



The Infernal Battalion

Django Wexler

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Military might and arcane power clash in Django Wexler's thrilling new Shadow Campaigns novel.

The Beast, the ancient demon imprisoned beneath the fortress-city of Elysium for a thousand years, has been loosed on the world. It absorbs mind after mind, spreading like a plague through the north. The fell army it has raised threatens the heart of Vordan, and it is under the command of the Beast's greatest prize: legendary general Janus bet Vhalnich.

As Queen Raesinia Orboan and soldiers Marcus D'Ivoire and Winter Ihernglass grapple with the aftermath of a hard-fought military campaign, they soon discover a betrayal they never could have foreseen. The news arrives like a thunderbolt: Janus has declared himself the rightful Emperor of Vordan. Chaos grips the city as officers and regiments are forced to declare for queen or emperor.

Raesinia must struggle to keep her country under control and risks becoming everything she fought against. Marcus must take the field against his old commander, a man who has seemed an unbeatable strategist. And as Winter recovers from her injuries and mourns her losses, she knows the demon she carries inside her might be the only thing standing between the Beast and the destruction of everything in its path....

The Infernal Battalion Details

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From Reader Review *The Infernal Battalion* for online ebook

Sherwood Smith says

[

In this final volume of the series, Janus, the brilliant general who has repeatedly saved his country . . . becomes its biggest threat.

We start off with my least favorite character, the evil Beast, which is spreading widely, slurping up minds and controlling the bodies of all those it encounters and building a terrifying army of zombie soldiers. At its head? Janus, who was incorporated by the Beast at the end of the previ

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

4.5 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2018/01/18/...>

Often it is said that the final book that can either make or break a series, but I'm thrilled to report that *The Infernal Battalion* is a finale that exceeded my expectations, bringing about a stunning conclusion to *The Shadow Campaigns*.

As this is a review for the fifth and final installment of the series, the usual caveats apply: beware of possible spoilers for the previous books, if you are not already caught up. A great deal has happened to bring us to this point, including the escape of the Beast—the demon of all demons, and a force of unspeakable evil—from its ancient prison beneath Elysium. Its influence spreads the way it feeds, absorbing the minds and controlling the bodies of all those it infects. Now it has amassed an unstoppable army of these drone-like soldiers, and at the head of this infernal host is none other than General Janus bet Vhalnich, whose faculties the Beast had stolen at the end of *The Guns of Empire*.

But to those who are unaware of Janus's possession, his actions seemed like the worst kind of betrayal. Vordan has only just emerged from a bloody war, and Queen Raesinia had been looking forward to a period of peace for rebuilding. Instead, she now finds herself under threat from the very same man who won her kingdom its many victories in battle. Janus has declared himself Emperor, and his message to Raesinia is loud and clear: surrender her throne, or else he and his army will destroy anyone who stands in his way.

For readers who have been following *The Shadow Campaigns* and are familiar with Janus's military prowess, we know perfectly well what his character is capable of. Perhaps it only makes sense for Vordan's greatest hope to become its greatest threat, and in retrospect, this crux of the series might have been in development for several books now, under Wexler's subtle guidance. It made for a gripping premise, one worthy of a grand finale, for not only did the phenomenal battle sequences and action make this the most intense novel of the series, Janus's apparent betrayal also created a lot of interesting conflicts for our characters. Many of them are unaware that their general is under the control of the Beast, giving rise to a lot of uncertainty and tension—an element of suspense that I felt was missing in the previous book.

As you may recall, in my review of *The Guns of Empire*, I noted the sporadic pacing of the book, almost like the series seemed to be biding its time, holding itself back for the right moment to unleash its full force.

Well, that time has finally come. Wexler is in his element as *The Infernal Battalion* shifts the focus back to the chaos and violence of the frontlines, making this one an action-packed installment.

