



Behind the Vale

Brian D. Anderson

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Thousands of years after the war of the ancients, a single bastion of human life survives - The Vale. And at its core the magnificent city of Troi. Here the mana flows from the great power station, bringing light and life to all. It is a beacon of hope in a sick and dying world. But all is not as it appears. Even as the Order of High Mages seeks to cure the land, sinister forces move to gain absolute control over The Vale and its citizens.

Drake Sharazi, disgraced Royal Guard turned bounty hunter, has been exiled from Troi to the surrounding provinces, where resources are limited and starvation is commonplace. It is in this squalor and poverty he believes he shall spend his remaining days. But after years of labor and suffering, he has been given the chance to go home; to return to the life he has longed for since the moment he left his beloved city. But he quickly discovers that the life he desires is built on a foundation of lies.

Now he must choose between what is right and what is easy. But what is right could cost more than he is willing to pay. And to save his home, he might have to destroy it...and all he has ever loved.

Behind the Vale Details

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From Reader Review Behind the Vale for online ebook

Helen Paton says

Brian D Anderson is a Master World Builder, and excels at providing fast paced action, with believable and loveable characters - flaws and all. He also touches on controversial current topics within his tales, in a very imaginative way. This introduction to The Vale series approaches very relevant global environmental issues in a unique meld of Myth and Magic, and Urban Fantasy. Again, he makes it difficult to 'spot the bad guy', and we find ourselves empathising with those who appear to be beyond redemption. I really love this author's books.

Kristen says

Full review is here, on my blog.

I do really like the cover, but I didn't expect to really latch on to this book immediately (because that doesn't often happen to me) but I sure did anyway! I read nearly half of this thing in one sitting, and these days, that's about the same as if a unicorn showed up at my house. A day and a half later and I was done. A very quick read, to be sure!

This story follows Drake Sharazi, an exiled Royal Guard from Troi who now lives as a bounty hunter (or 'hawker') in the provinces surrounding the kingdom. He spends his time in a sort of sleazy, run-down dive of a bar when he's not on a job looking for a runner. He's in said bar, among the riffraff of the outer provinces when he's suddenly and inexplicably the target of an assassination attempt. Already a bad day, but to add to that, the sheriff says there's a messenger from Troi here to talk to him.

As it turns out, the messenger is an old... frenemy of his, and he's there to tell him that the Prince of Troi, an old friend of Drake's, has been kidnapped. Despite the charges he was faced with and the resulting 9 years of exile, the King hires Drake to find his son. And shenanigans indeed begin. Drake has to find the prince and finds out some pretty crazy stuff along the way, and has to make some tough choices.

Vale is a land within a land. It's a largish country with several provinces in it, with varying levels of poverty among them, usually in the outer provinces. The land of Vale has a huge barrier around it, and outside that barrier is wastelands and creatures known as hellspawn. The high mages in this world are what keeps Vale going, keeps food growing, and things like that, and they all live in Troi, so the closer you are to Troi, the better your life is ultimately going to be.

This world is fascinating! It feels a little urban fantasy-ish (which I am a fan of), but not really like any other UF I've read. This isn't our world but with magic (like many UF). It's a huge, sprawling world... with magic in it. Perhaps it is our world but millennia after we've completely wrecked it... with magic in it... who knows? There is plenty of technology in it: cars, television, guns, and what have you, but there is a real sort of divide between our world and this one. There are similarities, yes, but this is a world unlike ours, and it is described well so I got a pretty good picture of it. It's almost like the world of Final Fantasy XV (modern, with cars/phones etc, but with magic, which the ruling class are the primary users of, etc) with a bit of an... almost Noir detective story vibe on top. That's what my brain made it.

I realize that I'm not doing a real good job putting my thoughts together here, lol. It's well written, had great characters that I cheered for, and a really interesting magic/gun technology system. It surprised me more than once with twists it turns in the plot, and the pace stayed pretty fast throughout. It was never boring. That's pretty much all I need in a book. Characters I don't hate: check. Not boring: check. (Alright, there's more to it than that, but this is a great start nonetheless). The last quarter of this book was fantastically full of twists and turns. All kinds of stuff that I didn't see coming came flying at my brain, and I was completely riveted. It didn't end on a cliffhanger exactly, but there is definitely more story to come, and I am excited to read it!

I received a free copy of this book, and in exchange, I have honestly reviewed it. :)

Brandi says

It was an entertaining read. Well written and the story was quite original, it is definitely a book I would recommend.

