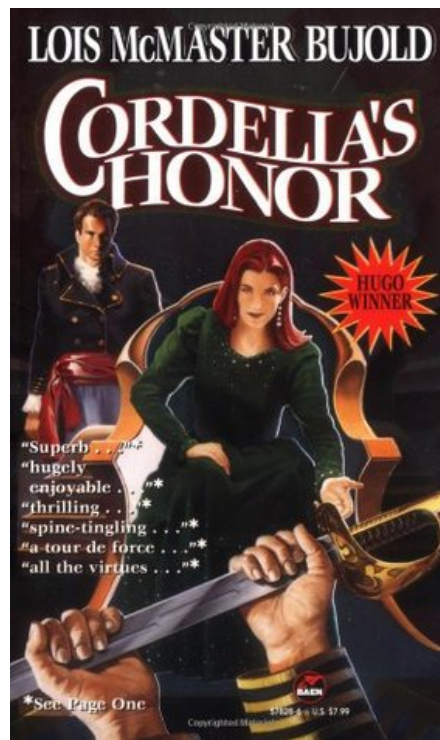




Cordelia's Honor

Lois McMaster Bujold

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Cordelia's Honor Lois McMaster Bujold

Shards of Honor - Betan Cmdr Cordelia Naismith and enemy Barrayaran Aral Vorkosigan are attacked and marooned together. Aral, misnamed "Butcher of Komarr", captures her. They exchange meanings of honor and love, separate for homes. Later demoted to Captain, Cordelia runs into Aral, after his sadistic cousin Vorrutyer, and warped ugly bodyguard Sgt Bothari. Cordelia flees Betans who ignore truth.

Barrayar Aral is appointed Regent of baby heir by dying Emperor. Cordelia, now pregnant Lady Vorkosigan, breathes antidote to poisonous gas. Her son Miles has fragile bones that break on birth and will limit his adult height and durability.

Cordelia's Honor Details

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Author : Lois McMaster Bujold

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Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Space, Space Opera, Romance

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From Reader Review Cordelia's Honor for online ebook

Justin says

Let's all agree on this right up front: the covers of the Vorkosigan Saga books are horrible. Just plain awful. The cover art for anything published by Baen is pretty bad, enough to make even the proud nerds of today cringe and place the book face-down whenever possible to avoid being snickered at. But these covers in particular, with their dramatic poses and odd retro fonts, seem to house a strange breed of quasi-historical space pulp that embodies everything that "serious readers" should avoid. And that's a damned shame, because Bujold writes fantastic, accessible science fiction. Were I to browse this by cover instead of trying out a no-frills ebook version, I may well have never discovered it.

I'll try to stick to well-known details, but there are a few mild spoilers here if you want to fly completely blind. *Cordelia's Honor* is an omnibus, comprising two separately published novels: *Shards of Honor* and *Barrayar*. These two books represent the first chronological stories in the sprawling Vorkosigan Saga, and begin a generation before the introduction of that saga's hero, Miles. *Shards of Honor* begins with Betan explorer Captain Cordelia Naismith, attempting to chart a new, unclaimed world. Her party is surprised and attacked by a squad of the warlike Barryarans, and she barely escapes with her life. She finds herself lost on an unfamiliar planet, and thanks to a mutiny within the Barryaran ranks, she is forced to rely on a gruff Barryaran outcast named Aral Vorkosigan, better known to her people as the Butcher of Komarr. She comes to know him better than she would ever have guessed during their ordeal in the wild, and their understanding of one another becomes crucial when they meet again, once the reason for the Barryarans' presence on the untouched world becomes clear and their respective peoples stand on the brink of a brutal war.

The second book, *Barrayar*, picks up on the titular planet. Having forsaken her homeworld of Beta Colony after her unpleasant homecoming, Cordelia attempts to build a peaceful life with her new husband and the eventual birth of their son. However, after the Barryaran emperor dies, Aral Vorkosigan finds himself manipulated into being the regent for the child heir, and thus a prime target for those lusting after the child heir's power. An attempted assassination has dire consequences for Cordelia's unborn child, and before she and Aral can gain their balance, a Barryaran noble launches an insurrection and attempts to seize control of the empire through force. Cordelia, loath to accept the responsibilities placed on her by political momentum, must decide how far she is willing to go to rescue her fledgling family, and how much she should compromise her personal ethics in order to do so.

This is the second collected omnibus of sequential novels that I've read in the past year (third if you count graphic novels), and I'm starting to notice a distinct feeling that the novels contained within such volumes work a lot better together than they do apart. I can't decide whether that's a psychosomatic thing that's brought on by there being so many pages left after getting through one book; I finished *Shards of Honor* feeling like more should have happened, and glad that I had a second half to move on to. In retrospect, I think that has everything to do with Bujold's writing style, and I'm pretty sure I would have liked each book on its own, had I approached them that way. These books are referred to as a "saga," and that's an appropriate label. This is the first entry in a space opera that spans great distances, unravels intricate political intrigues, and narrates epic battles, but it's immediately clear that the books are first and foremost about the characters. The saga follows the rise and fall of its players, and the landmark events in the plot provide the catalyst and backdrop for the landmark changes in the character arcs. This is what makes these books transcend pulp sci-fi and confirms them as a great choice for anyone who wants to read a good story.