However, the true strength of the novel lies in its characters. We've seen the cast expand in size and diversity over the course of five books, but the three main protagonists—Winter, Marcus, Raesinia—remain the heart and soul of this series. Individually, they've each endured so much, and now that we've arrived at the end of this journey, I desperately needed to know what would become of them. Happily, this finale did not disappoint; all three of our stars get their moments to shine, and there were plenty of revelations about them as well, with the surprises coming at us hard and fast. Marcus won my love in this one, as he was in the most unenviable position of having to go up against Janus—his former commanding officer that he greatly admired and considered a friend—knowing that his chances of winning were practically nil. I was also touched by his love and loyalty to Raesinia, even with their romance full of ups and downs. Winter was a joy to follow too, despite her constant guilt-ridden thoughts and self-pity parties, and I think her epic actions in the climax will end up being one of the series' most memorable moments.

In sum, *The Infernal Battalion* is the culmination of everything that has been building up throughout *The Shadow Campaigns*. As a finale, I couldn't have asked for more; the plot and characters were engaging, the ending was satisfying, and as far as I'm concerned, Django Wexler has written a pitch-perfect conclusion to one of my favorite series. It has been an incredible journey, one that I would not hesitate to recommend to anyone with a love for epic fantasy fiction.

Daniel says

I još jedan odličan serijal je stigao do kraja... i još jedna serijal je uspeo da zepne pred samim ciljem :P

Priča koja je počela davne 2013 (i nije nešto davno) stigla je do svog cilja i putovanje je sve vreme bilo odlično. Ovde dobijamo fin završetak priče i svi važni događaji lepo objašnjeni, likovi su dobili svoje nagrade i kazne i sve je čakum pakum sa mašnicom :)

Što onda slabija ocena od prethodnih? Zato što nitaju o ovu knjigu uopšte nemamo osećaj de je ovo veliko finale. Da se u ovih 500 strana priča završava. Jednostavno fali na veličini, nečemu epskom što bi nas držalo na ivici stolice pošto je zadnja knjiga pa svako može da umre. Više od 2/3 knjige sam imao osećaj da se radi knjizi koja će da nas pripremi za veliko finale. Ni u jedno momentu nisam bio zabrinut, iznenađen ili čak i oduševljen. I klimaks je samo doša i prošao tako brzo da sam imao osećaj da sam nešto promašio.

A i sam epilog više je došao kao fusnota nego nešto što će nam dati vremena da se oprostimo od ovih likova. Nije da otkujem nešto na nivou *Gospodara Prstenova* al se ne bi žalio.

Sem toga nemam šta reći, kvalitet je na nivou, nema dosadnih delova. Čak upoznajemo nove i interesantne likove. imamo par scena koje su opisane tako da prosto izmame osmeh i osećaj divljena.

Ipak svaka preporuka za svakoga ko iole ima interesa u flintlock fantaziju.

Django Wexler says

It's amazing to finally reach the end of this series. Thanks to everyone who's read this far, and I hope you all enjoy the last volume!

Travis says

My journey with this series has finally come to an end! Everything about this finale was wonderful. It wrapped up a lot of the loose ends and plot threads created throughout the other four books in a way that was ultimately satisfying. Two of the best things about this series were the characters and the world. Each book brought a new level to how big this world actually is which was wonderful. With some books it feels like you never fully get to see the entirety of the world that was created. That is not the case with this. Also the characters were executed flawlessly. They each had their own trials and tribulations to surpass which ultimately brought them all back together in the end. Action was still top notch. Every scene is so descriptive and engaging. Even the scenes involving the cutters (you know what I am talking about if you read this) are so vivid, sometimes to the point where I cringe. I am so happy that I discovered this series and also this author because he quickly rose to be one of my all time favorites and I will continue to purchase his books as they come out. Highly Highly recommend this series to anyone looking for flintlock fantasy. It is a bit of a chore to get past the military jargon but once you do this world will take you by storm!

M.L. Brennan says

Okay, I've read it (yeah, that's right everyone -- be jealous) and it is AMAZING. A fantastic end to the series, and I think one of the strongest entries. No last-book burnout here -- incredibly tense, huge stakes, amazing battles, great characterization, some good laughs, big surprises, and a really wonderful ending.

I'm not going to give any spoilers, but I'm just telling you all -- this is going to be worth your wait. It's epic.

Rob says

Executive Summary: While not quite as good as the last two books, Mr. Wexler finished this series quite well. It's easily one of the best fantasy series of the last several years. I highly recommend you pick it up.

