received this ARC from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.*

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## **Scott Hitchcock says**

I was on a skydiving team for a number of years. One of my teammates described our performance as a strobe light. Moments of blinding brilliance followed by utter darkness. That pretty much describes this book for me perfectly. One of my own favorite axioms is that a person's greatest strength is also their greatest weakness. As an example a person who is very detail orientated can often take it to such an extreme they become pedantic and inflexible to the point where they are ineffective and alienate others with their inability to see the bigger picture.

Beaulieu's writing is like this. His descriptions are very elegant and build a very vivid world. When the pacing is right the experience is very gratifying. When however he starts describing the same pebbles again and again the pacing suffers and you want to scream OH MY GOD GET ON WITH IT!!!!!!

If you're a fan of The Lions of Al-Rassan and Guy Gavriel Kay I think this is the book and series for you. The writing style, setting, characters and to a lesser degree the plot remind me of each other. I found the same praise and criticism of both works. Where Lions revolved around a diverse group of characters 12 Kings was centralized around one central figure.

I'll continue with the series and hope BPB has better pacing in the coming books.

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