There are a couple of snags, though. The characters are pitch-perfect, but their dialogue can get a little awkward from time to time. The narration is also a little odd, as well, especially in *Shards of Honor*. Bujold

tends to get a little informal with the narrative voice, occasionally letting Cordelia's sardonic humor bleed into the exposition and narration. Compounding this problem is the lack of italics or any other device to differentiate character thoughts in the first book, making the whole story feel a little slapdash. There was apparently a fair amount of time between the publication of the first book of this story arc and the second, and it definitely shows; Barrayar is much more tightly plotted, better paced, and efficiently narrated than Shards of Honor, displaying Bujold's evolution as an author between the two stories. Standing as a testament to her talent, however, the joining of the actual story is seamless and natural.

I am to understand that the Vorkosigan books don't really get going until we get into the exploits of Miles Vorkosigan, but as a newcomer to the series, I found this book to be a wonderful introduction to this particular world(s) and set of characters. It gives insight into the politics and technology of two distinct planets without seeming either contrived or confusing, leaving plenty of room to get to know wonderfully nuanced characters like Cordelia, Aral, Droushnakovi, and my favorite, Bothari. This gets a solid recommendation to any science fiction reader that puts a premium on good characters.

Jon says

4 stars

Gail Carriger says

The precursor to her Vorkosigan saga, this is an omnibus of two books featuring Miles's mother, Cordelia. It is amazingly well written and not only a wonderful sweeping Space Opera but quite romantic and sweet. The first installment is essentially a survival story on an alien world with enemies forced to survive, and uncover treachery, together. The second half is more political as Cordelia, now an outcast from her own culture, enters Vor politics in her own fierce and indomitable way.

Cordelia is witty, snarky, and tough, with an innate sense of right and wrong and true grace under fire. I'm more interested in her character than in the events leading up to Miles' birth, as I've never had the time or inclination to commit to the full (seemingly endless) Vorkosigan saga. Please don't tell me how sad this makes you, or how I should rush out and buy now now now, it's my retirement plan.

The true beauty of this omnibus is that it stands alone, and gives great insight into Bujold's brilliance.

Marjorie Friday Baldwin says

My Rating: 5 out of 5 stars (wish I could rate it higher)

Genre: Science Fiction, Space Opera, Romantic SF

My usual type of read? (yes/no) Yes, very much so!

Plot type: epic romance, galactic space war, incredible world-building

#

I just read this again for something like the 7th time since I first "discovered" the series in December of 2005, so I guess I've read it, on average, once a year for 6 years running. I remain astounded each time I read

this book at just how much *story* Lois has managed to jam-pack into this duology. I tend to think of the duology as "one, long book" (which Lois admits it actually was when she first started out, before she chopped off the first dribs and drabs of Barrayar in order to sell *Shards of Honour* on its own).

The amount of content relevant to the rest of the series is probably higher than in any other book of the series, too. Most people don't count the short stories--e.g., *The Borders of Infinity*, *Labyrinth* or *The Mountains Of Mourning* - and almost *no one* ever counts *Winterfair Gifts* as though these character-centric stories aren't actually "critical" to the series. Let me tell you, they are--all of them. Miles suffers psychic scars in *The Borders of Infinity* that he's still suffering from 10 years later in *Komarr*.

Likewise, the events of *Cordelia's Honor* are so inherent to the creation and growth of the characters and the *galactic history* of the universe Lois created in *The Vorkosigan Saga*, I can't imagine how anyone can get the same experience out of the other 18 books in the series without reading this one first. From the Escobaran War to the Vordarian Pretendship and the introduction of uterine replicators to the planet Barrayar which happens in between those two events, nearly every event in this book is a critical piece of galactic history in later books. I suppose that's just Lois's masterful ability to connect her series books while keeping them functionally standalone as well. I don't know anyone who's done as good a job at series writing as Lois McMaster Bujold (and I'm a big romance novel reader so I read a lot of "series" books--none are done quite as masterfully as this!)

The one caution, of course, is just that: *Cordelia's Honor* is an epic love story, a romance AND a space opera, while most of the other books in the series are either a space-based adventure OR an SF romance.

The space opera part of *Cordelia's Honor* is so huge, so complex, that it's hard to talk about in a review--and impossible to do so without spoiling, which I don't want to do. Suffice to say, there are NO events in this book that don't later impact someone somewhere in this universe Lois has built.

On a more basic scale, it's important to see where Miles comes from and to see just how much of EACH of his parents he really is. For instance, in later books, I never remember seeing Aral Vorkosigan behave the way he does in *Cordelia's Honor*. Instead, once Miles is up and about (i.e., no longer needs to be carried around in a bucket LOL) Aral acts like a father, anyone's father, he is Miles Vorkosigan's father (at long last, years before Miles wists for such a thing).

Aral actually fades into the periphery of Miles's brilliance. I know Lois was trying to show Miles's "hopeless" battle of living in the shadow of the Great Man as though no one could live up to the image of Admiral Count Aral Vorkosigan, but in *Cordelia's Honor*, he's still "just" Lord Aral Vorkosigan, with his own shadow-of-the-great-man complex to deal with, having General Count Piotr Vorkosigan still barking out orders for everyone's lives (or deaths). Not to mention having to live down the unjustly awarded title of *Butcher of Komarr*.