Paula Hanlon says

Pretty good, nice for a prequel

Mages, royalty, and bounty hunters all have their strengths all while the land and everyone in it suffers and dies. A crazy plan to heal the living wounds of the poor and disenfranchised all while the rich and powerful live fat and easy.

Audrey says

Loved it

The book was very different but it had all the great stuff. Magic, monsters, bad guys against the good people trying to save their world. I need book 2.

Emma says

3.5 stars

Ex-Royal Guard, Drake Sharazi, has been slumming it in the provinces since his exile from Troi. Accused of a crime he didn't commit, he's been doing what's necessary to stay alive, bounty hunting and consorting with the kind of criminals he would have taken down in his former life. He has this whole down and out, noir style vibe: seen it all, done it all. Now he has the chance to make it back into his golden existence, but can he do it without trampling over his already strained morals, or other people, to get there?

With the shining city of Troi at its heart, The Vale provides a beacon of hope and good living in a dying world. Or that's what the marketing department would say anyway. Living under streams of mana which

flow from a power station maintained by the Order of High Mages, the people of Troi have it all. At least in comparison to those living outside its boundaries. Within the city a hierarchical structure holds sway, each person allowed specific privileges according to their background, the whole system designed to support the rich and especially the royals. While most people are too scared of losing whatever position they have, the unfairness of it all has birthed Exodus, an underground organisation behind every major act against the regime, their ostensible aim to take over the Vale. And now they've kidnapped the prince, Drake's old friend and the person he now has to find. Except the conspiracy goes much deeper than he expected, the effort far more trying than the job description implied. With a supporting cast of misfits, he searches for answers, finding more than he bargained for about his own past to boot.

This is a place where magic and tech mix, all the mod cons enhanced by some specialist kit, like Drake's P37 gun and his modified car. Oh yes, it's a bit of a blokey read. In fact, it's a fun and trope filled romp through a UF style apocalyptic background, with high action set pieces, intrigue, and a little romance. It's a pretty simple tale, prioritising action and adventure over depth, keeping it pacey as hell. Even so, there's some attempt at meaty themes. The basic idea of pitting the haves against the have-nots is amplified by dwindling resources and twisted ideas about how to ensure the survival of not just the fittest, but the 'best of the best'. While it's a comprehensive world, painted in vivid colours and more than big enough to hold the plot, it never quite reaches that point of gritty veracity. It's a stage for the story and the reality it holds comes more from the way it reflects things we've seen before, on page and screen, than anything internal to the text. Drake's moral journey is by far the most interesting, if not entirely novel, aspect of the book, the hopelessness and bitterness at having to live his life away from civilisation slowly morphing into his own fight for what's right. Regardless, he's the kind of underdog hero with murder skills you can really get behind. No need to drag you along for this ride, you're suited, booted, and ready to go. I'll definitely see what comes next, this kind of easy fun shouldn't be missed.

Read for SPFBO 2018

Francis Chamberland says

The Vale: Behind The Vale Review

Dear Brian, this book is very interesting and exciting to read. Your imagination is wonderful and the characters were entertaining and interesting. Quite an adventure with much excitement and intrigue. Your background setting was exceptionally. I highly recommend reading this book to anyone interested in reading a great story. Thanks for the entertainment.Happy

Shirley Wright says

Have you ever seen one of those gritty movies from the 30's/40's about a private eye who's voice sounds a lot like Humphrey Bogart? That's exactly how this book reads! It has that great noir feel that makes you feel a little "dirty" when reading it, but in an oh so good way!

Disgraced royal guard Drake Sharazi is leading the life of a deadly bounty hunter in Vale, the last bastion of the human species. Exiled from his beautiful homeland of Troi, Drake is coming to terms with having to spend the rest of his life in the slums and squalor he's been sent to. Drake is a pretty damaged soul and not

really a favorite of many. In fact, from the very first page of this book, Drake is on someone's hit list! As you read, you find yourself empathetic to Drake and his plight. You root for him to survive and fight against his very nature to do what's right. He finds, almost against all odds, that he has a chance to go home again, but to go home may cause catastrophic destruction. Will it be worth it to go home?

In a very imaginative world of myth and magic Mr. Anderson draws you in with his world building and character progression. The story is fast paced and an easy read. I gave it 4 stars instead of 5 because it's a little confusing at first because you're thrown into a world and you're not really sure of what's going on with the magic, mana, weapons, and the word "hawker".

