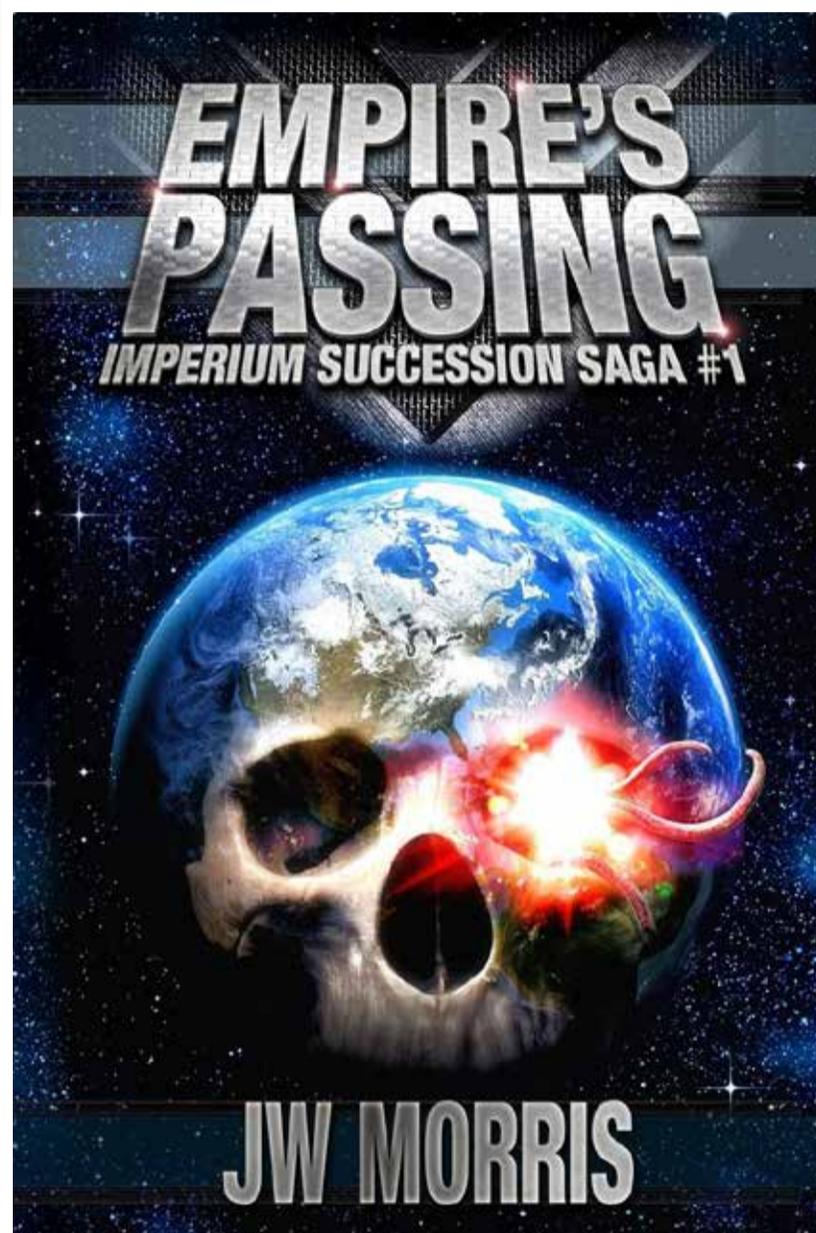


Science Fiction & Fantasy



Empire's Passing

By Joseph W. Morris

Joseph Morris, \$3.99, 372 pages, Format: eBook

★★★★

Empire's Passing is a science fiction book about the end of Earth and the beginning of a battle between the universe's many worlds and races.

The book begins with Alexander Landsman, the duke of a planet called New Meyer, trying to save Earth from being destroyed by the Goth Alliance. Unfortunately, he does not succeed and dies in the attempt, leaving his son Michael as the new leader of New Meyer. The high priestess, who led the attack against earth, feeds off of the sexual energy and emotions of humans. Once she possesses this energy, she gains more power and is even able to control humans to make them do

whatever she pleases. This makes it hard to tell friend from foe. She is also determined to attack and destroy New Meyer's largest and most powerful allied planet, New Brazil. Michael needs to figure out how to stop the Goths and the high priestess before New Meyer is hopelessly lost. The big question is this: Can his planet survive when Earth could not? And if so, how?

Like many science fiction books, there are many plot lines, new pieces of technology, and characters, and it takes a great deal of focus to keep track of all of them. The effort is well worth it, however, because the book presents a richly detailed world, full of new ideas. It is easy to become invested in this new world, because the characters' histories, motivations, and feelings are all so apparent. The author is very good at writing so that the reader can readily relate to the characters. However, it is a bit of a strange choice to make the high priestess into a sex-crazed character; it sometimes makes it difficult to take her seriously as a villain.

Sci-fi fans who enjoy military strategy, politics, and futuristic technology should enjoy this book. *Empire's Passing* is an impressive debut, and I look forward to reading the sequel when it is released next year.

Sponsored Review





there is a beautiful balance here. Also, we get to see the queen in her official role as statesman and then contrast that with her private self, raising interesting questions about power and the responsibilities that come with it.

Mostly, though, this book is just fun. The first chapter has a massive space battle. The discussions of military tactics introduce brilliant plans of attack. The queen is so darn likable, with her insecurities and her love of food. My only complaint is that things happen a little too quickly. There isn't any downtime between plot events, and the rapid pace with which things happen feels a little overwhelming. The book could benefit from additional descriptive passages, more narration, or something else that would simply slow down the story just a bit. This would make the characters, and thus their struggles, seem more real and more meaningful.

While this isn't a book that's likely to inspire deep emotional connection with the characters or extended musings on life, that's ok. In fact, that's wonderful! *The Starlight Fortress* is a fast, entertaining read that feels a bit like a roller coaster, pulling you along at breakneck speed through twists and turns that you never saw coming. In the end, you are a bit disoriented and fully exhilarated. This is Space Mountain in book form, and it's fantastic.