It's amazing to read Aral as a 44-year old man behaving just exactly like Miles does later (as a 20 something). It's not so much a sense of Miles imitating his father, as it is watching the "original" and thinking "Oh, that's where Miles gets it from." Aral will have settled down to being a home body and hard-core politician by the time Miles *could* imitate him and at that point, Miles is far more interested in imitating his Aral's father-the-Count, General Count Piotr Vorkosigan.

So in *Cordelia's Honor*, we see Aral as he was, before politics tempered him, before war destroyed his soul, before personal attacks hardened his heart to all but his family. The events of this book explain the why's and wherefore's of Aral's growth into the father Miles knows later--and in a wonderful way. Plus, who doesn't love Cordelia's outrageous and accidental sense of humor, making fun of Barrayar not to mention Barrayarans? :-) In *Cordelia's Honor*, we read the root of her views, while she's still oh-so-Betan as to be literally dumbfounded by the Barrayaran ways.

The love affair between Barrayaran Aral and Betan Cordelia is not really an "opposites attract" story but the culture clashes are startlingly funny the way Lois presents them. The "in jokes" that run through the series (*Rule Number 7*, Sir or Drou and Kou on the settee in the Library) are nearly as significant to the other books in the series as are the mortal wounds suffered by all.

From Emperor Gregor's life-changing before he's old enough to tie his own shoes to Miles's life being threatened by his own grandfather and saved (repeatedly) by the ever-loyal Bothari before Miles has even managed to get out of the aforementioned "bucket," *Cordelia's Honor* is the foundation of facts, fictions and fabulous people upon whom the richness and splendor of this series is based. The Bothari character, by the way, takes on a significance and depth in *Cordelia's Honor* that is referenced but never quite understood in later books. After having read this one, not a single later book of the series will fail to remind you Bothari's existence--without his presence in the books at all after *The Warrior's Apprentice*.

As Lois Herself has said, Aral Vorkosigan is the center of the series's universe. Cordelia is the center of Aral.

Highly recommend this book as one of the most important of the series as well as one of the most densely-packed stories ever written (in this series or any other). It's not just packed with a lot of story, it's neatly, tightly, and **well** packed with a solid solid, solid enough to form the basis for this incredible series. This is my #1 favorite of the 19 stories of The Vorkosigan Saga, followed by *Memory* and *Mirror Dance*, tied for #2.

I'm reading the rest of the series, in order, in its entirety, planning to finally write reviews for all before my pre-ordered hardcover copy of the latest book, *Ivan, His Booke* or *Captain Vorpatril's Alliance*, arrives in November. You can read my review of the first and only *Ivan Vorpatril Adventure* [here](#).

Libby says

I very much enjoyed these early books in the Vorkosigan saga, despite the fact that there are plenty of new-author moments that occasionally jarred me from the narrative. These human civilizations feel very much designed to showcase the characters rather than showcase the author's world-building. Fortunately, this works very well for these books because the main characters, the titular surveyor-turned-soldier from Beta Colony, Cordelia, and Barrayan soldier-lord Aral Vorkosigan, are utterly engaging, and the supporting cast is equally strong. Also excellent are Bujold's action sequences, which are invariably well-paced and clear.

Where the books occasionally fall flat are when the plot is taken hostage by the need to prove a capital-p Point. For instance,

SPOILER

the climactic scene in "Barrayar" where Cordelia and company break into the imperial palace, presumably to rescue hostages, and they come up in the bedroom of the usurper, who is asleep with the princess dowager. Instead of using her borrowed swordstick to slit the traitor's throat, Cordelia muses that her electronic weapon would set off alarms if she uses it to kill him. The purpose of this more than slight oversight is so the princess dowager can be shown to be a victim rather than an active participant. After an annoyingly manipulative scene involving her son's shoe, the princess is killed in crossfire, thus becoming a symbol of the capital-t Theme: patriarchal society harms women irreparably.

END SPOILER

All in all, I'd recommend these books for any sci-fi fan who hasn't already read them, and they're thus far wholly appropriate for a YA audience. I am very much looking forward to reading more.

Chris says

It is a good thing that these two books are joined in one volume. The first book, *Shards of Honor* is by far the weaker book; however, when taken with *Barrayar*, it works.

Honor sets the stage by introducing the reader to Aral and Cordelia. These two would be lovers are from different, quasi warring, planets - Barrayar (a.k.a. Sparta) and Beta (a.k.a. Athens). I found *Honor* to be the weaker novel. The major problem I had was I just didn't buy the fact that Aral and Cordelia were in love, deeply in love. I just didn't buy it. I brought the sense of the companionship they had while on planet. I brought that they were alike. I could even buy Aral's first quick proposal because of the culture he comes from. Cordelia's reaction and Aral's love I just couldn't buy. It's true that Bujold drops hints (shot, sentences) that say Cordelia is attracted to Aral, and considering the situation it would hardly be surprising. But love? Love enough to leave your home and go some place completely different? Didn't buy it. The other problem is Cordelia who in a section of the book seems to be a completely different person. She becomes stupid for several chapters in row, too stupid to be chalked up to simply, understandably, stress. The best part of the book, for me, was the epilogue that featured none of the main characters and focused on the cost of war in a harsher degree than the rest of the book. I felt more for those characters, in particular Boni, then I did for Aral and Cordelia.

