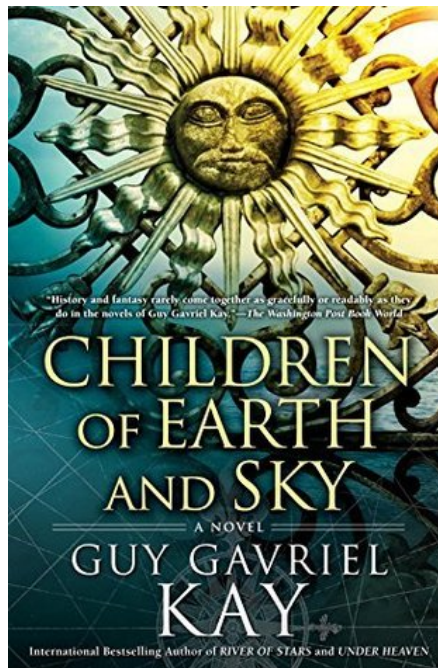




Children of Earth and Sky

Guy Gavriel Kay

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Children of Earth and Sky Guy Gavriel Kay

The bestselling author of the ground breaking novels *Under Heaven* and *River of Stars*, Guy Gavriel Kay is back with a new novel, *Children of Earth and Sky*, set in a world inspired by the conflicts and dramas of Renaissance Europe. Against this tumultuous backdrop the lives of men and women unfold on the borderlands—where empires and faiths collide.

From the small coastal town of Senjan, notorious for its pirates, a young woman sets out to find vengeance for her lost family. That same spring, from the wealthy city-state of Seressa, famous for its canals and lagoon, come two very different people: a young artist traveling to the dangerous east to paint the grand khalif at his request—and possibly to do more—and a fiercely intelligent, angry woman, posing as a doctor's wife, but sent by Seressa as a spy.

The trading ship that carries them is commanded by the accomplished younger son of a merchant family, ambivalent about the life he's been born to live. And farther east a boy trains to become a soldier in the elite infantry of the khalif—to win glory in the war everyone knows is coming.

As these lives entwine, their fates—and those of many others—will hang in the balance, when the khalif sends out his massive army to take the great fortress that is the gateway to the western world...

From the Hardcover edition.

Children of Earth and Sky Details

Date : Published May 10th 2016 by NAL

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Author : Guy Gavriel Kay

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From Reader Review Children of Earth and Sky for online ebook

Emily says

I'm really torn between giving this a 2 or 3 star rating. I'm going with 3 just because I do love all the other GJK books I've read. I received a copy of this book from NetGalley for free in exchange for a review, but I just can't say that I loved it when I didn't.

I'm not even sure how to describe what this book is about. I finished reading it and wasn't even sure what the point was. The book gets off to a very slow start introducing 7-8 different people who have their own POVs in the story. There's a banker's wife who isn't what she seems, an orphan warrior teenage girl, a merchant's son, a painter, an ambassador, a teen age boy who is a soldier for the "bad guys" (brother to the warrior girl) and a few others. The book is just a broad sweeping view of their lives as they interact with each other (although it takes forever to get to that point). There isn't a main story or main character like you'd find in other GJK novels. The plot just felt all over the place. There was one character who was pretty prominent in the beginning, and then just disappeared about halfway through - others who seemed like they were going to be important, but didn't really matter. There are so many characters, I didn't know who to focus on, nor did I particularly care about any of them.

I think the first chapter of the book has the potential to be very confusing for anyone who is new to GJK. There's a lot of information given about the politics/geography/religion of the world, but there are no explanations for what any of it means. For example, it calls some people Jaddites and some Asharites and Kindath - he talks about Osmanalis but later refers to them as Asharites. There are five main cities involved and it was a lot to absorb in the first chapter. I've read several GJK books set in that same "world", but even I was getting confused.

One of the things that really drove me crazy was the change in tense used for one character. Most of the book was written in "normal book tense" (3rd person past tense?) but the character of Marin was written in 3rd person present tense (It's been a long time since grammar class so I might have the name of it wrong).

For example:

John walked down the road, and stopped to look at the sky. He smiled.

vs

Marin walks down the road, and stops to look at the sky. He smiles.

It was really jarring to read and I thought disrupted the flow of everything. I didn't see the point of just that one character being written differently. I hated it.

Another issue is that a lot of scenes in the book are repeated from a different characters POV. For example, a "big thing" happens, followed by something bad. It all gets taken care of and the storyline wraps up. Then, the next paragraph switches POV and you're back to the middle of the "big thing" that happened and you're reading it all over again - and it almost never served to offer anything new that made it worth repeating. In fact, the book was overly wordy in general. I think at least a hundred pages could have been cut with no loss.