Sponsored Review

Sequela

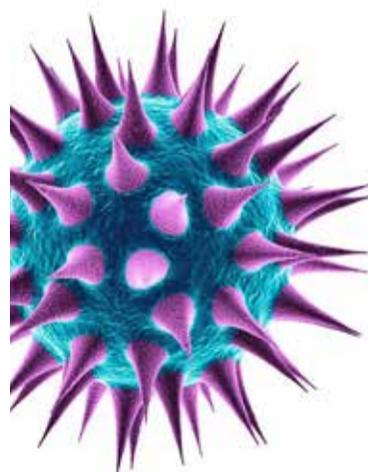
By Cleland Smith

Angela Smith, \$4.52, 404 pages, Format: eBook

★★★★

Imagine a world where STDs are not only socially acceptable, but the more outré the virus, the more status the "victim" has. This is the setting of *Sequela*, taking place in a near future London, mostly isolated from the rest of the world as the new Sodom. Kester Lowe is an academic virologist, looking to leave for the glitz and glamor of developing new STDs for a private firm. As you may guess, sex is a major component of the book, starting early as Kester shares his sample new STD to his prospective boss at the end of his initial interview in the most natural way STDs are transmitted.

Slowly, you gain a fuller view of Kester's



Sequela
Cleland Smith

beauty • goes • viral



world, but some potentially interesting history is overlooked. At no point is there an explanation of where the acceptance and desire for these new STDs came from. But beyond that, *Sequela* is an entertaining novel, finding new ground in a field that has explored many new ideas. The characters are well developed, even if many of them are unpleasant in personality. And Cleland Smith doesn't take any easy shortcuts in the story, good guys don't always win, bad guys don't always get punished. *Sequela*, like real life, is messy.

There is a lot of sex, as one might expect from a book with this subject, but not so much as to disturb the general reader. The characters, while often flawed, are interesting in their desires and motivations, and Smith keeps the story interesting throughout. Visualizing a London in another 70 years, along with a major societal shift is one thing, making it seem "real" is another, and that is the essence of good science fiction. And by that standard, *Sequela* is good sci-fi.

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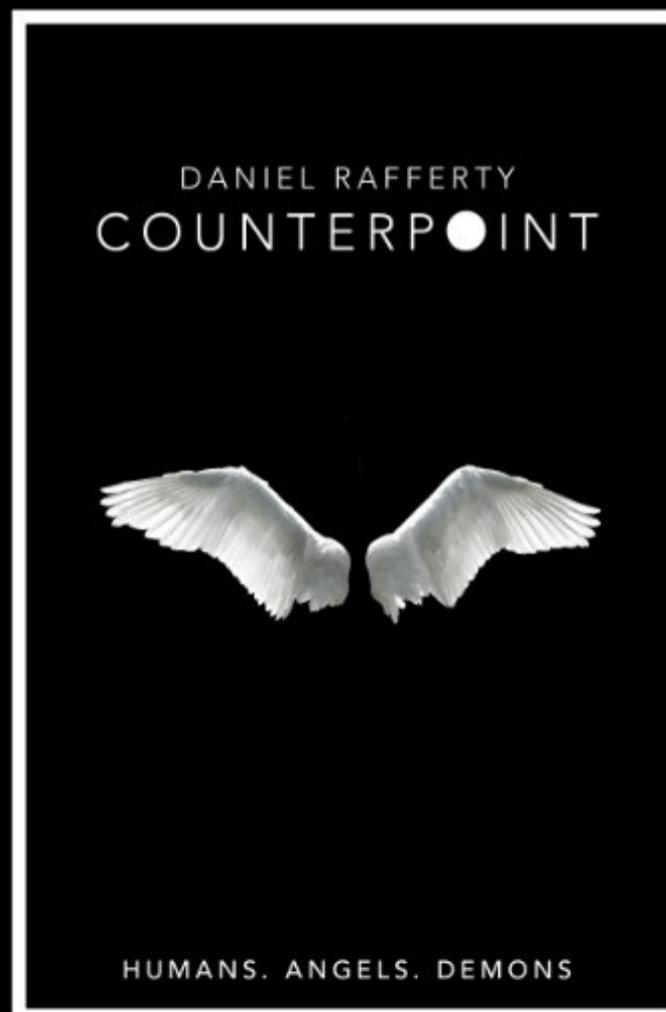
COUNTERPOINT TRILOGY

"WHAT IF HEAVEN TURNED AGAINST US?"

"A rollercoaster ride, steadily building up to that first turn where it drops you off the end and you have to hold on for dear life!"

"I would almost believe this to be a piece of non-fiction"

This epic tale takes places from Liverpool to London, to the Scottish and Welsh highlands and over to Dublin—but the end-game results will either be salvation or total destruction of the entire world—and the outcome is still not certain. Is God's human experiment over—or will we continue for another millennium? To find out, you must stop what you're doing right now and read the pages of this exciting story! Say your prayers and hope someone's listening!