Barrayar is completely different. From the first paragraph, it is quite easily to tell the writing is far more polished. Cordelia and Aral not only seem more real here, but so does their relationship. I couldn't buy them falling in love in the first book, but I brought them as an united married couple in the second. As Bujold herself and several other reviewers have pointed out, the theme of motherhood runs throughout this second novel. I found, however, the most touching and affecting part to be the conversation between Cordelia and Bothari. Bothari's struggles and concern, his repentance even, were more touching than his caring of the children. Perhaps because at the end, he seems more devoted to Miles than to Elena or perhaps because I don't have children myself. With Bothari, Bujold gives the reader a different kind of victim. She also more fully addresses rape here than in *Barrayar*, both books combining quite well in looking at the ramifications. Bujold does a good job using both Bothari and Kou to explore the mental and physical effects of war on members of a Spartan society.

I have to say, though, I do wonder about books like *Barrayar*. This isn't a comment just on Bujold but on other writers as well. I always feel strange when reading a book or watching a movie where a woman leaves a place where she has power to go and live in a totally new society where she doesn't have very much. Bujold does it with Cordelia, Marion Zimmer Bradley did it to a degree with her Darkover novels (and no, I'm not talking about the Free Amazons; I'm talking about Magda). While Bujold does show the reader Cordelia's anger or dislike of some of the rules and gives us Drou who is "wasted" or precieved as wasted in the society, I never feel that the examination of Cordelia's reaction goes as far as it could. I have yet to read a book that really does so, and I have to wonder why such fiction appeals because it does. But would I want to give up my right to vote, my right to wear what I want, my right to anything because of love? I can only think of two books that tackle the idea of a role reverse in such a situation - *The Ruins of Isis* and *The Gate to Women's Country*.

Apatt says

Lois McMaster Bujold is an author I have been meaning to read for the longest time, she has won so many major sf awards it is clear that she must be some kind of major talent in the field. However it took me years and years to get around to picking up one off her books simply because the synopsis of her Vorkosigan series never seem all that interesting to me. Fortunately for me Lois has graciously decided to make most of her Vorkosigan books available for FREE in digital formats on her publisher web site. So I took advantage off her generosity, downloaded the whole package and got on with the first book Cordelia's Honor. This is an omnibus volume consisting of Shards of Honor and Barrayar.

Shards of Honor introduces the characters and the settings and Barrayar is the more intense plot driven conclusion.

Character driven sci-fi is something of a rarity, most sci-fi novels are more concerned with plot and technology, characterization is more often than not of secondary importance. Sci-fi greats such as Asimov and Clarke are not known for characterization, they get away with less emphasis on characterization because of they brilliance of their plots and tech. Lois McMaster Bujold is a different kettle of fish, she puts technology in the background and concentrates on her characters and what they do. This works greatly in her favor as her characters are mostly complex and believable.

Obviously characterization alone is not enough a decent novel needs a decent plot to give the characters something to do. Bar bar has a reasonably complex and driving plot and becomes quite fast paced in the second half of the book. The only drawback for me is that it gets bogged down with romantic scenes from time to time. They are not badly written but the occasional lapses into sentimentality does make me cringe. They don't detract much from the over all quality of the book though and the whole thing concludes beautifully. Fortunately I still have many vote vote books to get through before I have to start passing fort them. Certainly I will be more than happy to start buying Lois non vote vote fantasy novels of which there are many. I feel like I really owe her something for all the freebies she has given to me.

Althea Ann says

This is an omnibus edition of 'Shards of Honor' and 'Barrayar.'

'Shards of Honor' is the first novel in what has since become an extensive series (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vorkosi...>) of which I've read a great many. It's always odd to go back and read an early book featuring characters who were later fleshed out a great deal more. To be frank, this book does not fully live up to many of the later entries into the saga - but then, how could it, really? The world, and the people in it, have grown in the three decades since this book was written.

None of this is to say this isn't a good book. It is.

Non-combatant Betan scientist Captain Cordelia Naismith and her exploration team are ambushed and attacked by a group of militaristic Barrayaran soldiers. Next thing she knows, her spaceship must flee, leaving her behind. Also marooned on the planet is the Barrayaran commander Aral Vorkosigan, betrayed by his own men. Cooperation may be the only way that either of them can stay alive - and the only way that Cordelia can keep a severely injured member of her crew alive, as well. Forced into proximity, the two of them may learn that although they come from wildly disparate cultures, as individuals they may have more in common than they would have guessed.

That's just the beginning of the story, and it progresses with plenty of action, but also with a very realistic,

human focus on emotions, values, and decision-making.

At the end of the book, 'Aftermaths,' a separate short story which was actually written (and published) before the rest of the book, goes even farther with that theme. It gives us a look at an aspect of space battles that action-packed stories of glory usually skip - the civil servants employed to collect the corpses floating in space, working an unpleasant but necessary job. It's a powerful and heartwrenching tale.

The chronological sequel to 'Shards of Honor,' 'Barrayar' follows Cordelia Naismith as she defects from Beta, in order to make her way to Barrayar and find her former captor Aral Vorkosigan - a man she has come to love and respect.

It's not incomprehensible that her Betan psychologists assume that she must be suffering from something like Stockholm syndrome, or some more insidious mental conditioning. The suspicion cast on her means that even though the war between Beta and Barrayar is technically over, Cordelia must leave the familiar comforts of home behind and give herself fully to her new life on primitive, violent, militaristic Barrayar. Nearly immediately she finds herself plunged into the dizzying complexity of the upper levels of Barrayaran politics, as Aral discovers that the peaceful retirement he'd been planning is not in the cards for him. And that's not the only sudden change: Cordelia is pregnant.

