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Jim Butcher

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Entry Updated : 10/23/2015

Awards:

Hugo Award nomination for best graphic story, World Science Fiction Society, for *Welcome to the Jungle*.

Personal Information:

Born October 26, 1971, in Independence, MO; married; wife's name Shannon (an author); children: one son.
Education: University of Oklahoma, B.A. **Avocational Interests:** Martial arts, including ryuku kempu, tae kwan do, gojo shorei ryu, and kung fu, horseback riding, fencing, singing, songwriting, films, live-action gaming.
Addresses: Home: Independence, MO. Agent: Jennifer Jackson, Donald Maass Literary Agency, 160 W. 95th St., Ste. 1B, New York, NY 10025.

Career Information:

Writer. Has worked as horse wrangler, sales representative, and restaurant manager; currently a computer support technician.

Writings:

- *The Darkest Hours* ("Spider-Man" novel), Pocket Star (New York, NY), 2009.
- *The Aeronaut's Wife*, Roc (New York, NY), 2015.

"DRESDEN FILES" SERIES; FANTASY NOVELS

- *Storm Front* (also see below), Roc (New York, NY), 2000.
- *Fool Moon* (also see below), Roc (New York, NY), 2001.
- *Grave Peril* (also see below), Roc (New York, NY), 2001.
- *Summer Knight* (also see below), Roc (New York, NY), 2002.
- *Death Masks* (also see below), Roc (New York, NY), 2003.
- *Blood Rites*, Roc (New York, NY), 2004.
- *Dead Beat*, Roc (New York, NY), 2005.
- *Wizard for Hire* (omnibus; contains *Storm Front*, *Fool Moon*, and *Grave Peril*), SFBC, 2005.
- *Wizard by Trade* (omnibus; contains *Summer Knight* and *Death Masks*), NAL Trade (New York, NY), 2006.
- *Proven Guilty*, Roc (New York, NY), 2006.
- *Wizard under Fire* (omnibus), SFBC Fantasy Printing, 2007.
- *White Night*, Roc (New York, NY), 2007.
- *Small Favor*, Roc (New York, NY), 2008.
- *Backup* (novelette), Subterranean (Burton, MI), 2008.

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- (With Aridian Syaf) *Welcome to the Jungle* (graphic novel), Del Rey (New York, NY), 2008.
- *Hardback*, Subterranean (Burton, MI), 2008.
- *Storm Front*, Volume 1: *The Gathering Storm* (graphic novel), Roc (New York, NY), 2009.
- *Turn Coat*, Roc (New York, NY), 2009.
- *Fool Moon: Volume One* (graphic novel), Roc (New York, NY), 2010.
- *Changes*, Roc/New American Library (New York, NY), 2010.
- *Side Jobs: Stories from the Dresden Files*, New American Library (New York, NY), 2010.
- *Ghost Story*, Roc (New York, NY), 2011.
- *Cold Days*, Roc (New York, NY), 2012.
- *Skin Game*, Roc (New York, NY), 2014.

"CODEX ALERA" SERIES; FANTASY NOVELS

- *Furies of Calderon*, Ace Books (New York, NY), 2004.
- *Academ's Fury*, Ace Books (New York, NY), 2005.
- *Cursor's Fury*, Ace Books (New York, NY), 2006.
- *Captain's Fury*, Ace Books (New York, NY), 2007.
- *Princes' Fury*, Ace Books (New York, NY), 2008.
- *First Lord's Fury*, Ace Books (New York, NY), 2009.

Contributor of short stories to anthologies. Butcher's work has been translated into Russian, Spanish, Dutch, French, Czech, Polish, German, and Chinese.

Media Adaptions:

Evil Hat Productions adapted the "Dresden Files" series as a role-playing game, and the series has been adapted for television by the SciFi Channel. Many of Butcher's novels have been recorded as audiobooks.