I did like that there were nods to the Sailing to Sarantium books (which are a GJK favorite of mine). This book happens a long time after those, but it made me nostalgic reading about the ruins of the chariot racing arena, or a few references to ruined mosaics.

All I can say is this book didn't do it for me. I wish that I liked it. I've been looking forward to reading this one for nearly a year. I think if you're new to GJK this isn't the book to start with. Try The Lions of Al-

Rassan or Sailing to Sarantium or Tigana.

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

3.5 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2016/05/15/...>

Any time Guy Gavriel Kay releases a new novel is a cause for celebration. Even with the understanding of how much work and time must go into each and every one of them, the waiting never gets easier! Known for his talent for recreating famous historical periods using fantasy, Kay's books are all gorgeously written and painstakingly researched works of art, often infused with powerful messages and themes. I'd been looking forward to *Children of Earth and Sky* ever since it was announced and was beyond excited to finally get my hands on it.

Like many of his stories that feature fictional analogs of real places in history, this novel is said to be inspired by the conflicts and intrigues of Renaissance Europe. It is apparently set in the same "universe" as *Lions of Al-Rassan*, if I recall the names of the religions and the world's twin moons correctly, though readers who know their history will probably recognize elements from the fifteenth to sixteenth century eras right away. For instance, the Ottoman Empire has been reimagined as the Osmanli Empire, and the most Serene Republic of Venice or *la Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia* has become the Republic of Seressa. Using this vibrant setting as a backdrop, Kay chronicles the lives of a disparate group of characters whose fates are all interwoven and connected like the threads of a tapestry.

There are about half a dozen key players in this epic drama. First, there's Danica Gradek, a young woman from Senjan who joins a group of raiders to harry Seressa ships that trade with the Ashar. The Asharites destroyed her village when she was a child, killing most of her family and stealing away her younger brother. However, unbeknownst to her at the beginning of this novel, Danica's brother was actually taken to be trained as a djanni, an elite soldier for the Osmanli Empire. Formerly known as Neven Gradek, he is now Damaz, brought up in the Asharite ways and ready to be deployed on his first mission with the army. There's also Pero Villani, an impoverished painter who manages to score a huge commission to paint the portrait of the Grand Khalif of Asharias—but in truth his real purpose there is to spy for Seressa's Council of Twelve. Pero is also not the only spy the Council has procured; another is Leonora Valeri, a noblewoman cast out by her family for becoming pregnant by a man from a lesser house. After her father had her lover killed and the baby taken away, Leonora agrees to be a spy in order to escape her family's clutches and leave her old life behind. Passage has been arranged for her and Pero on a ship captained by the brave Drago Ostaja and owned by the family of Marin Djivo. As the son of a prominent merchant from Dubrava, Marin is no stranger to the dangers on the high seas, but his life is forever changed when his ship is boarded by a band of pirates. Among them is the Senjan archer Danica, and thus, our web of characters is complete.

A prevalent theme in many of Kay's books is how history and people—their actions, their decisions, their fates—are all related. A single individual can shape the life of another a world away, based on how the ripples caused by events both large and small will flow through time. *Children of Earth and Sky* illustrates these patterns by following its characters "in the moment", but the narrative will also frequently take a step back to look at the full picture. The author did something very similar in his last book, *River of Stars*, in which he explored a person's life from multiple angles, going backwards and forwards in time to show how even the smallest gesture can have significant repercussions throughout history and affect multiple generations to come. If you're not familiar with his work, brace yourself for a lot of point-of-view changes, present-to-past tense switching, and skips all over the timeline.

This makes it pretty much impossible to rush through any book by Guy Gavriel Kay. I've said this before, but his work is meant to be savored slowly, though sometimes that is by necessity and not by choice. Personally, it took me three days just to read the first one hundred pages, but only three more to finish the rest of this novel. I find that's usually par for the course when it comes to Kay's books, since the incredible amount of detail in his world-building often requires a rather long adjustment period. Still, there were a few issues that made *Children of Earth and Sky* a little more difficult to get into. First are the many distracting instances of info-dumping, which I admit I was surprised to find, since Kay is usually a lot more discreet when it comes to filling in the political or historical background. Second, there were some pacing problems playing havoc with the flow, especially when it came to character POV imbalance. It bothered me how some characters would feature prominently for a while and then just disappear for a long time, until all of a sudden they would come back, pushing aside others to fade into the background, and then the cycle will begin again. Because of the format, at times you also had to read about the same event two or three times as multiple characters would describe it from their perspectives.