If you've read later books in this series, a great deal of this book is a lot of tension waiting for certain events that you've already read about, to happen. It's intentional on the author's part - this book involves her backtracking and filling in details about events that have already been referred to in other books. I think it would be an equally enjoyable, although different, experience to read it without already having been introduced to Miles and knowing the difficulties and circumstances surrounding his birth.

Nathan says

As I finish up listening to this series I couldn't help but go back and start a reread of the first two omnibus editions; both first read several years ago.

Shards of Honor is still a book that does not do the series that follows justice. It is disjointed, jumps in time without transition (though at least it avoids tedious filler of unimportant events) and lacks the mix of humor and serious later books have. Bujold's ability to give characters real personality shines early though.

Barrayar though is a different animal. The humor is there, the heartbreak is there. What amazes me though is how seamlessly she ties in a sequel to her first book after the next few books set 20 years later have already been written. It doesn't feel like a retcon; as a reader joining the series much later I would have never known there was a gap between writing the first two books in the chronology.

Bradley says

I read these separately, but together, they really make sense. From courtship to marriage to having a wonderful baby boy, it's definitely not about Miles, just as the title explains. Cordelia was always a very strong character in all of the books, but it was never as clear as here.

Olga Godim says

I've been Bujold's fan since my first reading of one of her Vorkosigan novels. Miles Vorkosigan, the hero of the series, is definitely my favorite sci-fi hero, but Cordelia, his mother, is much more. I love Cordelia. Her humanity and strength are humbling and uplifting. I hope such women exist in our lives, not just in Bujold's sci-fi world.

Although I read and reread most of the books of this series more than once, this is my first review of this novel. It is Cordelia's story, and it is divided into two parts: ***Shards of Honor*** and ***Barrayar***.

The first part, ***Shards of Honor***, opens with Cordelia as a Betan survey ship captain, exploring a newly discovered planet with her colleagues. Suddenly, her world explodes around her. Her scientific camp is destroyed. Some of her ship officers are dead or wounded. Unknown dangers threaten from every tree and bush, and her only ally in the frightening chaos is a Barrayaran officer, Aral Vorkosigan, who takes her prisoner. From that perilous position, Cordelia finally escapes, thanks to her courage and ingenuity, but her troubles are only starting.

Her twisty path weaves through the brutal war; she suffers capture by the Barrayaran military and the POW camp, but even when she at last reaches safety at home, troubles follow her in the person of the army psychiatrist who wants to wipe her mind clean of all she had endured. Especially from her love for Aral, the love that crept on her unawares, the love that changed her life.

Their love triumphs, of course, huge and poignant. The second part, ***Barrayar***, begins after Cordelia's frantic flight from her home on Beta Colony, one step ahead of the charges of treason and the dratted psychiatrist. Now, she is quietly married to Aral. Both are middle-aged, ready to settle down. He is retired from the military, and both of them are prepared to enjoy their retirement. They plan to start a family. Barrayar interferes. The old dying Emperor of Barrayar asks Aral to become a Regent to his orphaned grandchild, five-year-old Prince Gregor. A patriot and an aristocrat to his bones, with honor imprinted on his psyche, Aral can't say NO. Thus, Cordelia is thrust into the maelstrom of Barrayar's turbulent politics, as the planet climbs from its almost feudal mentality towards galactic standards under Aral's guidance. The resistance of the proponents of tradition is fierce, and Aral and Cordelia's son Miles pays the price.

But Cordelia never gives up. She stands beside her husband, proud and free, a symbol of the new possibilities. She fights for her husband as only a Betan ship captain could, and she fight for her son's life as any loving mother, and she wins in the end, although that victory comes with a painful price.

Cordelia is a marvelous human being, compassionate even to her enemies and a role model to countless young women on Barrayar. Loving and forgiving is her default mode, understanding and acceptance her dual mottos, but she could be ruthless to her enemies and acidic towards fools. I love Cordelia and I enjoyed her story. For me, it was, together with its sequel, Gentleman Jole and the Red Queen, the best two books of the entire Vorkosigan saga. And the best heroine in the sci-fi genre.

This book is a sci-fi adventure in form, a love story in essence, and an exploration of several deep and penetrating issues humanity has been wrestling with recently, from feminism to democracy. Although it is at times hysterically funny, the laughter is frequently tinged with sadness. So many of Barrayar's problems mirror our own that Cordelia's tale sometimes slips into satire. Other times, into philosophy. It captivates its readers with all its multiple facets and its irresistible heroine.

A lovely, amazing book.

Tokio Myers says

I'm not going to lie guys, I didn't like *Shades of Honor* which is the first book in this bind up. I thought the story moved a little too fast to the point characters were lacking development. The romance was bland and the plot is one I read in hundred of books in multiple genres. I didn't understand why people like Lois Bujold

so much. Why do people say she's the Queen of Scifi if this is her best work? The only thing keeping me from dnfing the series was a short story at the end called Aftermath. A short story that made me cry so I kept going and I'm glad I did because Barrayar is amazing.

"You should have fallen in love with a happy man, if you wanted happiness. But no, you had to fall for the breathtaking beauty of pain."