counterpointbook.com

Silevethiel

By Andi O'Connor

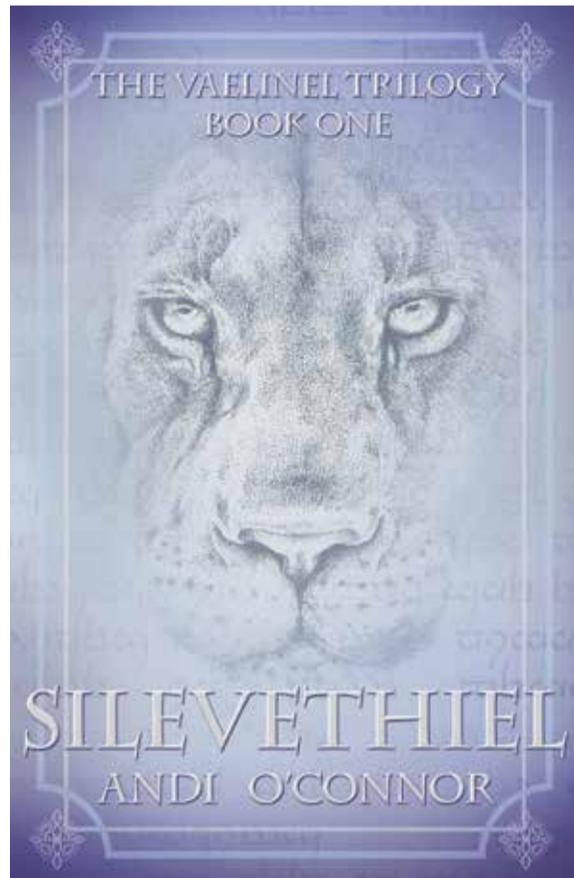
Purple Sun Press, \$5.99, 254 pages, Format: eBook



Having arrived at the end of *Silevethiel* by Andi O'Connor, I'm somewhat surprised to report this is not the worst book so far this year. You'll understand, given this is young adult fodder, that this is high praise. Under normal circumstances I avoid YA like the plague, but every now and then dip my toe into the water to see just how the standard is moving.

This proves to be a romantic drama with fantasy window-dressing in a world where magic works and zombies are, not surprisingly, damn difficult to kill. So we're off to the wars with humans and elves taking up arms against each other. Standing up for right, justice, and the elven way is Irewen and her hot prince Laegon. In support are the lionine guardians, including the titular Silevethiel, and other elves who can weave spells and do magic stuff. On the other side is the evil cousin who killed the human king and has raised the dead to crush all opposition. In adult hands, this would be dark fantasy. In this vapid romance, bathos is the norm and clichés abound. Applying negative psychology, this old man says this is poor, so all teens should rush out to buy.

Reviewed by David Marshall



Pirates of the Timestream

By Steve White

Baen, \$14.00, 256 pages, Format: Trade

★★.5

Special agent and time traveler Jason Thanou has had his hands full dealing with the machinations of the Transhumanists, a group dedicated to remaking both history and the human genome in their own image. And now, Jason and his team must travel back to the seventeenth century Caribbean and uncover the reason futuristic wreckage has been found there. But when Jason discovers more than Transhumanists waiting for him, he and his team will be tested to their limits trying to protect history while saving the future.

Pirates of the Timestream is the third book in Steve White's time-spanning series, which is where most series have worked out the kinks of the earlier books and really hit their stride. This book, on the other hand, starts out rough, bogged down by clumsy info dumps and historical minutiae that slow the narrative to a crawl. It's not until about halfway through the book that it recovers and all the sci-fi weirdness and historical detail start to meld into an engaging story. From there, swashbuckling adventure helps to mitigate the more tired time-travel tropes that pop up. Too modern to be true pulp, *Pirates of the Timestream* has great potential, but stumbles worryingly.

Reviewed by Glenn Dallas

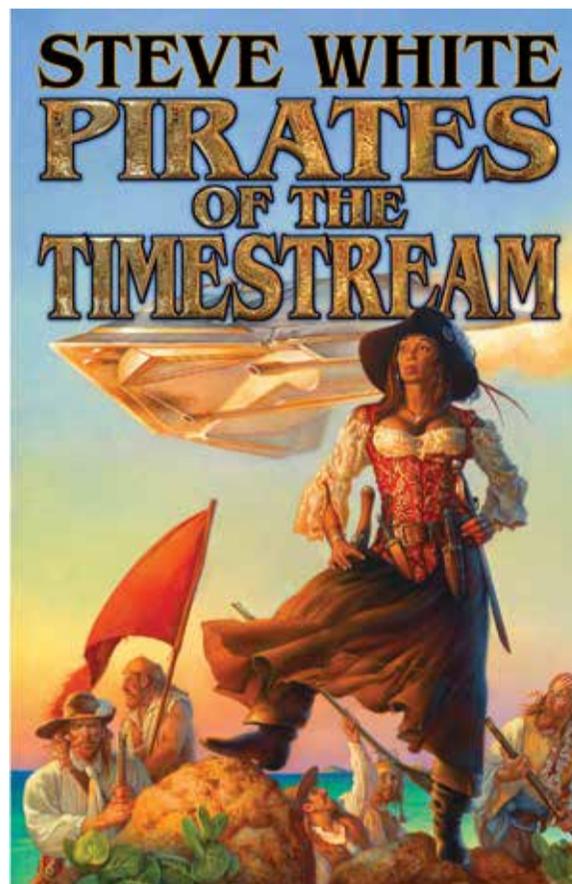
Fringe - The Burning Man (Novel #2)

By Christa Faust

Titan Books, \$7.99, 336 pages, Format: Mass

★★★

Olivia Dunham isn't like most girls. Mature beyond her years, protective of her younger sister, and a veteran of childhood years in Walter Bishop's laboratory, she possesses the awareness and steely resolve to confront her mother's abusive boyfriend, unleashing her dormant supernatural abilities for the first time. In the aftermath, the Dunham sisters are sent to boarding school, but the spectre of Walter's experiments and that violent confrontation will continue to haunt them and those closest to them.



The Burning Man is the second of Faust's prequels to the *Fringe* TV series, and it presents a very believable window into Olivia's formative years, capturing her most definitive qualities while still allowing for her to grow into the Olivia we know. Unfortunately, *The Burning Man* feels like two smaller novels crammed together, and the last hundred pages are something of a mishmash of ideas that never fully integrate into the overall narrative. We get our requisite cameos by shadowy government conspiracies and mad scientists, but they detract instead of enhancing the story. (Those unfamiliar with *Fringe* may have a hard time understanding some sequences.) *The Burning Man* is at its best when it's Olivia versus a boogeyman, and thankfully, there's plenty of that.