As I'm fond of saying, some authors are simply incapable of writing a bad book, just that some of them may be better than others. Guy Gavriel Kay is one of these authors, and it's not that I disliked *Children of Earth and Sky*, but I also don't think it was his best. Still, despite the rough start, I ended up really enjoying this book. Plus, it's hard to be disappointed, given the beautiful way the author writes. If there's a lack of poetry or subtlety in this compared to some of his other works, then he more than makes up for it with the heightened tensions in this fantastical world of war and intrigue.

Kaora says

I've read Guy Gavriel Kay before and didn't really enjoy his novels, but the cover on this one was so beautiful and the blurb so interesting I decided to give him another chance and pick this one up.

I am so glad I did.

Children of Earth and Sky has a number of characters, switching viewpoints every few pages. Some of them are:

- Danica Gradek, a warrior who lost her family in a raid and wants nothing more than revenge.
- Pero Villani, a young artist who is selected to paint a portrait of a man named The Destroyer and report back to the council.
- Leonora Valeri, a woman being given a second chance at life by being sent to spy as a Doctor's wife.
- Damaz, a soldier in training .
- Marin Djivo, a rich merchant's son.

By no means is this an extensive list! Despite the large cast of characters, and world that Kay has created I didn't get overwhelmed by the information dump as he does a great job of gradually feeding you information with each new character. It quickly grabbed my attention and kept it as each character revealed their story.

It is a mistake to think that drama is steady, continuous, even in tumultuous times. Most often there are lulls and lacunae in the life of a person or a state. There is apparent stability, order, an illusion of calm— and then circumstances can change at speed.

It is a beautiful blend of history and fantasy, with themes sprinkled throughout. While the foreshadowing became a bit much after a while, I mostly enjoyed the writing.

Eternity is too long for us. It is not a scale for men and women. We live by different, smaller measures, but

there are the stories we tell...

I highly recommend this book.

Cross posted at Kaora's Corner.

Kelly says

My early review is up at B&N and here's the link! (Shorter review, though: Wonderful. That was what I wanted and hoped for from him for years. You guys. Sit back and love.)
<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/blog/sc...>

Eilonwy says

I'm not sure I can summarize this book -- it features a large cast occupying several different countries/city-states and dealing with story lines which at first seem almost entirely unconnected to one another.

All I can say is, it was a great read. I blame this book for the reading slump which has haunted me through most of July. It was such a great mix of action -- the kind that makes it really hard to put a book down at any point -- and fascinating characters, whose emotional struggles also made for no good point to leave off reading. I loved living in this world and being with these people. This is one of those books that didn't feel long at all, because it was just so good. I could happily have spent another two weeks reading it. And I was very, very sorry to finish it.

My only nitpicks are:

First, what exactly is the definition of "fantasy"? This story has no magic, nor is it set in a world significantly different from our own. It's more "alternative historical fantasy," which takes elements of our familiar world (in this case, parts of Europe and the Middle East), places them on a similar but tilted map, and turns the time to a sort of fourteenth century feel. In his note at the back of the book, GJK calls his books "historical fiction with a twist," which I guess sums it up.

Second, since this was set in a European-type world, most of the characters are white, and that got me wondering, if you're going to come up with an alt-Earth, why not be a little more creative with the human diversity while you're at it? All the familiar Europe-type places and people felt just a bit bog-standard to me. But that was really the only thing that dulled my enjoyment of this book, so the five stars stand.

Highly recommended!!

Lyn says

This is the first book I have read from Canadian writer Guy Gavriel Kay and reviews about the quality and originality of his work is earned.

Children of Earth and Sky, his 2016 novel, is set as so many of his works in a fantastic world but one not far removed from our own. This seems like an alternative history Europe, perhaps Middle Ages eastern Mediterranean. The fantasy is minimalistic and oblique, the real magic here is Kay's inspired writing and his disciplined imagination.

Kay's skilled world building is also on full display and his attention to detail in his creation is absorbing. The reader is introduced to a world of intrigue among competing empires and city-states. Kay's characterization is as elaborate as the world he has created and the group dynamic amongst the players is mesmerizing. Using a shifting perspective narrative style, the author applies omniscience to further explore the psychology of the interactions between the characters. Sociological and cultural distinctions between the nations are also fascinating.

Kay's work resonates with a genius inventiveness and the scale of his vision, from personal reflection to the massing of great armies, is impressive.

*** A free copy of this book was provided in exchange for an honest review

Althea Ann says

A leisurely, beautiful almost-sort-of-fantasy set in Kay's alternate historical world. Longtime readers will recognize references here to events and characters featured in quite a few of his other books.

The time period here is the (I believe) fifteenth century, and the action moves between recognizable versions of Croatia, Venice and Constantinople.

