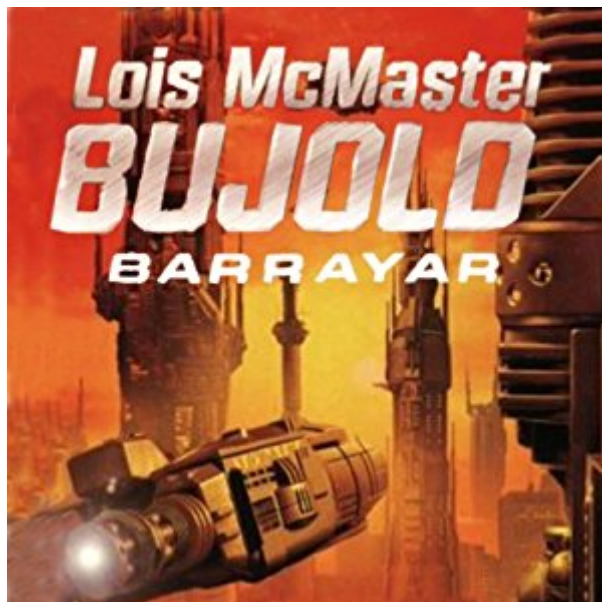


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# Barrayar: A Vorkosigan Adventure



## Synopsis

Cordelia Naismith has deserted her own home planet to marry the leader of the enemy Barrayarans, Aral Vorkosigan. Together, they struggle to establish stability on a planet threatened by civil war.

--This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Captain Cordelia Naismith is one of the most compelling characters I've ever come across in science fiction: empathetic but tough, brilliant but self-effacing, loving mother and coldblooded soldier. In *Barrayar*, the third book in the Vorkosigan Saga by Lois McMaster Bujold, she is now married to Admiral Aral Vorkosigan. When the two met, they were enemies, both stranded on an alien planet. They came together to defend themselves against the traitors in Vorkosigan's army who had seized control of his battleship. Now, months later, living in luxury on his home planet, Barrayar, Cordelia is reasonably content—until the Admiral is appointed regent for the four-year-old heir to the Barrayaran imperial throne, Prince (now Emperor) Gregor. As she soon discovers, the new position takes Aral away from home most of the time. Cordelia becomes increasingly unhappy. "She hadn't married the regent of Barrayar, four months back. She'd married a simple retired soldier." Life in a militaristic patriarchy plagued by factional fighting Barrayar is a hierarchical and militaristic patriarchy riven with factional disputes. Aral, an aristocrat with the title "Lord" as the son of General Count Piotr Vorkosigan, is a rare example of tolerance and flexibility in a society that is stubbornly resistant to change. Only 80 years earlier had Barrayar emerged from its Time of Isolation and "made contact with the wider galactic civilization again." Prince Gregor's

grandfather, Emperor Ezar Vorbarra, had been largely responsible for suppressing the factional fighting and reintroducing contemporary technology to the planet. However, by Cordelia's standards, Barrayar is a primitive place compared with her home world, Beta Colony. The society's relative backwardness proves problematic when she gives birth to a son months later. Not long after Aral's appointment as regent, a near-successful assassination attempt upends his and Cordelia's lives. But even that horrific event pales by comparison with the civil war that breaks out some time later following a conservative revolt against his "progressive" rule as regent. The struggle that follows tests both Aral and Cordelia to the limit. Though we're confident they will triumph in the end, the path to victory will be strewn with costly losses. Much more than a space opera. Superficially, Barrayar is a space opera. But it's much more and better than that. What sets Bujold's writing apart from that of most other science fiction authors is the depth and complexity of the characters in her stories. Cordelia is at once strong enough to best some of her most fearsome enemies, a loving mother, a homesick off-worlder, and a leader who inspires both respect and affection from those she commands. Her internal dialogue is colorful, full of internal inconsistencies, and all too believable. She is truly a unique character. Aral, too, often surprises, as do several of the soldiers who surround them. Barrayar is superior science fiction. About the author Lois McMaster Bujold has won multiple awards for both science fiction and fantasy. The only other author who has won four Hugo Awards as she has, is Robert A. Heinlein. The Vorkosigan Saga, one of the three book series she is writing, consists of 30 novels to date, spanning the 30-year period from 1986 to 2016.

One of the great political space adventures of all times. Written before *Firefly* was conceived of, some of the plot points from this novel have since been "borrowed" by later authors but never used better. Set on a feudal planet in the midst of a time of political upheaval is Cordelia whose upbringing on a more progressive world makes her an observer of belief systems and customs that range from complex to repressive. Her marriage to a retired military and political leader is thrust into the center of a maelstrom when a coup takes place and Cordelia's husband, self and unborn child are forced into the mix of those maneuvering and willing to kill for power. A scientist and former soldier Cordelia is told that war is the business of men on this world, however the men don't seem to be doing an adequate job of ending the conflict and most importantly to Cordelia, of protecting her unborn child. If you are a man you should not be deterred by the female hero and the baby from reading this. There is true adventure here, and the birth of one of the great adventure heroes of science fiction. Plus a few sword fights and some gun play. If you are a woman who likes speculative fiction this book embodies some of the prime movers of female motivation and

courage. Although written awhile ago this book is still completely relevant and our science has not yet caught up with some of the inventions herein although they are likely coming. Ms. Bujold is a writer with unique vision and insight into how people and cultural systems tick. This novel contains one of her best antagonists and best heroes. I have read and reread this book with joy.