Reviewed by Glenn Dallas

The Butcher of Khador (The Warcaster Chronicles)

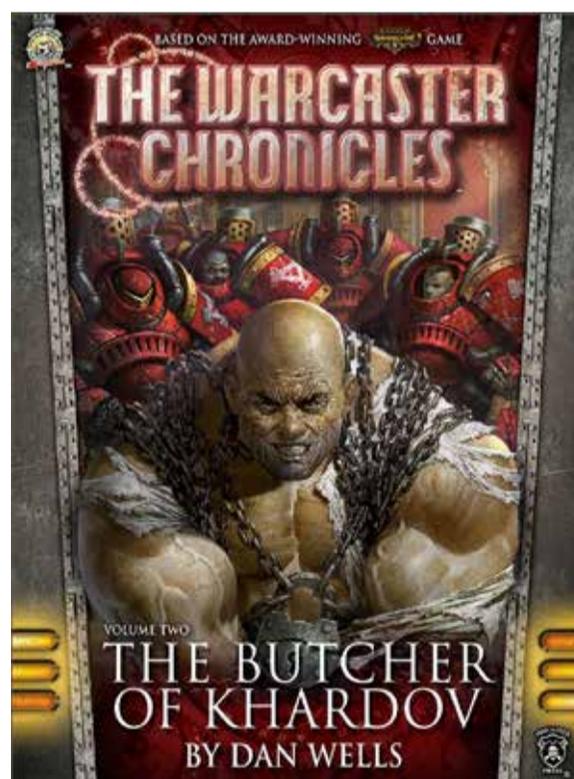
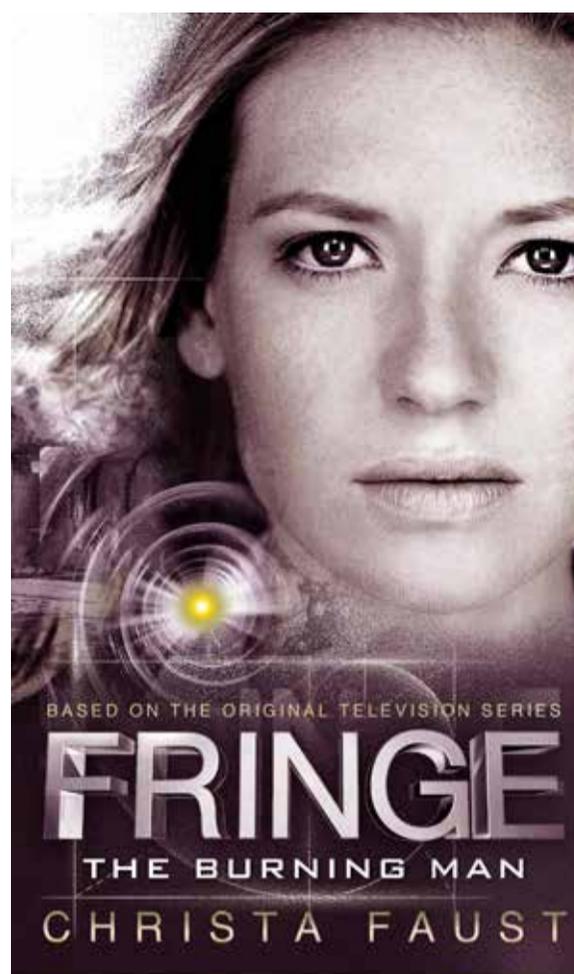
By Dan Wells

Skull Island eXpeditions, \$4.99, 80 pages, Format: eBook

★★★★

Orsus Zoktavir is one of the most feared warcasters in all of Khador. Horror stories are still told of his madness, his rage, his sheer brutality painfully displayed for all to see when he destroyed an entire village of suspected traitors and then turned on the army he rode at the head of. What most people do not know is his tortured past, and the memories that drive him. Before he was a weapon, Orsus was simply a young man who sought to escape the violence that constantly tainted his life. When he fell in love, Orsus finally had the motivation to change himself. But fate, it seems, has other things in store for him.

The Butcher of Khador is set in the world of the tabletop miniature game "Warmachine," and provides a fantastic background story to one of the fearsome warcasters in the Khador army. However, readers do not have to play "Warmachine" or even be familiar with it to enjoy this book; it easily holds its own



as what most would classify as a fantasy novel, although some might prefer to go with the smaller genre of steampunk. At first, the story seems a bit disjointed; jumping back and forth in time between important events in Orsus's life, but readers will soon become adapted to the style and be able to go with it. This is a great book for "Warmachine" fans and non-fans alike.

Reviewed by Holly Scudero



Woman King

By Evette Davis

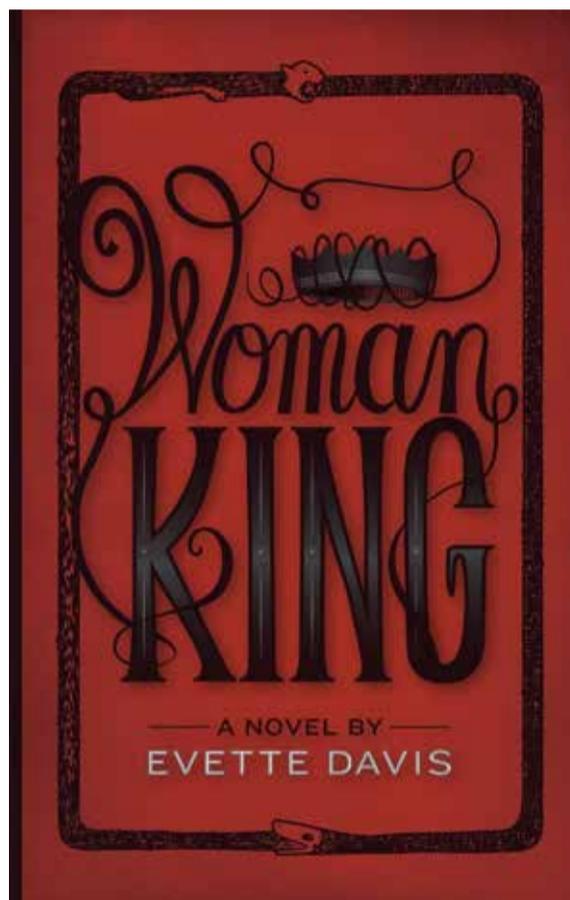
Createspace, \$11.15, 346 pages, Format: eBook