Audiobook: Richard Poe once again does a good job here. The issues with his volume I've had in the past seem to be resolved. I'm not sure if that's his doing, or just improvements to the recording process or both. He's still a bit on the quiet side, but nothing like I remember from the earlier books. Audio is definitely a good option here.

Full Review

For the last few years, the new books in this series have been coming out every summer. And every year when I look at my top reads, the most recent entry has been near the top. Last year we were deprived of another entry, but that just starts out 2018 on a strong note.

I thought the first book (The Thousand Names in this series was good, but a bit heavy on the military action (and rather light on the magic). I enjoyed book 2 more than the first, but it was a bit overly heavy on the politics. Of course that didn't stop me from writing possibly my all time favorite (and one of my best

liked)reviews.

However it was *The Price of Valor* where this series really started to shine for me. Mr. Wexler found what I feel was the perfect balance of military battles, political intrigue and an interesting magical system that made it one of my top reads of 2015. I don't give 5 star ratings to books likely, so that fact that the final 3 books of this 5-book series have gotten one should tell you how much I liked it.

The characters are fantastic. This is especially true of Winter. I think the main reason I didn't enjoy this one quite as much as the last two, was that her story felt like it took a little longer to get going. Luckily Marcus and Recinia's chapters more than made up for it. I found myself listening a bit longer each day just so I could squeeze in an extra chapter here or there.

I'm not a huge military fan, but the way Mr. Wexler writes these battles make it more than apparent how much he is. I'm not going to rush out and start reading books about the Napoleonic wars, but maybe if they demons granting magical abilities, I just might have.

Overall I thought this was a fantastic series, and I'm glad a friend got my little side reads group to pick up the first one 5 years ago. It's a shame that Mr. Wexler isn't better known at this point, but I think he's been writing some of the best fantasy books of the last few years. If you haven't given this series a look yet, I highly recommend you do.

Megan says

All right, let's answer the most important question first: yes, he sticks the landing.

And come on, let's be honest here, I can't have been the only one wondering if Django Wexler could possibly pull this off, given the way *The Guns of Empire* ended. Where can the story go from here? How can the characters come back from this? The more the implications of that last scene sunk in the more questions arose in my mind, but they all boiled down to the same thing; what's going to happen next?

Luckily, and to my vast gratitude, Mr. Wexler took pity upon me and sent me an arc of *Infernal Battalion*, and I proceeded to let real life know that it was going on the back burner for a while, because I was going to be spending all my time with Winter, Marcus and Raes.

But Winter, Marcus and Raes had to wait. Because the first point of view in *Infernal Battalion* belongs to Janus.

I know, right!?!

Janus was the reason I first picked up *The Thousand Names*, (it was recommended in a thread asking for really smart characters, I believe) and Janus has remained my favourite from the start. And while it makes sense that Wexler kept him removed from his, because after all mystery is the best friend of a convincing fictional genius, I always wanted to see more of him. He's always been such a huge part of the *Shadow Campaigns*, but it felt like he was always stepping nimbly away from the camera's focus, never letting the reader get a good look at him. But in *Infernal Battalion*, finally, we see him a little clearer.

It's not just that he gets his own POV as these interludes, while fascinating and invaluable to the plot, are

brief and rare. No, it's that so much of this book is focused on the other characters trying to understand and anticipate Janus. Watching people trying to work against Janus illuminates the man so much more than watching people working with him, if that makes sense. Watching Marcus, especially, try and make sense of Janus and his actions is endlessly informative. And not just in the obvious ways, like where Marcus visits Janus' childhood home and snoops about, but in more subtle ways, like observing the way Janus is treating his men.

But enough about Janus! Geez, you'd think the guy was special or something.