Danica Gradek is a young woman whose surviving family was forced to relocate after being attacked by raiders who kidnapped her beloved young brother. She is now from Senjan, an island known for (depending on whom you ask) its vicious pirates or its brave warriors who defend the borders and the Jaddite faith of the empire. (The location is based on Croatia's Senj and the people known as the Uskoks - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senj>.) Although it is uncommon, Danica is a warrior - she excels at archery, and her dream is to avenge her brother by killing Osmanli (Ottomans) who stole him and destroyed her home.

However, we soon learn, the bulk of the Osmanli raiders are actually kidnapped children. At a young age they are trained by their captors in a new faith and the ways of war. Their loyalties are often transferred utterly, and they are even grateful to the Osmanli for showing them the way to the 'true faith' and 'salvation.' The reader soon suspects what might've happened to Danica's brother.

Meanwhile, in the Republic of Seressa, a young artist is picked for a dangerous job. The Osmanli Khalif has commissioned a portrait to be done in the Western style. Pero Villani has little to lose and much to gain - if he makes it back from his trip alive. The getting-back-alive part may be complicated by the fact that Seressa, in addition to hiring him for his artistic skills, also expects him to act as a spy - and possibly an assassin.

Also recruited to spy for Seressa is Leonora Valeri. After she bore an illegitimate child, her father murdered her lover and incarcerated her in a convent. She's willing to agree to just about anything to gain a degree of freedom - even a false marriage and a dangerous mission.

And then, there's Marin Djivo. The merchant is hoping to take over his father's lucrative business, managing ships & caravans, and running trade goods between people who, if not actively at war, enjoy a peace that's fragile and uneasy at best. Raiders on land and pirates at sea are an unavoidable hazard in this line of work.

Naturally, all of these individuals (and many more) will intersect along the way. Seemingly small actions will have consequences that reverberate in time and space. The past affects the living (quite literally; the 'fantasy' element in this book is a ghost which can communicate with his grandchildren), and choices made now impact others' lives and future lives.

The book has plenty of adventure and action - but somehow the overall experience is more contemplative than exciting. At times it works beautifully, but at times I also wished for just a bit more compelling forward-motion and plot tension.

Still; Guy Gavriel Kay remains one of my very favorite writers, and this is not one of the least of his accomplishments. Highly recommended.

Melanie says

ARC provided by Penguin Random House in exchange for an honest review.

Alyssa says

Review posted on The Eater of Books! blog

Children of Earth and Sky by Guy Gavriel Kay

Publisher: NAL

Publication Date: May 10, 2016

Rating: 4 stars

Source: Review copy sent by the publisher

Summary (from Goodreads):

The bestselling author of the groundbreaking novels *Under Heaven* and *River of Stars*, Guy Gavriel Kay is back with a new book, set in a world inspired by the conflicts and dramas of Renaissance Europe. Against this tumultuous backdrop the lives of men and women unfold on the borderlands—where empires and faiths collide.

From the small coastal town of Senjan, notorious for its pirates, a young woman sets out to find vengeance for her lost family. That same spring, from the wealthy city-state of Seressa, famous for its canals and lagoon, come two very different people: a young artist traveling to the dangerous east to paint the grand khalif at his request—and possibly to do more—and a fiercely intelligent, angry woman, posing as a doctor's wife, but sent by Seressa as a spy.

The trading ship that carries them is commanded by the accomplished younger son of a merchant family, ambivalent about the life he's been born to live. And farther east a boy trains to become a soldier in the elite infantry of the khalif—to win glory in the war everyone knows is coming.

As these lives entwine, their fates—and those of many others—will hang in the balance, when the khalif sends out his massive army to take the great fortress that is the gateway to the western world...

What I Liked:

I don't even know where to begin, with my review of this book. Like most adult fiction novels, it's complex. Complicated. Intricately yet intensely written. If you find this review lacking, well, it's because this book is not easy to review! I was very satisfied with this book, and highly enjoyed it.

There is conflict, between the lands of Senjan and Seressa. An artist is sent to spy on the Khalif, as well as a young woman posing as the wife of a young doctor. A young Senjan woman wants revenge for her lost family. A second son of a merchant owns a ship, and is ferrying the artist, the doctor, the and the doctor's fake wife to Dubrava. A young boy is training as a djanni to be a soldier in the infantry of the Khalif. The lives of all of these people will intersect, as a war is emerging.

I love how this story unfolds. There are so many characters, so many protagonists, so many names to keep track of. In the beginning of the book, there is a handy list of all of the important characters. That was really helpful! Overwhelming at first, but definitely helpful. The story is told slowly in each character's third-person perspective. Within each chapter, the perspective switches (in an obvious way), and between each chapter. Information is revealed slowly, and I like how everything comes together like a puzzle, as the story progresses.