★★★.5

Olivia's clients have dwindled, turning to newcomer Stoner Halbert for business and putting her own in jeopardy. She's devoted everything into building up a name for herself in the gender-imbalanced public affairs industry, so the loss takes a heavy toll on her generally calm demeanor. Despondent and nightly haunted by dreams of a black panther, she ignores her career, her best friend Lily, and the persistent advice of her mother to turn back to her 'empath' roots. After a week of depression, a woman named Elsa approaches her as the embodiment of the panther in her dreams. She tells Olivia that she possesses secret powers, that she's a guardian of Olivia, destined to protect and strengthen her against the demon Stoner Halbert. Olivia isn't quick to accept Elsa's aid, however; she's seen her mother suppress her past with alcohol and neglect. Elsa helps her realize that her extraordinary powers outweigh her inhibitions, though, and that Olivia has great potential.

As Olivia climbs higher up social and political strata, she feels the pressure of being far more capable than her career allows, as Elsa implies. After all, her powers transcend elections; often *Woman King* dabbles with Biblical elements and casually mentions mythical creatures. Stoner Halbert is just the tip of the iceberg as far as Olivia is concerned. With these new revelations and friends, along with the realization that they too possess magical strengths, she fortifies herself for an inevitable confrontation between her past and present.

In addition to its own fantastical world, *Woman King* makes full use of San Francisco as a backdrop for Olivia's journey.



The city's ubiquitous fog, diverse culture, and environmentally conscious atmosphere tie into the novel's emphasis on the supernatural in unexpected ways. *Woman King* puts the witty, femme-power elements reminiscent of *Charmed* at a contemporary tempo, with, of course, the addition of myth and lore. Although the plot buildup is slightly awkward at points (a tattoo in an 'old language' is the mark of a fairy), readers familiar with the area will appreciate constant references to the Bay Area, as well as creatively conjured world of the Council who quietly works within human affairs to keep a balance of justice.

Sponsored Review

The Simon & Kirby Library: Science Fiction

By Dave Gibbons

Titan Books, \$49.95, 352 pages, Format: Hard

★★★★

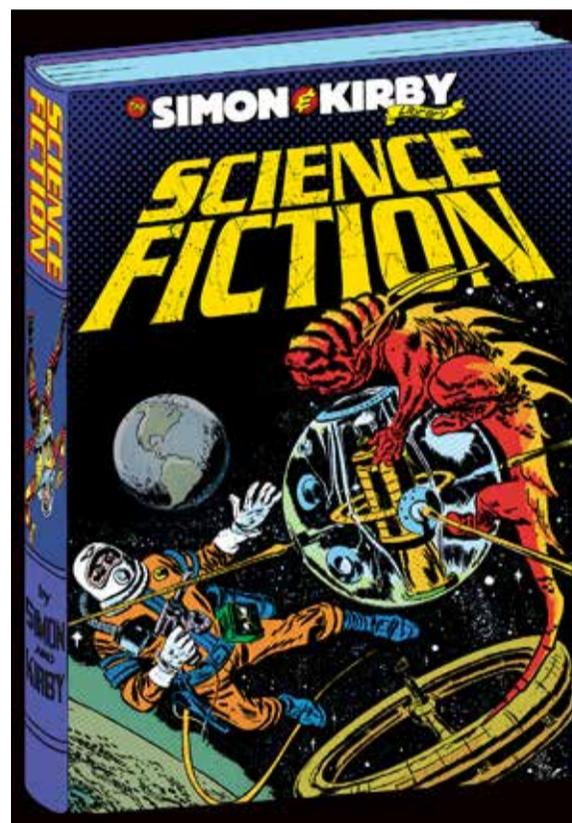
Joe Simon and Jack Kirby - for comic fans of any age, those two names belong in the pantheon of greats, names to be spoken with reverence and gratitude. Men who knew how to meld morality and action, Simon and Kirby have innumerable stories to their credit, and *The Simon & Kirby Library: Science Fiction* is the latest edition collecting their contributions to comic history for a new generation.

Covering their sci-fi work from the nineteen-forties, fifties, and sixties, *The Simon & Kirby Library: Science Fiction* assembles dozens of tales, featuring gloriously goofy but engaging storytelling that offers moral parables and entertainment alike. Time travel, what it means to be alive, what it means to be human... Simon and Kirby tackled the deepest questions of science fiction, and did so with style.

Some stories even feel like the sci-fi serials of the thirties, like Blue Bolt's adventures against the Green Sorceress or the bumbling three rocketeers who blunder into victory and achievement.

It's a trip to read these stories now and see not only foreshadowing for stories to come decades later, but to get a glimpse of the true optimism that suffused every tale, an optimism that seems oh-so-rare these days.

Reviewed by Glenn Dallas



The Worlds of Edgar Rice Burroughs

By Robert T. Garcia, Editor, Mike Resnick, Editor,
Todd J. McCaffrey, Contributor
Baen, \$15.00, 384 pages, Format: Trade

★★★★

This book pulls together a number of stories by Edgar Rice Burroughs fans, some of who always wanted to write a story using some of his famous characters and settings. Edgar Rice Burroughs has a huge fandom and his influence on genre literature was momentous. None doubt that *Tarzan* is an American cultural icon, but there were also *The Martian Tales of John Carter* who became a Warlord of Mars. Edgar Rice Burroughs did go on to visit Venus, the Moon, the center of the Earth, and other places in his heroic tales. His works were sometime genre hybrids of sorts not falling solely or necessarily cleanly in any one genre.