Multi-book plot threads are wrapped up neatly, character arcs are concluded very satisfyingly, there's kissing and pitched battles and some more kissing and Raes figures out a few more ways to die and Sothe is a bad-arse. But those things feel almost like a given after reading the four excellent books that preceded this one. What really struck me as impressive was the way Wexler moves his characters across the board. I remember when GRRM was struggling to finish *Dances with Dragons* he would talk a lot on his blog about the "knot" he was stuck with, which boiled down to needing to get Dany from here to there and this character needed to be here at the same time and that character needed to be over there too. The point being, that getting characters who are involved in their own different plot arcs into the same place at the same time and, more importantly, making it feel natural and organic to the plot and not like the author forcing them there, takes a huge amount of skill. And *Infernal Battalion* is probably one of the most excellent examples of it that I've seen. Maybe it's not a showy thing to be so impressed by, like epic battles or whatever (let it be noted that this book does not lack for epic battles), but it was just so damn fun to watch Wexler expertly move everyone into place.

I look forward to this book's release so I can discuss the plot in more delicious, spoilery depth but for now just let me say that it was excellent and I can't see any way that anybody who had enjoyed the *Shadow Campaigns* so far will be disappointed by its conclusion.

(Still needed more Fitz though).

Scott Hitchcock says

Book 1: 5*

Book 2: 3.75*

Book 3: 3.75*

Book 4: 5*

Book 5: 3.5*

The problem with book five is that it resets and doesn't capture the crescendo that was book four. Much like *The GreatCoats* this would have been a much better series had it ended one book sooner and added 25 pages to that book.

The book itself starts out with the cardinal sin of recapping ad nauseam which is a pet peeve of mine. After that each of our main characters has their own thread and eventually they are intertwined. At the end the predictable ending lacks any real punch. The final conflict falls really flat which is a shame since this series could have been an all time great.

It's not a bad ending for all that. The series itself is worthy of a read but not without a myriad of faults. The author does leave himself an out for a potential spinoff series with one of the major characters. I'd give that a go if he does decide to write it.

Mary ~Ravager of Tomes~ says

Geez. What do I even say?

This is literally one of the **best fantasy series I have ever read.**

It just hit all the right notes for me.

An expansive world set in the age of gun smoke, and upon a foundation of **nuanced & well-researched** military strategy.

A **smartly written** story line teeming with **interesting magic & a satisfying grand design.**

An amazing cast of characters, each with their own **unique personalities**, each **rising to the occasion** as necessary, and each capturing me with their individual **depth & charm.**

In particular, I have to especially mention main character Winter Ihernglass. She is strong. She is competent. She is in touch with her emotions. She brave & complex & powerful in her evolution as a character. **She is the female protagonist we all want in our fantasy stories.**

This wrap up came with all the **drama & tears & resolution** I hoped it would.

I'm here to tell you, my heart was in my throat for nearly all 500+ pages. And it was worth it.

I'm so thankful to have found this series, as it's not often that I feel so immediately ready to experience the story I just finished again. A consistently wonderful journey that I foresee rereading many, many times in the future.

The Infernal Battalion is a beautifully fitting conclusion to *The Shadow Campaigns*. It only leaves me waiting not-so-patiently for the next masterpiece Django Wexler will publish!

****Check out my interview with the author here!****

This review and other reviews of mine can be found on Book Nest!

Haïfa says

I would like to thank the editors for providing this ARC, via Netgalley, in exchange for an honest review.

You can find this review and more at [Booksprens](#).

The Infernal Battalion is equally a well-thought out and frustrating finale. **This was objectively a very good book, mixing as usual detailed battles, politics, strategies and magic.** It just wasn't a book for me. Though I liked the characters and couldn't wait to see how things would evolve and wrap up for them, the plot didn't manage to enthrall me as much as the first three books did.

I strongly believe that this series would have worked so much better with four installments, instead of five. Much to my chagrin, by the end of the 60% of TIB, I was as exhausted (mentally) as the Vordanai Army (physically) was of the never-ending marching, fighting, setting camp, marching, fighting, dying... The beginning of the book wasn't exactly boring but it felt like a variation of what already happened before in the series and in hindsight, the various campaigns kinda blurred and merged in my mind. Raesinia's diplomatic tribulations were what saved the first half of the book for me.

The second half was mostly great however! I was ecstatic to see how far the characters have gone since the beginning. **TIB was a journey of questioning, self-discovery and accomplishment for the main characters, and though secondary characters mostly stayed true to their personalities, they affected, impressed and inspired me.** Heck, my favorite character is probably Sothe (secondary character). What can I say, I have a fondness for efficient, cold-blooded but loyal assassins, for whom fighting is akin to art!