Bujold has done it again! The second fabulous novel about Cordelia and Aral, except this time she deceives him - but it's for a good cause. **THE PLOT:** Cordelia and Aral are now married and living on Barrayar. He becomes Regent for Gregor who is only a child. He will be regent for at least 16 years until Gregor comes into his majority, unless something else happens. Well, something else does happen in this novel, someone tries to take away the Regency. Unfortunately, Cordelia and Aral's fetus is trapped in the area controlled by the usurper. Remember never get between a mother tiger and her cub. Many things happen in this book. Running and hiding, much propaganda on both sides, murder, when there seems no other option, Cordelia goes commando, helped by some household staff without Aral's knowledge or permission. After all, she was a Captain on Beta, and had her own experience in the military, so she knows what she is doing. You would never expect what happens in this book. The plot is twistier than a hedge maze. At the end, it all comes together in a coherent fashion, though quite unexpectedly. There is surprise everywhere, especially in Aral's staff. **THE CHARACTERIZATION:** Again, Ms. Bujold has used her magic to make every single character seem astonishingly real. Even the secondary and tertiary characters have attributes and details that are common in the main players in other books. I do believe that she has a rule, that if she sets a character in a novel, that they have to be fully three dimensional, no matter what their parts are. This makes the novel much richer for the reader and is the hallmark of a great writer. Aral and Cordelia are both such fully fleshed out characters that they seem like they could be neighbors or relatives. Their staff's are the same - fully human in only the way Bujold can write them. Especially Bothari who's so troubled yet so loyal to Cordelia he'd do anything for her. He's almost an enigma, and yet he's so faithful and only sometimes scary, considering his past life as a torturer for the Prince who had some seriously nasty habits. **WORLDBUILDING:** This time the whole book stayed on Barrayar. We got to explore more of the customs, the planet, the countryside, the people, the everyday living, the Counts and their place in the aristocracy. It was all simply fascinating. This was the part of the detailed worldbuilding that Bujold seems to excel at. From the way the black market works to the look and layout of the palace, she puts in all sorts of details that make up one gigantic jigsaw puzzle where all the pieces fit together to form one gigantic whole. They all make sense. They all work together to form a cohesive picture of a society that's transitioning from

isolation into a galactic milieu. A lot of their traditions go back hundreds of years - some make sense, some do not, and it is Aral's job to lead the planet forth into a future of prosperity, which is why he is with the progressive party. Some traditions die hard, just as people do. Bujold understands all this, and has included all the details into forming the world of Barrabar. It is a masterpiece of worldbuilding.

**THE DIALOGUE:** Bujold is a master of this too. The Counts are formal when they are together, or in formal situations. When at home, they are cranky and demanding. The formality is always demanded at Court and at the Council of Counts, as well as at social function such as balls and other get togethers. When they are home, unless there are visitors, the dialogue is informal, unless it is between the Counts and the staff, then we're back to formal again. In the Vorosigan household, they tend to be a little more lax than some Counts. I think this has happened because of Cordelia's Betan attitudes. She just doesn't believe in aristocracy. It is a myth - a fiction built out of thin air. so they are less formal with their staff at home. But all the dialogue rings true in every circumstance - not a note out of place. As an example: when Gregor gets bored in the Council of Counts, he may start to fidget or yawn, wanting to be anywhere but there. He may make some comment to try to end the session, but they know what he is doing, so they placate him, and go on.

**THE ENDING:** The ending of the book came as quite a surprise. Remember what I said in the beginning, you never come in between a mother tiger and her cub. Just remember that when you read this book. Maternal instincts are strong. They can override any risk to yourself. In the end carnage results. Bad things happen and Bothari is along for the ride. Will Cordelia be able to get her fetus in time? Will Bothari flip out and kill everyone in sight? Will Aral find Cordelia before she can do anything and bring her back home? Will the Ursurper take her prisoner, demanding ransom for her and the fetus, making Aral's position untenable? Will Cordelia be shot in her attempt to get the fetus and die trying, killing the fetus in the process? All these questions will be answered in the book.

The upshot is, that I would recommend this book to anyone who can read English. It is a study of a planet that is in the stages of transition, between an old fashioned traditional aristocracy, to a galactic democracy. Of course, there is trouble along the way - but it makes for fascinating reading. If you like politics, military reading, thrillers, science fiction, historical fiction then this book is for you. It may take place in outer space, but change the details and it could be Earth if we had been contacted in our own history by aliens. Think about it that way. This could be Earth in the past, trying to cope with coming up to speed with the fact that there was a whole galaxy out there that had technology way beyond us. Meanwhile, we had just transitioned away from cavalry in the military and had a long way to go. There would not only be an arms race, but transportation would be a big factor on the ground and from planet to planet. There is a lot in this book to think about. I suggest

you buy it and read it. This is such a treat.

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