Though these stories are not very profound like he sometimes could be; they do offer a fun tribute and gush with excitement and sometimes suspense. *Tarzan* and Edgar Rice Burroughs are the stars in this collection, but if one does not get their fill from this there is a lot of Edgar Rice Burroughs out there to choose from. Assembled are some famous writers and some of the top talent in the field. These folks have written much and with distinction before they were allowed to fill the shoes of Edgar Rice Burroughs who also had a welcomed romantic side in his and these tales.

Reviewed by Ryder Miller

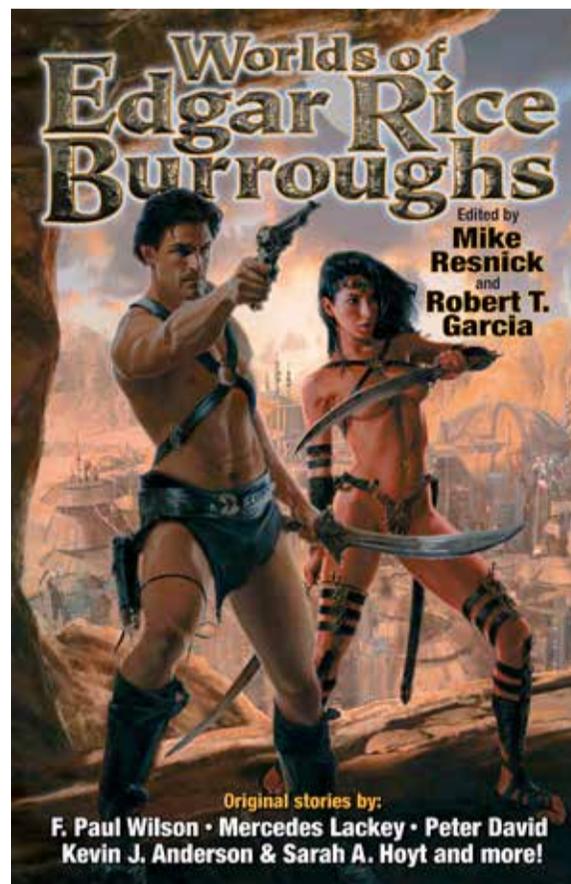
Overlay

By Blaine Readler
Full Arc Press, \$13.95, 236 pages, Format: Trade

★★★

Blaine C. Reader's *Overlay* takes you on a journey to another world, one which you have not likely seen before, for it is between this life and the afterlife; but it is a world not easily understood or one in which all the rules of reality apply.

Jordan is a simple, likeable guy who doesn't have many desires or wants in life, except for the company and affection of his beautiful fiancée, Kirsten. But he soon discovers that she



has participated in a strange and somewhat occult ritual found within an ancient text with the help of her college professor, to send her to another world. In our world, her body is now in a coma, lying in a hospital bed.

As Jordan looks down at the one thing he cares about in his life, he seeks out this professor of Kirsten's and demands that he provide the same method to transport Jordan to this other world so he can safely get Kirsten back. The professor agrees, and Jordan soon finds himself leaving his now comatose body and traveling on. The only problem is he isn't exactly clear on the instructions for getting back.

The idea for *Overlay* is an interesting one; but as with all good ideas, the execution leaves a little to be desired. The other world features unusual characters from the dead past, like Napoleon Bonaparte and a known mass murderer who, for some reason, are able to travel on to heaven and back at will. While actions scenes get a little drawn out, as well as the flipping back and forth between this world and the next, as well as the protagonist being a little too good at doing this, the story is still an interesting exploration into this concept. It is the overall meaning and moral for *Overlay* that will perhaps leave the reader questioning what exactly the author was intending, and what his spiritual beliefs may be.

Sponsored Review



Balfour and Meriwether in The Incident of the Harrowmoor Dogs

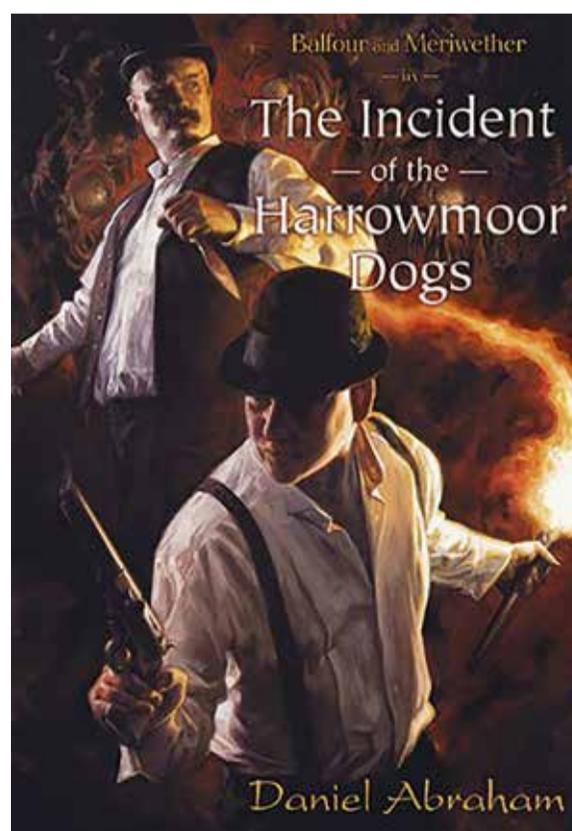
By Daniel Abraham

Subterranean, \$20.00, 88 pages,

Format: Hard

★★★★

Balfour and Meriwether in the Incident of the Harrowmoor Dogs by Daniel Abraham is the third novella to feature these two adventurers in a genuinely pleasing late Victorian/early Edwardian style romp through some classic tropes. As you'll gather from the title, this is not a million miles away from *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, but it's very definitely not a Sherlock Holmes pastiche.