"But the other side of the balance can be harder to make out. How do you measure what didn't happen? Friends who didn't die because of something you did, wars that didn't start, cities that never burned. That has to count for something, doesn't it?"

I really loved how the characters grew and I loved how they ended up *actually* talking to each other. I wholeheartedly appreciated the long-awaited dialogues that actually changed the characters' mind or the direction of the plot. During the first half, I occasionally yelled at them out loud (much to my husband's dismay): "you just learned something crucial! Share it with the others, damn you! Here, you have them around! Now or never, dude! ... Oh well too late...". This was the most frustrating aspect of the book (and of the series for that matter) for me.

The most fantastic aspects on the other hand were Wexler's elegant prose and his perfect mastery of military formations and strategies and of finance. The maneuvers he pulled, be they on the field or in a royal court, were impressive, consistent and decisive to the plot. **It was fascinating to learn about the rules of warfare, in the style of the Napoleonic tactics, to see how each formation, each move had its logical, systematic counter-move and that naturally gave some amazing battle sequences.**

The "Fantasy" arc was also pretty well explored in this final book! I thoroughly enjoyed seeing more magic and getting explanations regarding the Thousand Names, the lore and the demons. Some occurrences were sadly left unexplained at the end but it was nonetheless great to have magic play such a big role in the finale.

Conclusion

Despite having a few issues with this final book, The Shadow Campaigns series featured one of the greatest military representations and one of the largest female casts I've ever read. I genuinely wish I loved it better. If you love Flintlock Fantasy or perhaps historical fiction, I wholeheartedly recommend this series to you. If you look for great, inspiring female characters, then look no more, this series will definitely appeal to you!

Emily says

Overall I really liked this series and liked Wexler's writing. However, I think this series went on one book too far. While I enjoyed this book, I thought large sections of it were repetitive or just unnecessary. About 75% of the way through I was thinking "this isn't even getting close to wrapping up", and then ultimately the entire ending happened in 50 pages. The ending tied everything up neatly, it just felt a bit rushed.

Here's what I liked:

Many of the secondary characters were favorites - I liked them better than the main characters - Cyte, Soothe, Fitz etc

I always liked Marcus' chapters and thought he was a great character - same for Winter
Janus was always one of my favorites - the most interesting character in the book. I wish he'd been more of a presence in the last book.

Didn't like:

I continue to hate Raesinia. So annoying and boring.

I thought that Cora was a "deus ex machina" character throughout. A 14 year old financial whiz kid that is always able to accomplish these enormous financial miracles - it was just unbelievable

(view spoiler)

Petrik says

ARC provided by the publisher—Ace—via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review

A good ending to an overall fantastic series, but in my opinion, The Infernal Battalion didn't live up to the greatness of its predecessors.

The first thing you should know is that I love this series; there's no way I'll binge-read a five-book series if I didn't truly enjoy each installment. However, *The Infernal Battalion* disappointed me and I'm extremely disheartened to give the last book in this series less than 4-stars—the final volume and an ARC too—but honest I must be. *The Shadow Campaigns* had been very consistent in quality from the first up to the fourth book, even when the direction of storytelling shifted to politics or actions. This final one, however, is the only book in the series which fell short for me.

Why did this book not live up to the series thus far? As far as I'm concerned, it is packed with more fillers than actual plot progression. Like before, Marcus, Raesinia, and Winter remained as the main POV

characters. After the fantastic penultimate book, it saddened me to see how unnecessary Raes and Winter's POV in the first 65% book become - so many parts could be cut and it would not have mattered to the main plot. Django also introduced a lot of new characters in the last installment of the book, that I felt was unnecessary and unimportant. Raes's story actually bored me to sleep. Her arc involved dealing with tons of politics that revolve around financial complications and court drama together with plenty of new characters, which I find uninteresting. I wasn't able to bring myself to care about these new characters which were introduced in the FINAL installment of the series. All I want in a concluding volume is to read the continuation and the wrap-up of all the main characters' journeys, of which I've experienced through the eyes of a reader for the past books. Moreover, these new characters didn't contribute to the main plot, and did not even feature in the last third of the book, which brings to my point that they merely feel like filler content.