Sidelights:

Jim Butcher has written two fantasy series, the "Dresden Files," which is about a wizard working as a private investigator in Chicago, and the "Codex Alera" series, which features intrigue in a mythical kingdom reminiscent of the Roman Empire. He wrote the first entry in the former series, *Storm Front*, for a writing class and saw it rejected many times before it was finally published. Butcher has said he was inspired by characters as diverse as Sherlock Holmes, Merlin, and Spider-Man in creating Harry Dresden, the protagonist of the series. "I designed Harry to be someone who is basically your average urbanite male," he told *SFSite.com* interviewer Alisa McCune. "He has to pay his bills, feed his cat, go to work, worry about taxes, take showers and cook meals without the benefit of electricity and so on. Sure, he has access to Phenomenal Cosmic Powers, but his powers don't define who and what he is. First and foremost, I wanted Harry to be a human being."

Storm Front introduces this very human wizard, who hopes to make enough money to pay his back rent by taking on a missing-person case. However, he soon finds he is up against another wizard, an evil one who is killing people, and he consequently becomes both a potential victim and a suspected perpetrator. Meanwhile, he is having trouble with the police and the Chicago mob. Also introduced in *Storm Front* are recurring characters such as Karrin Murphy, a Chicago police officer, and Bob, a talking skull who keeps Harry company. They return in *Fool Moon*, which has Harry investigating murders that appear to have been committed by werewolves.

In *Grave Peril*, the third entry in the series, ghosts and other supernatural creatures are wreaking havoc on Chicago, and they appear to have a special enmity toward Harry and his friends. A *Publishers Weekly* contributor praised Butcher's "vivid descriptions and colloquial dialogue" in this book, while *Booklist* reviewer Kristine Huntley dubbed Harry "a likable protagonist" and predicted that the story "will keep readers turning the pages." Don D'Amassa noted in *Science Fiction Chronicle* that *Grave Peril* is "a well written addition to a very nice series."

Further books in the series include *Death Masks*, which sees Harry trying to recover the Shroud of Turin from thieves while fending off vampires and other paranormal menaces. This book led D'Amassa to remark in *Science Fiction Chronicle* that the Dresden books have "consistently mixed humor and mayhem with great success." In *Booklist*, Huntley noted that the series "continues to surprise and delight with its inventiveness and sympathetic hero." *Blood Rites*, involving Harry with more vampires and with the pornographic film industry, is "filled with sizzling magic and intrigue," Huntley observed in *Booklist*. Kate Savage, a contributor to *SFReader.com*, commented that in this book, as in the rest of the series, "Butcher strikes an amusing balance of originality and dark humor."

Dead Beat is Butcher's seventh novel in the "Dresden Files" series, and the first to be published in a hardcover edition. In this story, Harry learns that police officer Karrin Murphy, with whom he is now romantically involved, is being blackmailed. The blackmailer is a vampire who is after the magic spells of a dead magician--spells that give the user incredible and dangerous powers. He is only one of many supernatural beings who all want the same thing. The story of Harry's battle against them combines "offbeat humor, a hardboiled style, and rich detail," according to Jackie Cassada in a review for *Library Journal*.

Proven Guilty is the next title in the series, and in this story, Harry has been appointed to the White Council of Wizards, who have assigned him a difficult job. He must try to contact the Winter Fairy Court and gauge their position in the Council's ongoing war against vampires. At the same time, he must protect Molly, the teenage daughter of a close friend who is in danger of losing her life and soul to the forces of dark magic. A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer noted the "believable, likeable set of characters" in the story.

White Night is a "superlative" addition to the "Dresden Files" series, according to a *Publishers Weekly* writer. The lesser wizards of Chicago are under attack, and Harry teams up with various friends to track down the killer. He learns that his brother Thomas is under suspicion in the case. The sizable cast of characters is "finely drawn," according to the *Publishers Weekly* writer.