Equally, you may suspect it's edging towards the Cthulu Mythos idea of the *Hounds of Tindalos*, but these "dogs" are most substantial and less supernatural than their Lovecraftian counterparts. The best way to characterize this *amuse bouche* is to picture Allan Quartermain, whose response to danger is to shoot it and, when the bullets run out, hack at it with a conveniently-to-hand knife. This is the British Empire under pressure from an unexpected source and, when the chips are down, the only thing to be done is adopt a stiff upper lip and start shooting. The result is a sly fantasy with an interesting set of definitions as to what constitutes an abomination. Subterranean Press continues to produce excellent shorter fiction and this elegantly produced volume is no exception.

Reviewed by David Marshall

Wicked Bronze Ambition: A Garrett, P.I., Novel

By Glen Cook

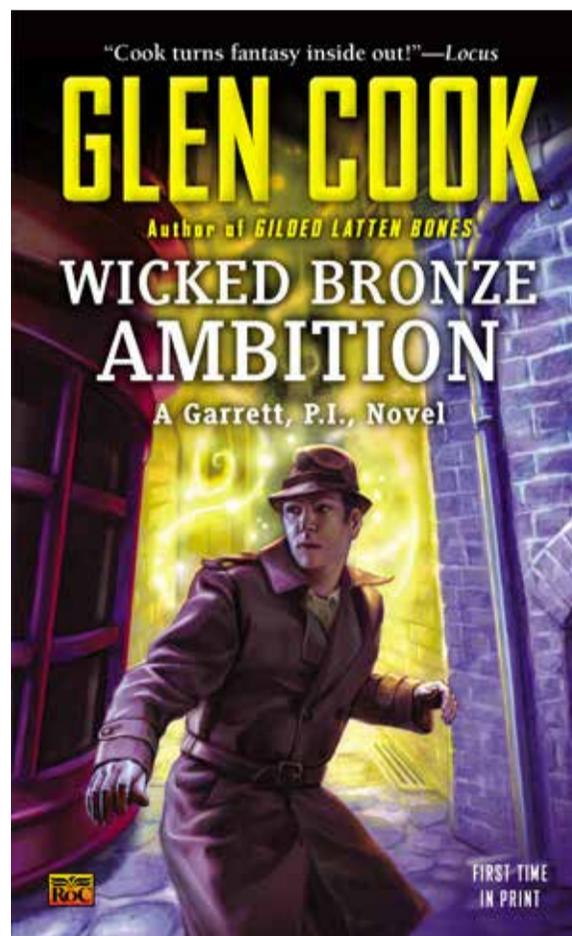
Roc, \$7.99, 496 pages, Format: Mass

★★★★

Garrett has been a PI in TunFaire for a long, long time, and everyone wonders if maybe he is starting to slow down. If not slowing, he certainly is settling down, engaged to the rich, sweet, charming, beautiful Strafa Algarda. The catch: she is also one of the city's most powerful, dangerous sorcerers, known in those circles as the Windwalker, Furious Tide of Light. Her extended, convoluted family, Garrett's soon-to-be-in-laws, are perhaps the scariest, craziest people poor Garrett has ever met. And even worse, they need his help.

Glen Cook's *Garret Files* series has been an ongoing project since nineteen-eighty-seven, and is a refreshing example of the fact that not every long-running character ends up running amok. Garrett, his friends, his enemies, and the city around him have certainly changed over time, but organically, avoiding the fourth-season-TV-show-style plot mishaps that so many writers seem to fall into. It may be a bit hard for new readers to jump into, simply because of the weight of accumulated back-story, but *Wicked Bronze Ambition* is an entertaining ride in a distinctive style, a treat for any fan.

Reviewed by James Rasmussen



A Clockwork Heart: The Chronicles of Light and Shadow, Book 2

By Liesel Schwarz

Del Rey, \$25.00, 304 pages, Format: Hard

★★★

For Elle Chance and Hugh Marsh, marriage hasn't exactly been the blissful journey they first imagined. After all, when an untrained Oracle and a powerful wizard unite, what do you expect? Now, somewhere in London, a malignant force is at work turning human men and women into a soulless, clockwork army, and when Marsh unexpectedly disappears, Elle fears the two events are related. With nothing less than the fate of the world at stake, Elle and her faithful companions go up against the dark forces of Shadow and the evil that's stolen Hugh's very soul.

The good news is that Schwarz continues to grow as a writer, delivering a tighter story and better pacing in *Clockwork Heart* than was previously apparent in the first book of the series *A Conspiracy of Alchemists*. The bad news is that for a story that's set against a backdrop of fairies and magic, precious little magical energy is expended. Elle's abilities and duties as the Oracle are never really displayed or discussed, leading you to wonder why she was cast in the role of supreme magical being in the first place. For this reader, more fairy dust would help knock this story up a notch.