Barrayar takes place after the events of Shades of Honor and it follows a woman surviving in a society and world that's unfamiliar to her. What I enjoyed about this book is Cordelia (the woman/protagonist of the two books) about how strong she is without seeming unrealistic. How she hates the society but finds benefits in it. I loved her struggle because it's real. She isn't some pity girl who wants to complain about the world; she's sees real danger that anyone would be afraid to face and wants to run yet she stays not because she has to because she loves the people she meets and doesn't want to abandon them or the man she's come to love. Don't even get me started on what these people do to her cause I would have hightailed out of there.

"He's bisexual, you know." He took a delicate sip of his wine.

"Was bisexual," she corrected absently, looking fondly across the room. "Now he's monogamous."

Highly recommend!

Anne says

I first read this book about 8 years ago, and it remains one of my all time favorites.

Cordelia's Honor is actually a compilation of two of Lois McMaster Bujold's earlier books, *Shards of Honor* and *Barrayar*. It is part of the Vorkosigan saga, but I had not read any of the others when I first read this one. The book is told from the point of view of Cordelia Naismith, Captain of a Betan Survey ship. While on survey, her crew is attacked by a band of Barrayans, led by none other than Aral Vorkosigan, aka The Butcher of Komarr.

In truth, Vorkosigan, is actually the victim of a conspiracy to kill him and frame him for the attack on the Betans. As Cordelia travels with him to safety, she gets to know and admire him. Both of them are military people for whom responsibility means everything. Unfortunately, they're on opposite sides of a brewing war.

Romance and science fiction rarely blend smoothly. You either end up with the same old romance story just set in outer space, or a science fiction story with really bad romantic scenes. *Cordelia's Honor* is the exception; it is the perfect harmony of both.

What makes this book so successful is the characterization. I read a lot, but Bujold has written some of the most engaging, realistic characters I've read in a long time. Especially Cordelia. I loved Cordelia, I want to **be** Cordelia. She's witty, strong, smart and, well for lack of a better term, a kick butt heroine. She is not content to huddle quietly and wait for her man to rescue her from the bad guys. Nope; she gets up and blasts them with her stunner without so much as a by your leave. This is not to say she's one of those annoyingly all men are idiots types either. She's attracted to Vorkosigan, not afraid to admit it and rather likes the idea. Even better, Cordelia is not a young, sexy spacebunny in a tight suit. She's in her 30's, a little on the tall side and just a regular looking woman. Did I mention I loved her?

As easy as it is to see why Vorkosigan would fall for Cordelia, it's just as easy to see why she falls for him. No studmuffin himself, Vorkosigan is in his 40's and just barely taller than Cordelia (which makes him short

for a man) Though on the outside he's all business, inside he's a honorable man who is reluctantly dragged into the political messes of his world. He finds he can open up to Cordelia, and does so with refreshing ease. Too many SF heroes (and romance heroes for that matter) are of the breed that would rather get a root canal than express their emotions or communicate. He's also a great foil for Cordelia's dry wit, giving as good as he gets.

Bujold doesn't stop at the main characters either. The small cast of secondary characters, such as the mentally interesting Sergeant Bothari, is three dimensional and as intriguing as the main characters. You care about all of them, no matter how small their actual part in the story.

The first half of the book, (*Shards of Honor*) covers the developing relationship between Cordelia and Vorkosgian through their trek on the survey planet and the Betan/Barrayan war. The second half (*Barrayar*) starts shortly after their wedding and covers Cordelia's acclimation to life as Lady Vorkosgian and the political wrangling after Aral is named Regent for the child emperor. I found this part of the book dragged in places. I would have preferred less political intrigue and more Cordelia/Vorkosigan, but still *Barrayar* is one of the best of the genre (and it won the Hugo award for best novel).

Jonathan Terrington says

4.5 Stars

Cordelia's Honor is a fascinating novel, or rather a fascinating omnibus, having been split down the middle. Well not the precise middle but that middle we mortals all mean when we say middle. The middle that's a little to the left. However either way this novel was split into two novels, a sort of conjunctive novel, and as such I will discuss my reaction to the two different stories.

Shards of Honor

4 Stars

This novel flings its readers directly into the action, causing the two romantic interests of this space opera to be flung together quickly and decisively. Aral Vorkosigan and Cordelia Naismith are two intriguing characters, however their romance proved to be unbelievable (a little fast paced and rushed). It was a bunch of teasing, flirting and then suddenly they were in love? I didn't really buy it that much. In fact the major problem that prevented me liking this book as much as I could was the pacing. At times it was too quick, at times it was too slow. I did like the plot - which involved a war between two cultures in space and, of course the romantic elements, and some close calls where some very gruesome things almost happened to Cordelia. But it was all okay because this is a fictional novel and nothing bad happens to characters in fiction right (unless you're G.R.R Martin or Cormac McCarthy - nothing but bad seems to happen to you then).

Barrayar

5 Stars

It was easy to see why *Barrayar* is the winner of a Hugo for best sci-fi of the year. As science fiction goes this was magnificent. It had the science fictional gadgets, it had the characters, it had the setting, it had conflict and it had political intrigue. The speed of the plot was far more even and the character interactions and romantic angles more levelled and believable. As for the plot, well this novel focused on the culture shock experienced by Cordelia in a different world as well as a power vacuum created by the loss of a ruler.

