

The Tainted Cup

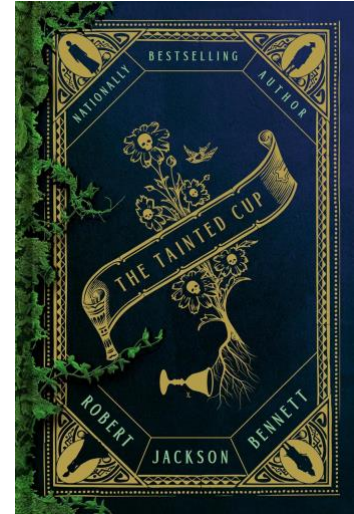
Robert Jackson Bennett

Reviewed by: Cheri Li, 16

Star Book Reviewer of Be the Star You Are! Charity

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In a complex, plant-based fantasy world, the Empire of Khanum is surrounded by sea walls, and imperial forces fight every year to prevent the leviathans that come from the deep ocean to begin their destructive path inland. Their complex, administrative government works to maintain control of each region of Khanum, called cantons, and develop genetic modifications and infrastructure to fight the leviathan. The protagonists, Dinios “Din” Kol, works as an investigator in the Iudex branch of government, works with Anagosa “Ana” Dolabra, an eccentric investigator assigned to solve the murder of engineer Taqtasa Blas. Unlike previous murder cases, Blas was found brutally murdered by a plant growing from his chest. While the leviathan approaches, Din and Ana untangle a wider mystery connected to Khanum’s rich and powerful, unlocking dangerous enemies who wish to keep their secrets.



Overall, this book was incredible to read. I loved the way the novel alternates from heavy topics, such as death and racial struggles, to light joking between the sarcastic, witty characters. In this way, Bennett creates a narrative where the characters are funny and relatable, and the novel isn’t too dense or heavy. He also does first person very well: Din’s perspective added emotional depth and character from the novel, such as his reactions to Ana’s hermit life. Able to solve murders without ever leaving her house, Ana adds a comical break to the novel, as even her serious discoveries are sometimes humorous due to her disregard for how people perceive her.

Even though I enjoyed the fantasy world this book was set in, it was sometimes hard to keep track of all the government jobs and positions. Bennett creates a whole bureaucracy of engineers, scientists, and detectives, each part of a different department, but referred to by the same government ranks. Sometimes, this became confusing to me, because there are so many supporting characters with different jobs and complicated genetic mutations.

I would recommend this book to those 16 and up, as the use of strong language was prevalent throughout the novel. Vulgar language was incorporated into everyday speech for these characters, so anyone sensitive to strong language should probably avoid this book. However, it is a perfect read for those looking for a beautifully written, unique fantasy with a murder mystery element. Despite the profanity and serious themes, this book was not as serious as many young adult fantasy/murder mysteries.

Recommended Titles:

A Drop of Corruption by Robert Jackson Bennett

Katabasis by R.F. Kwang
The Blackfire Blade by James Logan