The conflict between good and evil becomes more heated in *Small Favor*. This novel, published in 2008, puts Harry at odds with some of his closest companions and features "compelling characters and superb storytelling," commented Jackie Cassada in a review for *Library Journal*. That same year, Butcher published *Backup*, a novelette in the "Dresden Files" series. The series also branched out in a new direction that year with the publication of *Welcome to the Jungle*, a graphic novel. Another graphic-novel adaptation, *Storm Front*, Volume 1: *The Gathering Storm* appeared in 2009. That year also saw the publication of *Turn Coat*, another new "Dresden Files" novel. In this story, a Warden of the White Council shows up at Harry's place begging for protection. This book finds Harry "in fine form," stated Stacey Rotliers in a review for *Library Journal*, with an action-filled plot and "excellent, irreverent humor." The series as a whole got a boost in popularity after being adapted for television by the SciFi cable network.

In 2014, Butcher published *Skin Game*. In this volume, not only has his boss, Mab, Queen of Air and Darkness, just traded Harry's skills to pay off a debt, but she puts him on a mission with his archenemy, Nicodemus Archleone. Their task is to break into the highest-security vault in Nevernever, which happens to belong to Hades, Lord of the Underworld, in order to hoist the Holy Grail. Harry senses that more is afoot and feels certain that Nicodemus has plans to ensure the team doesn't survive.

"The last few novels of 'The Dresden Files' have been exhausting," wrote Swapna Krishna on her blog *S. Krishna's Books*. "Good, yes, but incredibly complex, with basically nonstop action. ... That's why *Skin Game* comes as such a breath of fresh air. Yes, it's still important for the bigger, wider story, but it also feels a little quieter. ... *Skin Game* is fun, in the adventure sort of way that Harry does best." A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer was critical, writing that "series admirers can only hope for a shot of adrenaline next time out," while *Booklist* critic Regina Schroeder predicted that "this should be just what fans of the Dresden Files series would hope for."

While continuing the "Dresden Files" series, Butcher also began the "Codex Alera" series, which he described to McCune as "much more in the way of standard horse-and-sword fantasy." The first book, *Furies of Calderon*, portrays troubled times in the land of Alera, whose elderly king has no heir. The king's spies suspect there is a plot to overthrow the monarch. During the investigation, beautiful female spy Amara meets Tavi, a young man frustrated because, unlike many people in Alera, he has not been able to develop magical powers. Assisting Amara, Tavi becomes involved in the kingdom's power struggles. The book has "strong, likable characters and a graceful storytelling style," related Jackie Cassada in *Library Journal*. Frieda Murray, writing in *Booklist*, deemed it "a promising series launcher." A *Publishers Weekly* critic concluded that Butcher had done "a thorough job of world building" in this "absorbing fantasy," adding that the novel "bodes well for future volumes."

The series continued with *Academ's Fury*, published in 2005. In this story, Gaius is the victim of an attack intended to take his life. The story displays "a fresh approach to magic," wrote Jackie Cassada in *Library Journal*. Gaius survives, and in *Cursor's Fury*, he sets out to destroy the two men who would become the first lords of their world. Tavi, the featured character in the first book, is enrolled in legionary training. The book alternates between his story, as he makes his way up to the position of commanding officer, and that of Gaius and his cause. Gaius suffers a setback when hostages are taken by Kalare, one of his rivals. He must counter this move by sending a female spy, Amara, to rescue the hostages. A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer noted that the author "defly mixes military fantasy and political intrigue in the rollicking third 'Codex Alera' book."

The fourth book in the series is *Captain's Fury*, and it is distinguished by "sharp tactical plotting, hazardous cross-country travel and a dash of sardonic humor," according to a writer for *Publishers Weekly*. The story opens two years after a campaign has begun against the Canim, invaders who have wolf-like characteristics. As the captain of a legion, Tavi is deeply involved in the fighting and planning, but political machinations force him into acts that could be construed as treasonous. The reviewer praised the author's ability to render the military action in his story in a realistic manner while still providing enough dramatic battle action to keep readers engaged.