I really enjoyed it though, and I look forward to seeing where the road leads Drake in the next installment.

Shannon Marino says

Great book

Enjoyed reading this book. Looking forward to more. I read it in a day. I will be reading more of Brian books

Aaron says

Excellent book

Solid pacing, good character development, and a world brought to life by very descriptive writing. I am really looking forward to the next in the series.

Wol says

Characters

Drake – Exiled Royal Guard turned Bounty Hunter. He's a cynic doing what he must to survive in a joyless, harsh environment.

Salazar – the Prince of Troi, an old friend of Drake's who has been accused of treason by his father. He's on the run believing that the King has set a price on his head.

Xavier – The new Captain of the Royal Guard, a rival and foil to Drake.

Lenora – Drake's lost love, in what had been a complicated and possibly doomed relationship. She is resourceful and brave, also a skilled healer.

My Thoughts

Behind the Vale is sort of like if an 80s sci-fi action movie got into a dust-up with a film noir. That is to say, it's highly plot driven and fun and you're likely to recognize a lot of the tropes it uses if you're a fan of those

things. We open on Drake's life in exile – he's an outcast Royal Guard doing all he can to survive as a Bounty Hunter in a crappy, dog-eat-dog society in the last, barely inhabitable outskirts of the world. These are seedy slums populated by dangerous people and the desperately poor and unlucky. Amongst the most dangerous are Mages, one of whom attempts to assassinate Drake in the opening scenes. Mages are skilled with mana and have the ability to channel it, where Royal Guards like Drake have a mana crystal installed in their bodies and can use it to power their weaponry – both methods have a cost in terms of pain and exhaustion, which makes for an interesting system.

The main thrust of the plot lies in the protagonist being given a second chance to make it back into the kind of society where food isn't scarce – simple pleasures like hot water and entertainment are available. The King requests that Drake bring in his son – he's on the run, mistakenly believing that he is to be executed for treason. He acknowledges that Drake's exile was unjust but necessary to keep the peace, and apologizes. It's an interesting scene because for all his action hero moments, Drake is shown to have a tender and emotional side. He has waited a decade to receive this vindication and once again pledges himself to his King.

The pacing of the story is very good, with the plot and worldbuilding being its main strengths. The city of Troi is dual-layered, with the people of each level given a different amount of privilege – the bottom six levels are literally designed to support the upper levels, which house the richer classes who are held totally separate. Everyone in the lower six lives in constant fear of losing their modest jobs and being forced out of their level and into poverty and exile, which proves an excellent means of keeping the population under control. This is the most prevalent theme of the novel and it's well designed – Anderson hasn't just made his world unfair, he's given thought to how it remains unfair and what keeps the populace from rising up... a basic terror of life getting worse. It's relatable.

The prose is pretty simple, and serves only to move the story along – while this was a downside for me personally I know a lot of readers won't be bothered by it, particularly the kind of action fans who like to just get on with it. There's some repetitive phrasing and a lot of mention of Drake "enjoying the feel" or "enjoying the taste" of something, but very little in the way of description in terms of what the thing actually felt or tasted like, for example. It's definitely a "your mileage may vary" kind of deal so taking a look at the sample on Amazon can help you decide if it's an issue for you. Similarly, I found the dialogue to be fairly uninspired in terms of the characters having their own distinct voices. But again, it's a very plot heavy piece and in that respect it did very well. There were twists on top of twists, the character motivations made sense and it certainly never committed the cardinal sin of being boring. By the end, there's a lot that still hasn't been resolved and it's more of an intro to book 2 than an ending to book 1, but I found myself liking it. Overall I thought it was an enjoyable read that moved at a nice clip, with creative worldbuilding and solid commentary on the unfairness of this society in a way that also relates to our own. I'd definitely recommend it to action fans who like 80s sci-fi movies, simple prose and a competent, strong lead who isn't afraid to cry.

Score: 6.5/10

jay hatch says

Good read

I thought it was a really good read. It took a while for the storyline to get some action on. But the more you read the better it got. Really enjoyed the characters . Wish the second book was out. I hate when people stop right in the middle of and more or less got you sicker now wait for a year.