There are so many characters that I could name and discuss. Pero is the young artist who is sent to spy on the Khalif by painting his portrait. Pero is quiet and not a violent man, but his role in the story is pivotal. Danica is the young Senjan woman seeking revenge, who joins the crew of the ship with Pero, the doctor, and the doctor's wife. The doctor, Jacopo, is no spy, but his fake wife Leonora is to be one. He is instructed to "marry" her (and she him) so that she will gain entry into Dubrava. I felt bad for Leonora! Not that she had to marry the doctor - no, Jacopo is kind and gentle and she has no issue with him (or he her). But her past life is so said.

My favorite characters are Marin, the second son of a merchant and owner of the ship, and Danica, the young Senjan. The Senjans are hated by many, and so Danica is never really welcomed. She's a raider, which is how she "meets" Marin and his crew. But she joins his crew for protection from her fellow raiders. Danica is so fierce! She is a strong young female character that I admire. Marin is a ladies man, a very handsome and very charming second son who is extremely clever as well. He's just as good with a sword as Danica is with a bow and arrow. I like him because he is very intelligent, but he's also a flirt (very roguish).

Each of the character's lives intersect with each other, in complicated ways. As one would encounter in adult fiction novels, there is a lot of slow-building action, and things can change in the blink of an eye, from one paragraph to the next. The pace of this book is slow, but skip a paragraph or a page and you've missed crucial information.

I didn't mind the pacing too much. This book is long, but so detailed. A lot of time passes in the story, from start to finish. While it is written in third-person and there are many perspectives, we get to know all of the characters extremely well. Especially Danica, Marin, Pero, and Leonora.

There is some romance! There are a few couples, and my favorite was Marin and Danica. As with many adult fiction novels, the relationships start with sex, and there is some somewhat explicit scenes (so this is definitely not for children). Marin is a ladies man, and so it's not surprising that he and Danica attract each other. What is surprising is the development of feelings - from both of them. None of the romances (there are several pairs) are terribly significant in the book, but they are there, in a peripheral sense. And there is some messiness to the relationships. So I would not read this book for the romance (and why would you, it's not a

focus in the book).

On that note, this book is SUPER adult fiction-y, guys. Lots of sex, sexual acts (though not as explicit as adult romance novels), violence, and such. Some of the deaths totally caught me off guard, and I didn't see them coming. My feels!

Overall, I really enjoyed this book. Probably more than I thought I would (though I don't really know what I had been expecting!). This is my first book by Kay that I've read, and I liked it. While the first half (ish) of the book was a little slow, things really started to pick up about halfway.

What I Did Not Like:

This is the romance reader talking, but I would have loved to see more from Marin and Danica! The ending was incredibly sweet and made up for a lot of things, but still.

There is magic/spirits in this book, and I think I would have liked more explanation on that? Maybe it was supposed to have been explained by religion and faith, but I wasn't sure. Still, I liked the (small) presence of the supernatural.

Would I Recommend It:

I'd recommend this book but ONLY to seasoned adult fiction readers, or adult readers in general. Definitely not young teens or adolescents. It's an excellent historical-esque fantasy novel, but there are graphic scenes that I don't think would be appropriate for all ages.

Rating:

4 stars. I am glad I took a chance on this book! The length had me hesitating, but this was worth the read. I'll be looking out for books by this veteran author in the future.

Algernon says

Chance and change are the way of the world, and more so for those living on disputed borders, or venturing to sea.

The struggle between holding on to a piece of land for shelter and survival and raising our eyes to the stars in search of the meaning of life was never more poignant and bittersweet as in this latest offering from Guy Gavriel Kay, a master of the lyrical prose and of the heroic evocation of lost civilizations. After a couple of novels set in ancient China, Kay returns to his alternate universe based on European history and focuses on the turbulent decades following the fall of Constantinople, known in this setting as Sarantium. "Sailing to Sarantium" is my all time favorite in a long list of Kay novels that I read in the past, and I was looking forward to a return to the city's magical and history infused streets, especially after a couple of recent visits to present day Istanbul, still a fascinating and colourful metropolis.

Children of Earth and Sky hits all the right notes and recalls everything I love about Guy Gavriel Kay's style, yet I cannot honestly place it among my favorites. It may be a case of being distracted by work or of the action being placed too close to my own home (the Balkans), but I couldn't get immersed in the story to the same degree I did with previous books by the author. Little personal annoyances in the transcription of

local dialect and some liberties taken with the historical facts kept coming back to put me in a more critical frame of mind than usual.