As such a kind of 'game of thrones' begins (without so many character deaths as G.R.R Martin) and Cordelia proves why she is one of the strong women of fiction. The relationships between characters in this novel were perhaps the highlight for me. I loved Kou and Drou, I found Aral and Cordelia to be one of the best relationships in fiction, not just science fiction, and I loved the complexity of Bothari as a character. He's the insane character kept in check by meds (and the strength of Cordelia's personality).

Ultimately this is an omnibus that must be read by all sci-fi fans. I particularly encourage the first novel for space opera and romance lovers and I particularly encourage the second for anyone who just loves a good sci-fi read. It certainly is one of the best character driven sci-fi novels I've read and I will read more of the Vorkosigan Saga.

Stephanie says

I like science fiction. I read a lot of it. *Cordelia's Honor*, on the surface, seems a standard science fiction novel with just a dash of romance. It has the customary interstellar war, political intrigue, and, of course, high-tech gadgets that we've come to expect from our sci-fi. What makes this book special is its title character, Cordelia Naismith.

Cordelia is not the clichéd woman you see in most science fiction. She doesn't just cling to the arm of her leading man (which would be easy to do, because her husband, Aral Vorkosigan, is awesome). She doesn't sacrifice her femininity to be the hero. And she *definitely* doesn't stoop to flaunting her sexuality in a steel bikini either (no offense, Princess Leia). Her strength comes from smarts and the relationships she forges, not from rippling biceps and an icy-cold demeanor, nor short skirts and seductive smiles. In other words, she's what I would consider the ideal female heroine: confident, resourceful, and intelligent. I found Cordelia to be very refreshing.

The story itself (this is actually two novels in one book) is engaging and entertaining, but in my opinion, it is little more than a setting in which Cordelia can shine. And I, for one, am glad to find another female heroine that does us women proud.

* This book is definitely for more mature readers. There is war and the accompanying atrocities, and there is sex (all kinds). Before you freak out: there aren't any graphic descriptions, but don't say I didn't warn you!

Conor says

Shards of Honour - 3.5 Stars

This was a fun start to an interesting series. The main characters were likeable and interesting (especially the gradual reveal of Vorkosigan's past) and the plot was fast-paced, filled with a series of exciting adventures. The world-building was solid but nowhere near as ambitious, intriguing and memorable as the first book in the other sci-fi series I have experience with (Hyperion). The secondary characters were for the most part also not particularly remarkable with the exception of the menacing and tormented Sergeant Bothari. I'm definitely interested to see where this series goes from here, especially in how the weird publication vs. reading vs. chronological order debate will effect the series' development.

Aftermaths - 4.5 stars

This was a short story that only had a tenuous connection to the events of the 2 main books. With the setting of 2 characters aboard a small space-ship on a mission to recover the bodies of those killed in a recent war the tone was suitably subdued and introspective. Overall I found this to be a somewhat creepy but deeply poignant story.

Barrayar- 4 stars

Jumping around a bit in reading book 7 after book 1 in this series but it worked pretty well. This book started out brilliantly with some understated (well as understated as assassination attempts and high risk experimental surgeries can be) family turmoil, politics and character development taking center stage. While it wasn't particularly dramatic Bujold's masterful writing of interesting, nuanced characters kept me engaged.

With the introduction of a much larger and more interesting supporting cast than in the first book it's become obvious that writing characters is Bujold's greatest strength: her world-building is pretty shallow and the plots are for the most part straightforward and over reliant on somewhat cliched adventures but Bujold has now written an impressive cast of colourful, nuanced characters. Especially interesting in this book were Droushnakovi the female bodyguard who defies the expectations of a warrior society where women aren't supposed to have anything to do with war, Princess Kareen who was convincingly written as a woman who had been forced into a series of horrific and difficult situations while struggling to survive and protect her young son, Count Piotr a decorated old officer whose old-fashioned values bring him into conflict with the main character and especially Sergeant Bothari who was a complex and compelling character in the last book and becomes even more so here as we learn more about his background and motivations.

However about half-way through the book the focus turned into an isolated trek through the countryside that just seemed to drag on and on. And on. By the time the plot returned to the important points and characters I had grown to care about I was struggling to maintain my attention. Fortunately the conclusion was strong: exciting action and some really cool moments where we learned more about certain characters and their motivations (insights into Sergeant Bothari and how his messed up childhood led to the development of the demons that have plagued him throughout the series were especially compelling). Overall this was a good continuation to the series that has left me psyched to check out the rest of the series, especially as these first 2 books often felt like a prologue to the "really start" of the series with the appearance of Miles in book 2.

Sarah Yoffa says

Lois has written one of the best love stories in the little-known subgenre of Romance SF with this duology. Two halves of one book, IMO, this story anchors the entire series for the next 20 years of Lois's writing, Miles's life, and the universe's existence. Except at the center of this universe is Aral Vorkosigan and it is ONLY in this book (pair of books) that we really and truly get to know Aral's heart. Which is, of course, named Cordelia ;-). The Admiral's Captain, Cordelia Naismith and Admiral Count Aral Vorkosigan, The Butcher of Komarr have quite the little love affair that wasn't. The way the man courts without courting--not to mention the way this woman flirts without batting an eyelash. Well, maybe while she was retching on his boots her eyelashes batted a bit but after that, she kept both eyes open and on the Enemy :) Great story, great love affair, great masterpiece of art created by a very humble Lady Bujold.