I guess my high expectations after coming from the incredible penultimate volume, *The Gun Empire*, added fuel to fire. I have anticipated *Infernal Battalion* to go full throttle with the main plot up until the ending of the series. I can also tell you that if you're expecting this final installment to be action-packed like I did, most likely you're going to be disappointed like me. It is a fact that the main climactic actions happened only around the 90%-97% point of the ebook; it's that short. Sure, there may be minor action sequences here and there for Marcus and Winter throughout the book, but most of them are just not that thrilling and gripping.

That said, the last third is wonderful. Every character we know from the past four books has their own conclusion with no loose ends. Django has always been skilled in establishing his characters, and that remained true here, especially for the females. Winter has become one of the best female characters I've ever read in any high fantasy series, and it's not only her that's well written; it's very evident that Django was meticulous in strengthening every female's characterization. I can't honestly speak the same for the male characters though. By the end of the series, only Janus and Marcus were memorable to me. I'm pretty sure I won't remember any of the other male characters in a week's time. In fact, I can't even recall Give-Em-Hell's real name, and he actually did appear in all five books. As for the action scenes, although it was too short for my preferences, overall, it was well written and immersive because of Django's continuously engaging prose.

While I sound quite negative in my review, I want to state once again that I mostly liked this book and most definitely enjoyed the entire series. Even though I felt let down by the last book, the previous four were fantastic, and I will still recommend this series to anyone who wants to read military fantasy with great, kickass female characters.

Series review:

The Thousand Names: **4/5 Stars**

The Shadow Throne: **4.5/5 Stars**

The Price of Valor: **4.5/5 Stars**

The Guns of Empire: **4.5/5 Stars**

The Infernal Battalion: **3/5 Stars**

The Shadow Campaigns: **20.5/25 Stars**

The official release date for *The Infernal Battalion* is 9th January 2018

*You can find **this** and the rest of my Adult Epic/High Fantasy & Sci-Fi reviews at **BookNest***

Jody says

Great conclusion to a fantastic series. I am really going to miss these characters and this world. So many good things to take away from this one. I hope Mr. Wexler decides to visit this world again in a future series.

4.5 stars ****

Jack +Books & Bourbon+ says

I think that this will be one of my more bittersweet reviews, as *The Infernal Battalion* is the final novel in *The Shadow Campaigns*, a series which I am unabashedly a huge fan of. It's always a difficult proposition, heading into the final book of a series, especially a series that you've followed since it started. *Harry Potter* was like that for me, as was *The Wheel of Time* and *Mistborn*. When you invest so many hours with certain books, you feel connected to the characters in ways that are sometimes hard to describe; you know how they'll react in a situation, you know their past pains and joys, and you know what their dreams and hopes are. You tend to know them better than some of the real people that are around you. And, because of that familiarity and connection, when you reach the final page and things either did or did not happen like you wanted, it's always a hard thing to finally bid those characters goodbye.

Such was the case with *The Infernal Battalion*, which for me was undoubtedly the most frustrating and yet fulfilling novel in the series. And I suppose that is appropriate for the final book. Might as well go out with a bang, right? And I believe Mr. Wexler did what he wanted to do and went where he had planned to go, as the story does come full circle in a satisfying way. I only wish that other parts of the book were as satisfying, or as universally solid, as the first four books of the series. But, whatever my little quibbles might be, this was a great end to a fantastic series, and actually had me tearing up at parts. And, to be clear, VERY few books have ever managed to do that over 30+ years of reading.

As always, my review will be as spoiler-free as possible. I sincerely feel that books (and movies for that matter) are just better when you don't know the major twists. Some reviewers like to reveal all (as do Hollywood movie trailers), but I find my enjoyment level is generally higher when I go in blind. Preconceived notions can be the death of entertainment, and since I read to be entertained, I try to keep mine at an absolute minimum. So if it's not mentioned in the Goodreads synopsis, I'll do my level best not to mention it here!

