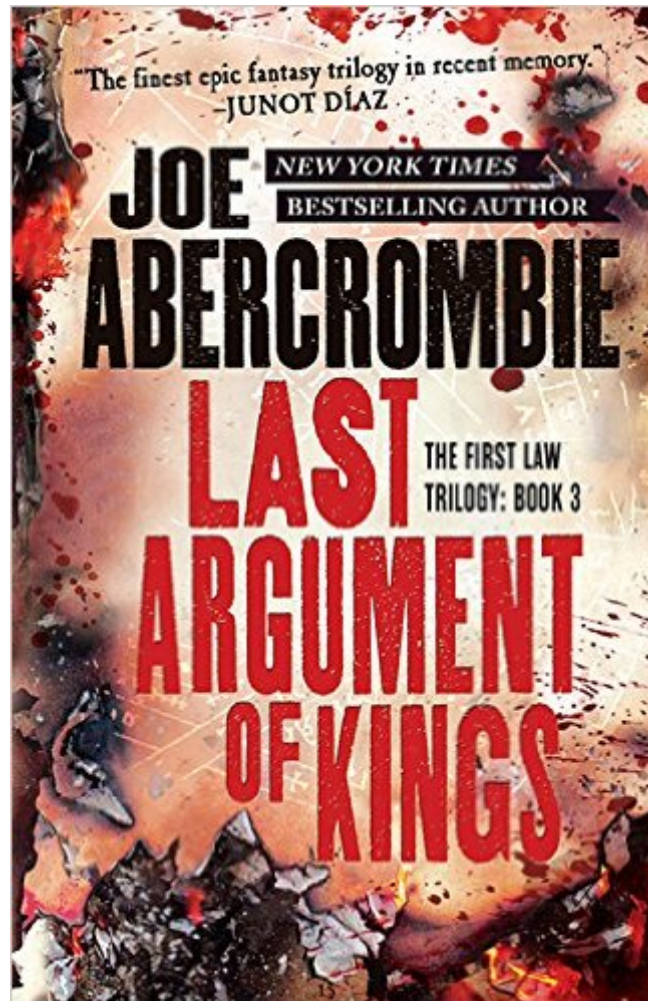


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Last Argument Of Kings (The First Law)



Synopsis

The final novel in the First Law Trilogy by New York Times bestseller Joe Abercrombie. Logen Ninefingers might only have one more fight in him -- but it's going to be a big one. Battle rages across the North, the king of the Northmen still stands firm, and there's only one man who can stop him. His oldest friend, and his oldest enemy: it's time for the Bloody-Nine to come home. With too many masters and too little time, Superior Glokta is fighting a different kind of war. A secret struggle in which no one is safe, and no one can be trusted. As his days with a sword are far behind him, it's fortunate that he's deadly with his remaining weapons: blackmail, threats, and torture. Jezal dan Luthar has decided that winning glory is too painful an undertaking and turned his back on soldiering for a simple life with the woman he loves. But love can be painful too -- and glory has a nasty habit of creeping up on a man when he least expects it. The king of the Union lies on his deathbed, the peasants revolt, and the nobles scramble to steal his crown. No one believes that the shadow of war is about to fall across the heart of the Union. Only the First of the Magi can save the world, but there are risks. There is no risk more terrible, than to break the First Law...First Law TrilogyThe Blade ItselfBefore They Are HangedLast Argument of KingsFor more from Joe Abercrombie, check out:Novels in the First Law worldBest Served ColdThe HeroesRed Country

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Customer Reviews

It was with much excitement that I opened the box that months ago I had pre-ordered and had rapid-shipped from the UK.As with the first two books, Last Argument of Kings has superb cover-art.

It's a very dashing trilogy displayed on your bookshelf appropriately. But to the story: In the first two installments, in particular the first, action took a back seat to characterization. You can check out my critiques of both those books if you like. Some of the most interesting and original-yet-archetypical characters in fantasy were made flesh and earned high-praise for me for that feat. In *Last Argument of Kings*, action definitively steps to the fore. All of the plot-lines that were set up like dominoes in the first two books are tipped, and before you know it you're swept up in a tide of the little black bricks like Mel Brooks' entrance in the computer-animated *'Robots'*. From climax to climax, Mr. Abercrombie charges you through exciting conclusions to every plot and sub-plot introduced before-hand. This is a difficult review to write because, even more than usual, I would be loathe to give away even the slightest hint of what happens, but most of those characters from the first books that you felt needed some comeuppance get it in this book. But Joe Abercrombie isn't sentimental, and by the end of this book it will be plain that some of those that got a comeuppance didn't deserve it as much as others or as much as you might have thought they did, and those that deserved good certainly don't get it, and many of those that you used to want good things for you'll find you no longer do. The character Sand Dan Glokta has a saying not quite as ubiquitous as Logen's "You have to be Practical", but far more descriptive of *Last Argument of Kings*: "Nobody gets what they deserve." In a manner of speaking, no character gets justice in this book. None of the character arcs end in a way that conventional fantasy norms indicate they should but are nevertheless ended with integrity. In a way, this is a masterful feat. I took JK Rowling's unsentimental killing of characters like the owl Hedwig or the house-elf Dobby for ungraceful, gratuitous acts included in the story simply to showcase her unsentimentality. I perceived none of that artless hackery here. The story concludes as it should, consistent with the world Joe Abercrombie established in the first book. True - not everything is perfectly graceful. Some of the surprises that are inevitable in any tale - characters thought gone turning up in new guises, etc. - seemed a little forced, but these are small concerns. As a work of art, Mr. Abercrombie stayed true to his original vision. Ironically, this is as much a source of dissatisfaction for me as a reader as a source of admiration for Mr. Abercrombie as a writer. These are great books. This is great writing. These are amazingly whole characters. What a flipping depressing way to end a great tale though - I get enough dissatisfaction about how things turn out by reading the news. It's not that everything ends badly for every character, but I would have loved to end the tale with a swelling of joyous emotion for just one of these perfectly crafted characters receiving a truly wondrous reward for all of the sacrifice they endured through the three books. No such luck. Joe's broader message is really that all the struggles we endure, as the struggles of characters like Dogman, Colonel West, Sand Dan Glokta, or Jezal dan Luthar, mean