Brian Anderson says

Update: 12/15/2017 There are sample chapters on my Facebook fan page!
<https://www.facebook.com/TheGodlingCh...>

James Lafayette Tivendale says

Although I read this for Fantasy Book Review's contribution to The Self Published Fantasy Blog Off it was a book that had been on my horizon for some time so I was thrilled when it was placed in our group. I am happy to announce that Behind the Vale was my first semi-finalist from this year's competition.

What is it with awesome bad-ass characters being called Drake recently? We had a Drake in Rob J. Hayes' - Where Loyalties Lie and Peter McLean's - Drake. Drake, the protagonist here is a 'hawker' who is a sort of bounty hunter who lives and takes assignments in the greyest, dirtiest, and most violent places in the world after being exiled from the Troi's Royal Guard for a crime he didn't commit. He is an engrossing main character who has a P37 army specification gun and a magic sword. In similar fashion to how Geralt does in the Witcher novels, he has a very necessary set of skills to complete many complex and dangerous tasks that other individuals would not even contemplate considering. That has been his life for nine years. That is until he is arrested one day after defending himself from an assassination attempt. He is taken to the local police station only to see his old comrade who is now head of the Royal Guard awaiting him and he has a request. The Prince of Troi, who was once Drake's best friend has been kidnapped. The Royal Guard has thus far had no success in tracking the heir and they need Drake's honed skills, intelligence and knowledge of these unsavoury areas to lead the rescue efforts.

The standard for top-tier Self-Published books is phenomenal. Behind the Vale fits into that category with ease. To the extent that Anderson's story is so well crafted, engaging, and original that TOR have signed him to release a trilogy for them in 2020. That's the future so let's discuss what we have here.

The action is presented in a near-futuristic world where most of the wealth resides within the main city Troi. Outside the city are very desolate and grim towns and settlements where times are truly hard and greenery and anything beneficial for survival just do not grow. The city has a stranglehold monopoly on these inhabitants whose lives aren't exactly rosy unless you are highly skilled in a certain field. Even further from the capital is an area that is unknown and is guarded by a magical structure known as the Vale. Presented as being similar to The Misery in Ed McDonald's Blackwing, nobody dares venture beyond the Vale as that is where grotesque monstrosities lurk. All the action takes place under a shimmering sky flowing with mana and magical capabilities that looks sort of like a spider's web through a kaleidoscope. Imagine looking at the sun with your eyes closed and seeing dots spinning and moving and dancing on the back of your eyelids and that is how I imagine the skyline is viewed here.

Some of the elements featured in Behind the Vale are very reminiscent of recent Final Fantasy or Star Ocean games such as monster battles, phenomenal magical capabilities, signature weapons, and infiltrating secret facilities where notorious experiments are taking place. That isn't where the similarities to JRPG's end,

however. The cast of characters could be right out of one of the aforementioned games. The roguish lead-guy with a brutal past but a heart of gold, a long-lost love interest who all believe is out of his league, an assassin accomplice that he doesn't know if he can trust or not, a former employer who might just have it in for the hero, and a mysterious young girl who happens to be an expert hacker. The whole ensemble is neat, interesting, and their dialogue flows expertly. It is like reading a computer game but not in the sense of LitRPG as this is a really detailed and constructed fantasy world. A player isn't sucked from real life into it and we don't have endless levelling up, skill sheets or bonus enhancement choices like some LitRPG books do. There is nothing wrong with that genre but here the writing, action, and progression feel more organic and I, therefore, care more about the players and outcomes as I know this isn't a game and in this beautifully crafted world the consequences really do matter.

I won't discuss the narrative too much, however, this is the second time I've read it and both times I've read it within two days and haven't been able to put it down. There are moments of utmost excitement, shocks aplenty, betrayals from where you would least expect them and all the other excellent ingredients that make an excellent Final Fantasy-inspired addictive and thoroughly enjoyable fantasy thriller. Remember the name. Anderson is going to be a big deal, so be one of the cool kids and read him before your friends do. Excellent work and very much still in the running to be Fantasy Book Review's SPFBO finalist.

Esmerelda Weatherwax says

This was an author request, I had read and enjoyed Akiri: The Scepter of Xarbaal, so I was excited to give this one a go. I listened to this via audiobook (thanks for the credit, Brian) so please forgive any spelling errors.

Plot:

In the opening of the book, Drake is living in the slums of the world known as the Providences, working as a 'hawker', (which is basically a bounty hunter) and spending much of his time in a seedy bar when he's not working.