So I guess I'll start out with the negatives, which is a hard thing for me, as I've had hardly any issues with the books in this series. And maybe it's just a case of Mr. Wexler just being ready to move on to a new series, but my biggest complaint with *The Infernal Battalion* was the overall feel of it. It honestly felt slightly rushed and just the slightest bit undercooked. The pacing was just a bit off, the battles weren't quite as detailed and gripping as they usually are, and a lot of the conflict got resolved a bit too easily (and quickly) for my taste. I have read a few other reviews of the first four books where the reviewers felt that parts of the plot relied a bit too much on convenience. I actually never felt that way about those books, but I will admit that there were a few instances in *The Infernal Battalion* where I was a little let down by just how convenient things became. To an extent, I can see the dilemma. With everything going on, and the plotlines to tie up, this book could have easily been double the size. I'm certain that it's hard to find the balance in a final book between too little storyline and having the ending drawn out too long. And for me, the balance was just a bit off here. And, in a first that I recall in the series, there were a few odd grammatical structures or choices. Not

terribly often, but there were a few times I would have to reread a sentence to try and understand what was being conveyed.

Fortunately, everything else with *The Infernal Battalion* was amazing, keeping the high standard set across the rest of the series. The characterization is still top notch, the intrigue and the interpersonal struggles are still handled deftly, character relationships are relatable and believable, and the stakes are at their highest. Even with my nitpicks, this is still a five star book for me.

Returning to the fray are our established POV characters of Winter, Marcus, and Raesinia. And, as I stated above, we know these characters. We know what they have sacrificed, we know their deepest hopes, and we know the things that scare them. And because we know them so well, we genuinely care about them and fear for them.

As usual, Winter's chapters are the most engaging. She's been through hell and back so many times that she is becoming somewhat numb to it. Since joining the Vordan army, she's discovered that there is something out there greater than herself. She believes in duty, sacrifice, and honor, but at the same time, being surrounded by so much death and heartache has definitely taken its toll on her. She is weary down to her bones, and starting to question if she should be in the leadership positions she always finds herself in. It's a dichotomy that works, as it gives her some wonderful internal struggles as she ponders her role in everything that is transpiring. And as the host of the mighty Infernivore, she has the greatest part to play in the final conflict, which also weighs heavily on her. It's also in her chapters where I saw the greatest discrepancies. One the one hand, her interaction with The Beast/Jane Verity were where things felt rushed or underutilized. It just wasn't as impactful as I expected. These two have such history, and the conflict is so great, that I was expecting more. On the other hand, some of her other chapters were the ones that were getting me choked up. Her interactions with Marcus later on are so heartfelt and heartbreaking, and they really got to me. I got all misty-eyed and everything.

And speaking of Marcus, given the closing events of the previous book, he has the most unenviable position of matching tactical wits with Janus. And everyone, including himself, knows how that will go. But he's as stoic as ever, and refuses to give up, while also quietly refusing to think the worst of Janus. As a taciturn character, his chapters could easily be boring or rote, but they never really are. While he may be in a command position, he is a target of high value to The Beast, so Marcus rarely has a moment to sit still. Add in the complicated relationship with Raesinia, the choice between duty or friendship, and his self-sacrificing nature, and you have one interesting character who is easy to root for. His interactions with Winter are also great, and since we get to see both sides of that equation, we really get the full effect. And the fact that he still doesn't want to believe Winter is a woman, even with all the evidence finally on the table, is just priceless. Still, even with that, he's come a long way from the stick-in-the-mud he used to be, and while he may never be completely comfortable with women on the battlefield, he recognizes what an asset that the Girl's Own regiment is, and uses them accordingly.