The story continues with *Princeps' Fury*. Though the Canim and other threats have been beaten back, a new danger has arisen in the form of the Vord, an insect-like creature who can control powerful elemental forces. The battle scenes are "intense" and the characters are "vivid" in this tale, according to a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer. The Vord continues to pose a threat in the sixth book of the series, *First Lord's Fury*. This fast-paced story "ties up a lot of loose ends," remarked Frieda Murray in a *Booklist* review. The Canim are now in an alliance with Alera, and Tavi faces challenges to his leadership.

Butcher continues his popular "Dresden Files" with the twelfth installment, *Changes*. Here Harry Dresden, private investigator and trained wizard, is in store for a major transformation in his life. Former girlfriend Susan Rodriguez became a vampire when attacked by Harry's enemies, the vampires of the Red Court. She exiled herself to South America where she could battle those very enemies. But she had a secret, and now the Duchess of the Red Court discovers what it is and plans to use it against Harry. Unknown to him, Harry has an eight-year-old daughter, Maggie, with Susan. The Duchess, Arianna Ortega, kidnaps Maggie and is going to offer her as a human sacrifice. Learning of this from Susan, Harry only has a matter of days in which to save his child. He must risk everything to do so, and he is aided in this by police officer Karrin Murphy, his half-vampire brother Thomas, and other regulars from the series. Reviewing this work in *Booklist*, Jessica Moyer termed it a "can't-miss entry in one of the best urban-fantasy series currently being published." Similarly, a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer felt that this series addition is "fast-paced and compelling." Further praise came from a *Blogcritics* Web site contributor who dubbed it a "page turner." Writing on the *io9* Web site, Chris Braak felt that "true to its name," this title "barrels through Harry's recent history, demolishing everything in sight." Braak added: "Old allies are lost, old enemies finally dispatched, and nearly every hovering, delicately-balanced element of Butcher's established status quo is thrown into disarray. ... In *Changes*, Butcher doesn't give Harry a way out, leading to a necessary compromise and an actually heart-wrenching conclusion to a long-running secondary plot line."

With *Side Jobs: Stories from the Dresden Files*, Butcher provides eleven short tales dealing with Harry Dresden, including "Aftermath," set directly after the events at the end of *Changes*. A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer found that tale the "collection's strongest, full of powerful emotion." For a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor, this story collection provides "sidelights on the Dresden mythos, which no true fan will want to miss."

In the thirteenth addition to the series, *Ghost Story*, Harry Dresden is again on the case, except now as a ghost. Having been shot and killed in the previous installment, he is now sent back to Chicago to solve his own murder, for it was an unknown assassin who shot him. But now his task is made more difficult by his lack of body. His first stop on the way back from the dead is to the home of Mortimer, a medium, whom Harry helps in his battle with bad spirits. Nobody in Chicago, however, wants to believe in Harry's status as a ghost except for his cat, Mister, but eventually he begins to uncover secrets and faces an old enemy that nearly vanquished Harry before when he was a wizard. *Booklist* reviewer Regina Schroeder found this a "high-octane addition to the series," further noting: "Butcher keeps pushing Harry to the edge in a way that makes the next volume something to anticipate eagerly." Similar praise came from *Library Journal* reviewer Stacey Rottiers, who called this a "stunning, exciting series entry with ... heart-stopping action." Braak, again writing on the *io9* Web site, remarked of this work: "Butcher's storytelling is satisfying on a level that's bone deep; from his knack for crafting suspense, to the multiple reversals of the final confrontation, to the surprisingly heart-rending denouement, it's all writing that just makes you feel good." Likewise, a reviewer for the *Love Vampires* Web site noted: "*Ghost Story* is a wonderful addition to the 'Dresden Files' series. Harry as a ghost has none of the magical abilities of Harry the live wizard. Instead of blasting his way through problems with his magic staff he is forced to observe his friends battling the forces of darkness without being able to help them. This gives him some time for introspection, swiftly followed by the realization that his desperate actions to save his daughter had more consequences than he imagined."