Amber Millter says

Perhaps it's just the books I've been grabbing lately, but I've had a hard time finding lead female characters I like. They're either whiny, weak, and wishy washy or they're buttkicking Alpha females that make Demi Moore's GI Jane look like a pushover (I don't know many people like that in real life, and the ones I do... I can't stand. I'm not sure why there are so many proliferating the pages of fiction).

Cordelia is a strong competent character without being able to beat the snot out of platoons of men single-handedly. She's smart and likable and I wish there had been more books written through her eyes.

Shards of Honor 3.5 stars

This is the first adventure and our introduction to Cordelia and Aral. I enjoyed the characters from the first pages (this is the most important thing for me as a reader) but I could tell it was the author's first book. There's less complexity than many of those that follow in the series, and some parts dragged (like when Cordelia is back home dealing with the family and therapist). I did like the "shards of honor" theme though and the issues Aral was wrestling with. He's probably a little too perfect of a male lead but this gave him depth and made me cheer for these characters to get together. By the end of the novel, I definitely wanted to read on. Which was easy to do since the next book started on the next page!

Barrayar 5+ stars

Barrayar is the one that won the Hugo and I can see why. It deals with a lot of issues you just don't see much in SF. Like the protagonist being pregnant, for one. Cordelia's mission in this one is to keep her unborn son safe, and thanks to the unstable political situation she really has to fight to achieve it. The victory is hard won, and I will read this again just to get to the spot with the shopping bag delivery (fellow readers will know what I'm talking about).

A wonderfully original story, a strong supporting cast, and a satisfying conclusion. 5 stars.

*In response to the reviewers who gave these books low ratings because it was more romance than science fiction, I'd actually agree (not that this diminished my enjoyment of the book). I recommend this series for people who like fantasy adventures and space opera such as Star Trek. It doesn't hurt if you like romance (there's nothing bigger than a kiss on the page but Shards of Honor, in particular, is first and foremost about two characters falling in love).

Wanda says

Actual rating: 4.5 stars

This is a combined volume, consisting of numbers 1 & 7 of the Vorkosigan saga, *Shards of Honor* and *Barrayar*. It is hard for me to believe, but although they are two halves of the same story, there was about 10 years between their original publication dates. I am really glad to have read them together.

I really enjoyed Cordelia Naismith Vorkosigan as a main character. She was practical, capable, smart, and sensible. And despite all of that, she fell in love with a guy on the wrong side of a war.

This was kind of an anti-fairy tale romance. Cordelia and Aral are mature people, not impulsive 20-somethings. They talk about the things that are bothering them and they count on one another for support. In short, they have a real relationship.

Cordelia is from a rather Gene-Roddenberry-esque culture, that of the Beta Colony. Decisions are made rationally, government is democratic, knowledge is valued, sexual preferences are publically acknowledged, and frank discussions are seen as normal. Sure, a scientific expedition of Betans is rather like herding cats—everyone thinks they get a vote—but the aim is reasonably pure. I adored Bujold's idea of uterine replicators to take the nasty part out of pregnancy—and all their medical procedures are first rate.

Contrast that with Aral's society on Barrayar. A military hierarchy, a royal family, inequality of men and women, hidebound by tradition, a bit primitive in medical technology. As Cordelia struggles to figure out all of the nuances of this society, there are bound to be misunderstandings. Add to that political intrigue, and you've got a recipe for a good story.

I also appreciated that there's no pretense that people have forgotten Earth and its history. They discuss Medieval history and one character in particular has become a devotee of the Marquis de Sade. I've always thought it would be a bit weird to have a society forget its roots while still having enormous databases full of information.

Favourite bits: The Betan psychiatrist and the fish tank; Cordelia's use of a shopping bag at the end of *Barrayar*. This is my first venture into Ms. Bujold's writing, but I think I can safely say that I love her style and will happily work my way through this whole series.

Books 211 and 212 of my science fiction and fantasy reading project.

Darbus says

Before I begin, allow me to puke in a corner. Now that I'm done with that, here's what I thought. It wasn't all it was cracked up to be, that's for sure. I have a lengthy list of complaints. To begin with, there were countless grammatical errors. Honestly, Bujold, it's possible to use more than one comma in a sentence, get verb tenses correct, and use pronouns to increase clarity. I'm not going to give it one star, just based on the fact that there are books that are a lot worse.

The characters/their development were another huge problem. For one, Cordelia completely changed personalities. She was a straightforward, determined, focused, responsible military woman at the beginning of *Shards of Honor*. By the end of just that half of it, she had transformed into a whiny and annoying typical female 'heroine.' I believe that her last action that I completely agreed with was trying to drown that shrink. After that, all her thoughts were about her baby, playing matchmaker for Kou and Drou, or about how Beta Colony was *so much* better than Barrayar. She regained a bit of her former personality during their rait, but immediately lost it when dealing with the birth, or with Kou/Drou. Also, her love for Vorkosigan wasn't very well explained. Other characters only had one major characteristic, and that was frequently variable. Count Piotr is a good example of that.

The plot of Barrayar was fairly lame. It was all about Cordelia's whining about being pregnant or whining about how primitive Barrayar was, and it kept picking up and then suddenly dropping sub-plots.