For Raesinia, she's always the character I struggled with the most. I don't dislike her...far from it. I just think it's hard to keep her involved in the storyline, since she's the Queen of Vordan. In a series filled with battlefield combat, how do you keep a Queen in the mix? Thankfully, here in *The Infernal Battalion*, she is given quite a bit to do that actually falls pretty well in her court, so it works out. And she's not the same person she was when we first met her earlier in the series. She has grown as a character, hardened by the events that have surrounded her ascension, and without Sothe to hold her hand through many of the difficulties. She has been forced to mature, adapt, and learn, and it has made her an even more enjoyable character. Sadly, several of her chapters also fall prey to the quickened pace and convenience. Much of what transpires with Raes seems like it should have taken longer, and with more struggle. But, again, the book

would have been twice as long, and I don't think that is what Mr. Wexler was going for. Fortunately, even with a bit of convenience, I really liked the way her storyline unfolded, and where she was at the end of the book. It fit together rather nicely.

We also get a few chapters from Janus' point of view, much like the previous book. They are small interludes, but still entertaining, as we see Janus up to his usual scheming and plotting. Though brief, these chapters do have a huge relevance to the story, so their inclusion is always welcome. I'm not 100% sure I'm sold on his ultimate motivation for seeking The Thousand Names, which is finally revealed here, but so be it. Can't be a fan of everything I suppose.

All of the supporting cast returns, albeit in much smaller roles this time around, with some of them popping up for cameos only. The only real supporting characters that get a chance to shine this time around are Cora, Cyte, Alex, and Sothe, with everyone else relegated to much smaller roles. But given that this is the end game, and our main characters are so much the impetus of the tale, the smaller supporting roles are expected and forgivable. I do love the fact that two of the main characters, and all of the best represented supporting characters are female. I can only speak to it from a male point of view, but I absolutely love that women have equal (or greater) representation in this series of books. It makes for a nice change of pace, and gives the story much needed depth and diversity. And the fact that he does male/female interactions so well (without all the war of the sexes like we found in *The Wheel of Time*) just makes it that much more enjoyable.

On the antagonist side, the only one of note is The Beast/Jane Verity. A demon straight from legend, The Beast is an all-encompassing terror that is slowly making its way to Vordan, and Marcus and Raesinia do not have the manpower to stop it. The power of The Beast is immense, and the danger it poses is very real, and for the most part that power is felt throughout the story. But, like in other areas, there were times when the threat just wasn't as fleshed out as I feel it could have been. Compared to the Penitent Damned from the last few books, The Beast just wasn't as engaging a foe, even with the power that it commands. That said, I do like the general feeling of "oh shit!" that everyone has when they realize that Janus is now under The Beast's command, meaning that his military genius is now being directed back at them, instead of used for their benefit.

So, outside of the characters (always the heart of this series), we have the intrigue and warfare in nearly equal measures. Most of the fighting is last ditch and last minute, as our heroes are making a fighting retreat to Vordan city. And while there was plenty of fighting, it wasn't quite as thrilling as we've experienced in previous books in the series. That doesn't mean it was lackluster or boring...far from it. But all in all I wanted just a bit more. As for the intrigue...it helps to advance the plot, and gives Raesinia some legitimate hob-nobbing to do, but I felt it was handled a little too easily. Again, I think it's the "last book" curse...so much to wrap up in only so many pages. So there were some narrative sacrifices to be made. With another series, I think it would have impacted my overall rating, but I'm so in love with these books that I'm willing to give *The Infernal Battalion* a pass.

I also admire how well same-sex relationships are handled in these books. They are just a matter of course, and are handled respectfully and without exploitation. Major kudos to Django Wexler for tackling this with dignity and respect.

Did I have issues with the book? Yes, I did. Did I love it despite those issues? Oh HELL yes. This has been, and still remains, one of my favorite fantasy series. I have loved every book, and I honestly wasn't ready for the ride to end. But, I'm glad that Mr. Wexler tied it off as well as he did, and isn't going to keep dragging it out over more books. Five books was a perfect size for this tale, and I'd rather it go out on top than overstay its welcome. And go out on top it did. Despite the little issues, this book really hit me in the feels, and I was

sad to be at the end of the series. I don't reread a lot of books (because who has the time?!), but I do know that these are ones I will come back to in the years to come.

Seriously, if you love Fantasy, and are itching for a great little self-contained series, you can't go wrong with *The Shadow Campaigns*. Do yourself a favor and pick these up, and you'll be very well rewarded. And now I get to eagerly await Mr. Wexler's next endeavor...and I suck at waiting...