essentially nothing at the end of the day, at the end of the struggle, at the end of their lives. We endure the futile struggle and are not rewarded. Joe chose to not be kind to his characters. As the god that divines their fate, he implies our own fates are as forsaken. So depressing. I could hope he'd write a spinoff of one of the surviving characters that ends in showers of good fortune, but by then that would seem a cheap device. The moment has passed to lift the reader's heart with inspiration, or to at least lift one of these characters out of the mud and gore of a miserable world. I think this series is a work of literary art - all too rare in my favorite genre. But like watching a great but basically bleak cinematic drama, I only watch it once. Or like driving through South Dakota in the wintertime - I recognize the majesty of all that flat land, but am eager to be done with it. My ultimate position is that I think Mr. Abercrombie got carried away with his own cynicism and left on the table what might have been a great opportunity to inspire and uplift - and ultimately what might have been an unforgettable tale is instead one merely superbly crafted.

When you come away from a book feeling disappointed in pretty much every character - minor and major alike, and outright wishing death upon several of them, it's hard not to feel disappointed in the book itself. It left me wondering whether good writing was enough, or if something actually has to happen in the story itself. Ultimately, nothing changed for any of the characters. If you want to know what they are like at the end of book 3, look no further than the first half of book 1. We're left with the same characters doing the same things, just to different people. The perverse cynicism is so unrealistic and forced that I felt a near-overwhelming compulsion to fly to the U.K., have beautiful women drag Mr. Abercrombie to a pretty garden with singing birds and bright sunlight, and force him to take antidepressants until he breaks down under the torture and lets himself smile for a moment. **** Spoilers **** Glokta's ending was probably the best of the bunch, but still disappointing. He ends up in the same profession, doing things that he hates for a master that he hates for reasons that he hates, and gets to babysit someone he hates for added... err, hate. Ferro becomes an extra superhuman woman bent on vengeance. That's different because she started out as just a superhuman (notice the missing 'extra') woman bent on vengeance. Logen kills one too many of his own friends, flip-flops between being sure he can be good and sure he can't, and really doesn't do much more than spectate. Even in his big fight, West and friends win the battle for him. He's just a leaf swept along by the wind, and I can look out my window to see that. The character didn't even contribute many hilarious observations like in past books. Jezal. Bah, where to start? The "noble with redeemable value" turns out to have none. Bayaz ends up being every bit the bastard I suspected he was. Every "villain" in the series has the moral high ground over Bayaz, and this is the guy who

ends up getting everything he wants. If there is a message or theme to this series, it's this: only bastards accomplish anything, no one can better themselves, you only hurt yourself when you do good things, and everything you love is a lie. Take Glokta and his relationship with his Practicals. He was good to them, every one. There seemed to be mutual respect and affection. So, of course, Frost betrays him for absolutely no reason whatsoever. Severard, who had plenty of money to buy a home, somehow gets himself in debt while he's at sea (how is that even possible?) and decides that the best course of action is to betray his greatest and steadiest source of cash. Vitari just glares at everyone a few times and leaves. Joy? West is another example. Possibly the only character who changed at all in the series. He rescues a woman from a lifetime of cruelty, forced labor, and later from rape, and is rewarded with her choosing another man and then promptly dying. He finds his courage, leads armies, and ends up having an entire building fall on him. Abercrombie goes so far as to tease us with the possibility that West might **only** end up with serious, life-altering injuries and psychological trauma. For an entire page or so, it is suggested that he might mend his relationship with his sister and start a romance with a pretty girl, but HA... don't be silly, he ends up suffering an agonizing death as his entire body literally falls apart. Good lord, enough is enough. The cynicism is outright forced on readers from every single direction the author can think of, whether it makes sense or not. I understand the concept of questionable pasts, character flaws, all that. But I think you need to look towards Jaime and Tyrion from the Song of Ice and Fire series to see how it should be done. Those two can both be ruthless, conniving bastards, and have serious character flaws, but there's still **something** there which lets you understand and/or cheer for them. And they change. For both better and worse, they change. Ultimately, memorable characters or not, nothing happened in this series. Glokta is still doing terrible things he has no interest in doing for masters who don't tell him why. Jezal is still a naive coward. Ferro is still all about vengeance. Logen is still the Bloody Nine. And in case the author doesn't make it painfully clear, you can't change either.

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