Another aspect of the novel that sets it apart from the bulk of Kay's oeuvre is what I perceive as a shift of focus from the personal journey of an artist (still the backbone of the tale here in the quest of Pero Villani) to a much more complex and ambitious weave that takes in politics, economics, warfare and religion from six or seven separate kingdoms/ settlements. I might go so far as to claim the present novel, in its epic scope, it Kay's own attempt to emulate the Game of Thrones. On the playing board we go from the court of the Holy Emperor of Jad in Obravic (Prague) to the Duke Palace in Seressa (Venice) by way of the High Patriarch in Rhodias (Rome). Crossing the sea we fight with the pirate/heroes of Senjan (the Uskoks of Senj), trade with the merchants from Dubrava (Dubrovnik) and fight against the Asharites (Ottomans) alongside the rebel leader Skandir (Skanderbeg) before reaching the triple walls of Sarantium, now renamed Asharias by its new ruler, Khalif Gurcu (Great Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror).

Against this dark background of the demise of an ancient culture, the rise of ambitious new kingdoms and the destruction of large swaths of land by mercenary armies, Kay places a small group of ordinary people who will rise to the challenge of their times and pass on the torch of civilization (art, commerce, love, kindness) to future generations. Leading the cast, at least in my opinion, is the young painter from Seressa named Pero Villani (based on Gentile Bellini), who is sent by his duke to the court of Gurcu the Conqueror to paint his portrait in the Western style. Pero is the latest incarnation of a recurrent type of hero in Kay's universe: the artist who must reconcile living in the present with living in the more rarefied air of spiritual enlightenment. On the road, Pero will come across some of the mosaics left behind by Crispin from an earlier novel, reinforcing this sense of continuity of purpose through the centuries:

'Sailing to Sarantium' was the ancient phrase. One of his friends had quoted it last night, raising a cup. There was a new sorrow that came with the words, since there was no Sarantium any more. It used to mean that someone was changing his life, embarking on something new, transforming like a figure in a classical painting or mosaic, becoming something else.

On his journey, both geographical and emotional, Pero Vilanni crosses paths with the other key characters in the epic: a young girl from the fortress town of Senjan named Danica Gradek, a mysterious woman sent by Seressa to spy on the town of Dubrava named Leonora Valeri and the younger son of a merchant family from Dubrava named Marin Djivo. Without spoiling the dramatic events of the journey and the final destination of each of the major players, these people will experience their own spiritual emancipation on the road to Sarantium, chance and change ruling their fate as they do for all of us under heaven, to paraphrase some more from the other works of the author.

I am in awe at the way Kay managed to bring together all these separate threads and to flesh out numerous side characters that play a crucial part in the developing conflict, yet I cannot help making a couple of critical observations, notes that are highly subjective and probably will get toned down on an eventual re-read. Firstly, I would say that it's not always good when an author gets over-enthusiastic about some of his subjects. I'm referring here to the treatment of the Senjani pirates, who are referred to right from the start as 'heroes'. It got so heavy handed by the end that I actually cheered for the other side when (view spoiler). Secondly, I normally enjoy Kay's treatment of magic as a subtle and mysterious force originating in the wildness of places untouched by modern civilization. I'm not sure how we got from this original stance to the current incarnation of ghostly presences acting like guardian angels out of a biblical parable. And lastly, I am familiar with the way Kay changes a couple of letters in a name to create his alternate universe, but every time I came across the word 'hadjuk' I wanted to put a spellchecker on and change it to 'hajduk'. The reaction was aggravated by also changing the original meaning of the term from a local guerilla fighter in the Balkans to a member of a Turkish marauder band.

As a conclusion, I was thrilled to get my hands on the new Guy Gavriel Kay novel. Despite these minor grumblings, I believe "Children of Earth and Sky" is a great addition to his alternate history universe and reinforces some of the recurring themes dear to the author.

The portrait of Gurcu the Destroyer, who had conquered Sarantium, remained in the palace complex. It survived upheavals and changes, a treasure of the Osmanli people - and the world - for centuries.

Emma says

This was going to be 3.5 stars but I liked the ending so it scrapes a 4. I like Guy Gavriel Kay, I do, but I find his books misleading. They are not really fantasy at all, just historical settings, admittedly well written, renamed. I always seem to expect something a little more than I actually get from them. That is not to say, of course, that that means there isn't more to get, just that I don't !

I really liked the multiple points of view of the same events.

I didn't really feel that invested in the characters while I was reading and yet I must have been to have been pleased by its conclusion.

This seems to me a novel about knowing who you are, your essence and your place in the world. Also how history can be redirected by the smallest of events. I like the way Kay zooms out to the wider historical picture in years and centuries to come.

So far the Kay books I have read are from historical settings with which I am familiar. I think his work may appear more fantastical (to me) if I next tackle a setting I am less familiar with, so will probably try Under Heaven. I feel somewhere there is a 5 star read from Kay that I have yet to find. All suggestions welcome!