He takes jobs from less than reputable people, and his latest client doesn't want to pay up and decides it would be easier to kill Drake. Since the MC isn't just a standard hawker, and is actually an ex-Captain of the Guard to the King, he's able to fend for himself pretty well. The assassination attempt goes poorly, and Drake ends up walking away from it.

The King, who has exiled Drake, asks for his help when his son is kidnapped by a group of rebels. It seems as though despite exiling Drake, he and the King have a decent relationship. The King apologizes for having to exile him, and swears he believes he's innocent, and gets a little choked up about the whole thing. Drake believes if he can bring back Prince Salazar unharmed, or at least aid the King in a significant way by finding the band of rebels, he will be able to return to Troi – the last and greatest city on Earth.

The problem is, even if Drake manages to find Salazar, he may not want to come back with him. His father accused him of treason, and although he rescinded the accusation, the prince doesn't know that yet. He would believe that his rescuer is bringing him to his death.

Drake has to team up with another hawker who he despises to try and find Salazar, and it's a bloody and interesting journey. To make matters worse, someone from within is trying to sabotage the mission, planting bombs and other things around Drake trying to ensure he dies before he completes the rescue.

Final Score: 11.75/15

Characters:

Drake is pretty bitter about being an outcast forced to live in the Provincial Lands, a place where people die from hunger and are more or less the dregs of society. He's pretty good at what he does and doesn't seem to have any moral qualms about handing people over for a bounty, even if it means their deaths.

He has a long lost love that he's had to leave behind when he was banished to the Provincial lands, and he's reacquainted when he gets to Troi.

He seems to be fairly loyal to the King, despite the fact that he banished him. He was also friends with the prince who's gone missing, so he not only wants to find him to possibly re-gain his place in Troi, but also because he was a friend.

I wasn't sure if I liked him at first, but the more I got to know him the more I came around to him.

Final Score: 10.25/15

World Building

Exodus is the rebel group who's been behind most of the civil unrest over the last couple decades. They are a secretive group that's managed to stay outside the King's grasp for a while, and likely has people stationed in the higher positions of the government.

Lots of different kinds of magic, flames, mind reading, healing, etc. It's all fairly mysterious except for the fact you know it uses mana.

Guards have a vex crystals that helps them channel mana which prevents exhaustion and boosts some of their abilities. Mages without this have to use their entire bodies to channel mana, and it can be very exhausting. Having the crystal to channel the mana is extremely painful, but you never get tired.

The world is sort of post-apocalyptic, something happened long ago that nearly wiped out humanity. Troi is the last city left, and it's also dual-layered, with the Lower City literally holding up the Upper City.

There's a lot of modern tech, cars, phones tv and all of that. Drakes favorite weapon is his P37, and never goes anywhere without it.

The society is rather hierachal, with peoples stations at birth having a big impact on how they can progress through society. A "level 6" is a lower station at birth, and are given poor jobs like sewer cleaning. The people living in Troi are rather removed from the rest of humanity that's struggling along. They live in

luxury, while most people are starving and dying by the hundreds.

Final Score: 11.25/15

Writing:

I felt like I wanted a little more from the prose, but it wasn't something that was glaring – there were just a few overused words and sometimes there was a lack of description to help me visualize what was going on or what the character was experiencing. However, it read quickly and the prose pushed the story along well.

Final Score: 9.5/15

Pacing:

I found the pacing to be smooth and consistent, there weren't any lulls or 'filler' material. There was a nice pace of action through the book that was coupled with narrative and dialogue so it wasn't moving at breakneck speed from one fight to the next. There were pretty high stakes towards the end of the book, and there was more than enough tension to keep my attention from beginning to end.

Final Score: 13/15

Originality:

I really liked the world building, the magic was interesting and I found the dual city concept coupled with the society to be a nice mix.

Final Score: 12/15

Personal Enjoyment:

I wasn't sure at first if I was going to like this because I wasn't connecting so much with the character, I've seen a lot of grumpy bounty hunters who are unhappy with their lives. However, once the main plot started to unfurl I became more and more interested. By halfway through I was speeding along through it. The audiobook was also well narrated and kept my attention, I made it through fairly quickly.

Final Score: 7.5/10

Audience:

Bounty Hunter main character

Single pov

Post-apocalyptic setting

Futuristic setting

Lots of magic with mages

Guns in Fantasy

Fast paced with lots of action

Final Score: 75.25/100