In an interview with Gayle Surette for the Web site *SFR*evu, Butcher commented on his writing process: "I always have at least a rough outline before I start chapter one. I know where the story will begin, what I want the ending to be like, and I usually have several 'stepping stones' in between that I want to make sure to include. At times, I have had to make alterations to my story outline, as the ongoing book reveals necessities of logic or pacing or tone that I had not foreseen. But I usually know more or less what I'm doing when I sit down to write a chapter, and so far I've managed to start at the beginning and make it to the end on a consistent basis." Speaking with *Clarion Foundation* Web site contributor Mishell Baker, Butcher remarked on what, for him, is one of the most important aspects of writing: "One of the really handy things that stuck with me that my teacher told me was that writing is a game about manipulating people's emotions, which is a really cold-blooded thing to say. But what it means is when people sit down to read a book, they want to like your character, they want to hate the villain, they want to support your hero. Learning how to get that done is what separates the successful writer from the not as successful writer."

Related Information:

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1. How did you **experience** the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"? How did you feel reading it—amused, sad, disturbed, confused, bored...?

2. Describe the main **characters**—personality traits, motivations, and inner qualities.

- Why do characters do what they do?
- Are their actions justified?
- Describe the dynamics between characters (in a marriage, family, or friendship).
- How has the past shaped their lives?
- Do you admire or disapprove of them?
- Do they remind you of people you know?

3. Are the main characters **dynamic**—changing or maturing by the end of the book? Do they learn about themselves, how the world works and their role in it?

4. Discuss the **plot**:

- Is it **engaging**—do you find the story interesting?
- Is this a **plot-driven book**—a fast-paced page-turner?
- Does the plot unfold slowly with a focus on character?
- Were you surprised by complications, twists & turns?
- Did you find the plot predictable, even formulaic?

5. Talk about the book's **structure**.

- Is it a continuous story...or interlocking short stories?
- Does the time-line move forward chronologically?
- Does time **shift back & forth** from past to present?
- Is there a **single viewpoint** or **shifting viewpoints**?
- **Why** might the author have chosen to tell the story the way he or she did?
- What difference does the structure make in the way you read or understand the book?

6. What main ideas—**themes**—does the author explore? (Consider the title, often a clue to a theme.) Does the author use **symbols** to reinforce the main ideas? (See our free LitCourses on both Symbol and Theme.)

7. What **passages** strike you as insightful, even profound? Perhaps a bit of dialog that's funny or poignant or that encapsulates a character? Maybe there's a particular comment that states the book's thematic concerns?

8. Is the **ending** satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it?

9. If you could ask the **author** a question, what would you ask? Have you read other books by the same author? If so how does this book compare. If not, does this book inspire you to read others?

10. Has this novel **changed you**—broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?

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The Aeronaut's Windlass review by Rob, Mark and Mark

Mark Yon October 13, 2015 5 Comments

It's not very often here at *SFFWorld* that we find a book that many of us are reading and want to review together. So it is with great pleasure that we discuss, in a review form, what we all thought together of the first in Jim Butcher's new Fantasy series.

We hope you enjoy it as much as we did.



Mark Y

Mark Y: To start with, I'll put up a copy of the publisher's summary:

"Since time immemorial, the Spires have sheltered humanity, towering for miles over the mist-shrouded surface of the world. Within their halls, aristocratic houses have ruled for generations, developing scientific marvels, fostering trade alliances, and building fleets of airships to keep the peace.

Captain Grimm commands the merchant ship, Predator. Fiercely loyal to Spire Albion, he has taken their side in the cold war with Spire Aurora, disrupting the enemy's shipping lines by attacking their cargo vessels. But when the Predator is severely damaged in combat, leaving captain and crew grounded, Grimm is offered a proposition from the Spirearch of Albion-to join a team of agents on a vital mission in exchange for fully restoring Predator to its fighting glory.

And even as Grimm undertakes this dangerous task, he will learn that the conflict between the Spires is merely a premonition of things to come. Humanity's ancient enemy, silent for more than ten thousand years, has begun to stir once more. And death will follow in its wake."