Wanda says

Actual rating: 4.5 stars

I am admittedly and unabashedly a GGK fan girl. Since I read *Under Heaven* three years ago for my real life book club, I have been gradually chipping away at his works and have adored every single one of them so far. This too was a big, thick book and I read it in two days.

But this one wrapped up so neatly and completely—and I'm a person who loves ambiguous endings or slightly unhappy endings, the non-traditional unhappily ever after. That's why this book didn't rate the entire 5 stars for me. There were no threads left hanging, nothing unresolved, nothing that I could daydream about after it was done.

Still, the political machinations were fascinating and I'm thinking that I must read the historical text that Kay mentions in his afterword, namely *The Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* by Fernand Braudel. I have some ideas of which cultures Kay based his characters on, but I would like to have a bit more background.

Even without an extensive knowledge of the history of the Mediterranean area of that period, I enjoyed the storyline. It was convoluted and told from *many* different points of view. As always, GGK provided some admirable female characters (and a couple of not so honourable women too, of course) that prevent this novel from being solely about scheming men. He is masterful at creating believable women, apparently believing that women are people. As we are.

I enjoyed it immensely, but would probably not recommend it as a first book to introduce oneself to GGK—for that honour, I would nominate either *Under Heaven* or *River of Stars*, both of which are set in an Ancient China-like setting and are absolutely stunning.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

Full review, first posted on Fantasy Literature:

I read *Children of Earth and Sky* several months ago and adored it. I should have written my review then, but Bill's eloquent and supremely insightful review proved so intimidating that I allowed this to slip to the back burner, to my shame. But I'm finally writing this review, if only to remind everyone of what an amazing novel this is, and what a delightful Christmas present it would make for any thoughtful reader of history or fantasy.

Guy Gavriel Kay writes what he likes to call "history with a quarter turn to the fantastic," and *Children of Earth and Sky* is definitely that. It's also compelling reading, epic in scope but also closely personal. It's set in a Renaissance-era analog of our world: Serassa is Venice, the Ottoman Empire is the Osmanli Empire, the Jaddites are the Christians, and so on. There's just a little bit of fantasy spicing it up: two blue and white moons appear in the skies of this world, and the spirits of dead relatives can linger and enter the heads of their living descendants, speaking with them and advising them.

In addition to altered country and empire names, Kay has shifted around some historical people and events to fit the story he wants to tell, and inserted a host of fictional characters. Kay weaves together the lives of several fascinating individuals, moving in different parts of this world but impacting each other's lives. Some of the most memorable: Danica, a young woman and a fierce warrior, fighting against the constraints of her time as well as against enemies; her brother Neven, kidnapped as a young child by Osmanlis and trained to be their devoted soldier; Pero, an artist with a commission to paint the Osmanli khalif and a secret commission to assassinate him; and Leonora, a disgraced young woman of Seressa's upper class, given a chance to redeem herself by spying on Dubrava, who finds an unexpectedly significant new life.

Kay frequently jumps from one character's point of view to another's, as their individual stories weave together, separate and intertwine again. Often, when books are divided into several different plotlines told concurrently in alternating scenes and chapters, my interest is primarily focused in on one character and their storyline, and I become impatient when the author temporarily shifts to another point of view. But Kay made all of these characters and their stories absorbing to me. More, I legitimately cared about what happened to all of them, even when they were at odds with each other. Occasionally there was an odd repetition of a scene when the viewpoint shifted from one character in that scene to another, but overall Kay handled the omniscient narration and changing viewpoints seamlessly, inserting an occasional perceptive observation:

He was never in Senjan again. How can we ever presume to know what will come of our choices, our paths, the lives we live?

History does not proceed with anything like fairness or recognition of valour or virtue. Senjan was gone, the walls broken and smashed, on both the harbor and the landward sides, less than a hundred years after this time.

The richness and complexity of the world of *Children of Earth and Sky* is remarkable, the more so because it is made so accessible by Kay's clarity of prose, insight, and sympathy for the lives of individuals caught in the relentless currents of war, politics and societal constraints. In the midst of frustration, fear and death, they

create meaningful lives and form lifelong relationships. I'll end with a comment from Kay in the afterword, which encapsulates one of the themes of *Children of Earth and Sky*:

We live among mysteries. Love is one, there are others. We must not imagine we understand all there is to know about the world.

I received a free ebook from NetGalley and the publisher in exchange for a review. Thank you!!

Content advisory: Occasional R-rated language, violence, and brief but explicit sexual scenes.