Reviewed by Heather Clawson

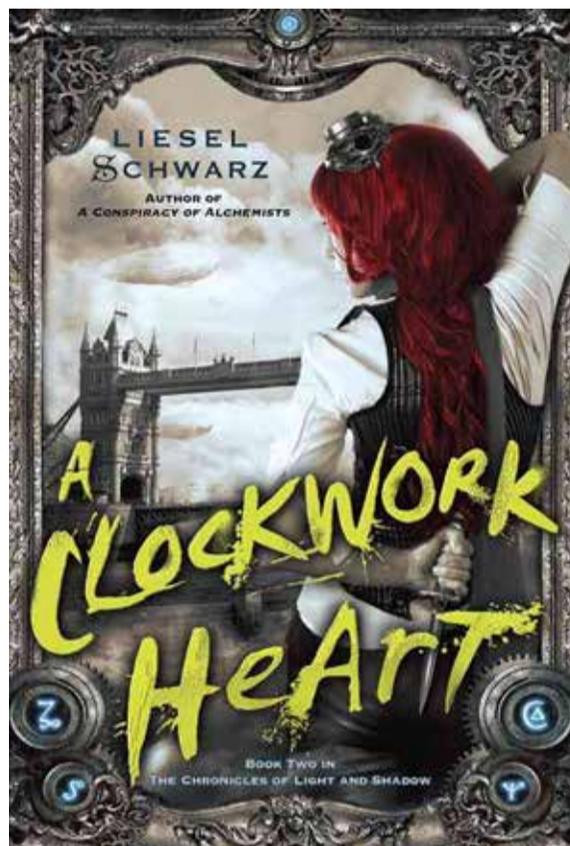
Elfhome

By Wen Spencer

Baen, \$7.99, 560 pages, Format: Mass

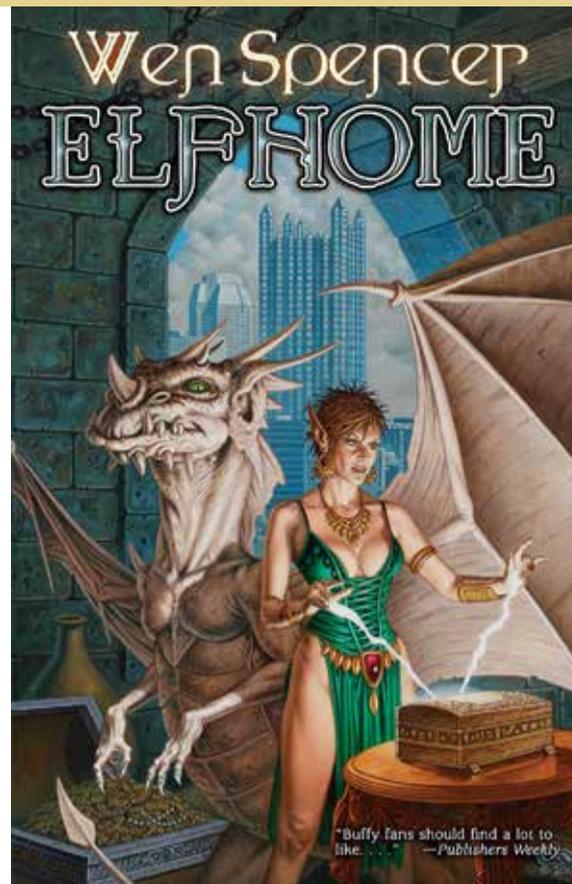
★★★

This book is the third in a trilogy that began with two-thousand-three's *Tinker*, the story of a female mechanic and junkyard owner who is plunged into a world of magic when a malfunctioning orbiting satellite sends her hometown of Pittsburgh through a portal to a planet populated by elves. When *Elfhome* opens, Tinker has been turned into an elf by her now-husband Windwolf, ruler of an elf clan, and is still adjusting to life as an



elf and as a ruler's consort. Tinker and her brother begin searching for missing elf children, who may have been kidnapped by the evil oni, who are aiming to destroy the elves. Much of *Elfhome* focuses on Oilcan, Tinker's brother, and other characters in the universe, leaving Tinker and Windwolf's story somewhat in the background.

Spencer's writing is vivid and engaging, and her heroine will appeal to those who like to read about kick-butt women, but the intricacies of the plot will likely confuse those who haven't read the previous two books in the series. This series is worth checking out if you are a fan of well-written fantasy and sci-fi.



Reviewed by Laura Tarwater Scharp

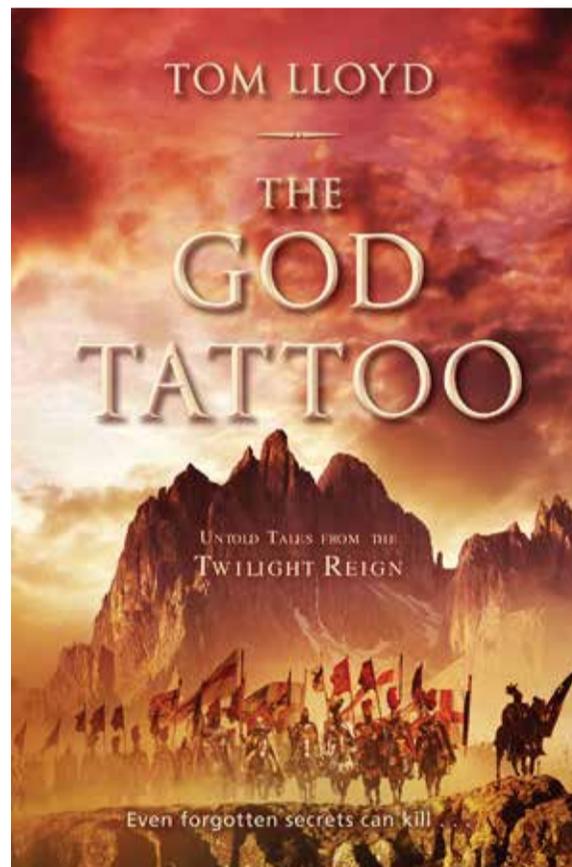
The God Tattoo: Untold Tales from the Twilight Reign

By Tom Lloyd

Pyr, \$18.00, 272 pages, Format: Trade

★★★★★

From the author of the spectacular *Twilight Reign* series comes a collection of short stories set in the same vibrant world. From the most distant reaches of the noble Farlan tribes, to the streets of the great city Narkang, to the hollow Elven wastes, smitten by a father mourning for his son, each tale is coruscant and grim. Aside from this, there is little similarity between them; each story (excepting one) is from a different point of view, each tale is narrated from a new perspective, each time you recognize a character or event from the *Twilight Reign*, Lloyd presents it in a whole new light. The tales are intense: a powerful white-eye roped into rescuing an imprisoned deity; a girl who ignores the silly tales of her grandfather and is consequently sucked into the frigid void; a determined investigator who learns about the true nature of the world from a despicable assassin – the quality of this book is astonishing. Read this book; read all the other ones too.



Reviewed by Peterson, Age 15