So, with the plot out of the way, I'd like us to start with general comments about the book. Did we all like it?



Rob B

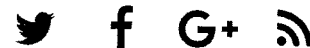
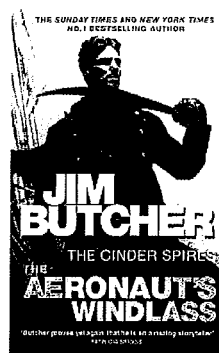
Rob B: I loved this book. Steampunk isn't my go-to subgenre, when it misses, it really misses. But when it hits like this one (or Beth Cato's debut *The Clockwork Dagger*), I really love it. I think because there's more of a mix between the Steampunk aesthetic and epic rather than what is more typical of Steampunk in a world that echoes Victorian times. I remarked on twitter that the best storytellers can transfer the joy they had in telling the story to the reader, in that conversation that a book/story is between reader and storyteller. It was very clear that Jim had a great deal of fun writing this one because it was an incredibly fun and engaging story.

Mark C: I loved this book too, and much like Rob, Steampunk is not my go-to genre. It also didn't



Mark C

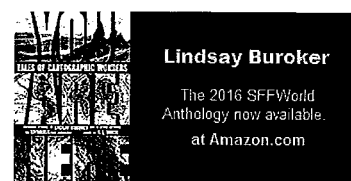
feel limited to Steampunk, with some clear indications of Fantasy and Science Fiction within the pages. But I'm getting ahead of myself – *The Aeronaut's Windlass* was just a blast from start to finish. I've known since reading the *Dresden Files* that Jim can tell a good story, but I must admit I was a little apprehensive starting a) a new series in a genre I'm not massively fond of, and b) one that tells the story from a third person point of view with plenty of characters. Fortunately, I wasn't left disappointed in the slightest.



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Mark Y: I've left saying anything until last, partly because I didn't want to pre-empt your comments. But I'm going to say that I too really liked it, for many of the reasons you two have said. I do enjoy a bit of Steampunk personally myself, though rather like yourselves I've had my fingers burned with a few disappointing ones. I have found as many that I haven't liked as those I have. For me too, Jim's book is one of the good ones and it ticks a lot of plusses on my list.

Which leads me to my next question. *The Aeronaut's Windlass* is different from Jim's *Harry Dresden*, (though I think there are some similarities in style, I'll mention those later.) With this in mind though, how surprised were you by this book? Was it what you expected, or was it something more, or less?

Rob B: I wasn't too surprised, to be honest. I'm a huge fan of **The Dresden Files** so I know that Jim Butcher is a great storyteller. Steampunk is usually hit or miss for me, this one had a more grand and epic feel to it. It was better than I expected, actually.

Mark C: Considering how touch-and-go I can be with anything outside of Science Fiction, and how a recent Steampunk novel by a favourite author of mine didn't quite hit the mark, I was very pleasantly surprised – here is much more here than gears, steam power, and airships. Add in Jim's prose and storytelling ability to a world that asks many more questions than it answers, and there really is very little (if anything) that left me wanting.

Mark Y: So, moving on, what were the particular aspects we liked?

Rob B: The world-building, the characters, the monsters, the plotting; pretty much everything. But foremost was Rowl. I think my favorite character was Bridget. A very believable character; a great hero.

Mark C: I agree with Rob – pretty much everything. The whole setup of Spire Albion was so interesting, with such a varied society and many differing sections and masterful world building – plus talking cats! Despite wanting to see where the story goes, I'm particularly looking forward to finding out more about the world and its history, including the oft-mentioned 'Builders'.

Mark Y: My first impression was how big a book it was – 600+ pages. As the first book in a new series, does it merit being so big?

Rob B: I think the size was just about right though I don't think a shorter book would have made it worse (although I wouldn't know *where* to trim it!). The **Dresden** books, at least the earlier instalments, are shorter, but the scope was different. As the scope of the story being told in **The Dresden Files** widened and became more epic, the books became larger. Jim was establishing the world in this one so I think the size was warranted.