Jessica says

There is a sanctuary in Rhodias where a long-forgotten artist depicted two empresses, facing each other . . . one a whore, one a barbarian . . . a thousand years ago . . .

sobs quietly, blows nose on bookmark

At a certain point in the first twenty pages of every Kay novel, you start to think, There are too many characters, and I don't know any of them, and what is going on?

But patience is indeed a virtue with Kay's novels. He is, quite frankly, my favorite living novelist (and a lovely person in real life), and his worst book would make other authors weep with envy.

Because every word, every line, every scene, every character, is important. Every passing farmer has a role to play, not because they suddenly drop their hoes and turn into heroes, but just because they are farmers, in that time and that place. Every one of Kay's books is a tapestry, each thread, dull or bright, short or long, as a part to play in the whole. Each kindness or cruelty, death or life, is a vital piece. Someone passes a farm, they ask for water and end up staying a year, working the land. Is it important? It is to that farm that had an extra pair of hands. It is to the traveler, who learned kindness and a new language in return. And because of the way Kay has written it, it's important to the reader as well.

There are battles. There are political plots. Lovers. Spies. Nobles. Warriors. Artists. But battles and assassinations aren't always what moves the world. Sometimes it's the decision of one man or woman. Words spoken or not spoken. A portrait painted of the wrong person. A message dropped in the street. Kay highlights these things and makes you look at the world through new, sharper eyes, until by the end of the book you're holding your breath over every gesture made and phrase spoken, and you've already cried over the deaths of people who, on page 20, you didn't even know. I cannot think of another author who writes such layers, such nuance, and with such an eye for the beauty in every day life.

He is, to quote the great philosopher Lola, My favorite and my best.

Sherwood Smith says

Copy received courtesy of NetGalley

This book is set twenty-five years after the fall of Byzantium, that is, Sarantium. The veneer is pretty thin in places: the Ottoman Empire has become the Osmanli Empire, the Venetia Republic is now the Republic of Seressa, Dubrovnik is now Dubrava, and the other major players in Europe have their analogs, but Kay plays

around with history in boosting the fascinating and problematical Hapsburger Emperor Rudolph II back a hundred years and turning him into Rodolfo II, and bringing in sixteenth-century Eastern European politics as a counterbalance.

Kay makes it work, especially if you can enrich your perceptions with images of the various settings. (Take some time to Google the Rector's Palace in Dubrovnik if you're unfamiliar with it.)

Pero Villani, who seems to be based on Giovanni and Gentile Bellini (the latter's trip to Istanbul, where it is said he painted Mehmet II, recent conqueror of Constantinople; the former being, by historical reputation, a far better painter, mastering the new oil techniques as he shed the restraints of the Quattrocento style) has only completed one piece of art, which was so revealing it was destroyed. He's living over a tannery, working for pennies, when he's summarily brought to the palace of the Duke of Seressa (the Doge), and given a choice between going to paint the Khalif of the Osmanlis--and attempting to assassinate him--or death.

He sets out on board a merchant's trip for the dangerous crossing, with him more spies from Seressia in the guise of a merchant and his wife. The inevitable pirate attack brings Senjans, people whose lives hardened by constant invasions from various armies, especially the Osmanlis, had turned them all into guerillas and pirates.

They are led by eighteen-year-old Danica, a talented archer and knife fighter, who lost her family to Osmanli attack. Most died, except her four-year-old brother Neven, who had been carried off by the Osmanlis, they assumed to be gelded like the rest and sold at the slave market. I say "they" because unaccountably, she hears the voice of her grandfather, also dead. Danica is accompanied by her faithful dog Tico (view spoiler).

These characters, and a few others introduced through the action (including a number of fascinating female characters), are at the heart of this tale about the clash of cultures and trade, shadowed by a century of plague attacks during summer. Kay uses an omniscient narrator whose voice evokes storytellers in long winter evenings by the fireplace, the pacing leisurely until action is sudden and shocking.

Kay's characters are complex, their personalities and motivations and passions keeping them from being overwhelmed by the larger picture, a difficult achievement given the vast scope here. There is just enough of a fantastical element to evoke a shimmer of the numinous over the colorful (indeed, sanguinary) tapestry of interactions and consequences, some of them real white-knuckle moments.

My only complaint is that an omni voice gives one the chance to keep the flow linear, unlike limited third epics, which have to jolt and jerk back and forth in time, sometimes repeating whole conversations as one POV then another gets its airing. There are several of these jolts here, including repeated exchanges, which could have been worked seamlessly by the all-seeing narrator, but that is a small problem given the scope, the imagination, the elegiac observations about the fragility of human life under the inexorable threat of war, pestilence, and time.

Kay brings the story to a poignantly triumphant and satisfying close, as the narrator slowly weaves inward and then outward again for the long view, then ends gently, and perceptively, with characters we have come to love.