Mark C: Not only warranted because of the need to establish the world, but also because it has a wider cast of characters through which we follow the story. With the differing points of view, certainly compared to the first-person style of the **Dresden Files**, the story felt right at this length. I don't think any chapters or viewpoints were wasted either, and there was little pointless world-building within the pages. Just about right for me.

Mark Y: I said I'd come back to a similarity in Jim's writing. For me, characterisation has always been a strength of Jim's – Harry Dresden and Tavi are all characters that we can both like and identify with, for example. Does Jim improve on these characters here in *The Aeronaut's Windlass*?

Rob B: I haven't (yet) read the **Codex Alera** series, but I think what Jim did best in this one, in terms of seeing his skills grow, was giving readers female characters who were proactive and quite simply believable human beings. Granted, Karrin Murphy is a well-drawn character in **The Dresden Files**, but she's mostly a secondary character in a series of books which are first person narratives so we rarely see the story from her point of view. I go again to Bridget who is in my mind a co-protagonist (at the least) with Captain Grimm. Grimm is a bit larger than life, a character many people know by reputation so that sets up a distance whereas Bridget seems to be a character who truly comes into her own in *The Aeronaut's Windlass*, her history prior to the novel is not "set" the same way Grimm's is.

Mark C: The main difference between *The Aeronaut's Windlass* and the **Dresden Files** (like Rob, I've not read the **Codex Alera** yet either), is the fact that this is a third-person narrative. As such, it opens up a great deal of possibilities for Jim as a writer, and he takes advantage of them all by giving us plenty of interesting characters. Grimm is a fairly typical character, but Bridget, cousins Gwen and Benedict, etherealists Ferus and Folly, and, of course, Rowl, all bring something different to the table. It's nice that we see each situation from different points of view, and the



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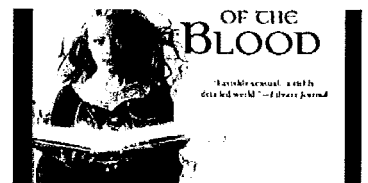
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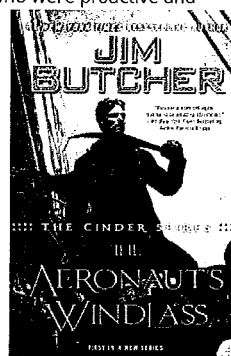
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characterisation is very strong throughout.

Mark Y: As you've said already, Rob, Rowl is a wonderfully realised character, and I think my favourite – I can see a lot of fans for him. I must admit that I also noticed what Rob has said here, that the characterisation is dominated by females, not that that's a bad thing. I liked it! But bearing in mind Jim's previous female leads (Karrin Murphy, Molly Carpenter, for example) how do Gwendolyn, Bridget and even Folly stand up for you by comparison here?

Rob B: Have I mentioned that I like Bridget? ☺ Gwen was a great character, too. Very headstrong and I really empathized reading the scenes written with her as the POV. I don't think she was as frustrating to the extent that her co-characters did, I got a sense that some thought she was a bit of a nuisance but again I didn't see her that way at all. She was just a very headstrong, youthful character who acts before thinking. Folly is a lot of fun, too, even if she was more of a secondary character. I see big things down the road for her in terms of moving up to be more of a primary player. (Or maybe if the series is popular enough, a story from her POV would be fun).

Mark C: Gwen is definitely fierce and headstrong, and her view of the world is somewhat annoying at times, though her cousin Benedict certainly balances her out. Folly is also great fun, a character that could grow massively as the story progresses. I also liked Bridget (perhaps not as much as Rob... ☺), and her development through the novel is perhaps the best of the bunch – it's great to see her take such a prominent role. I'd perhaps go as far to say that it is the male characters that fall behind here, or certainly don't have the same level of development that the female characters have.

Mark Y: Folly reminded me a little of Patrick Rothfuss's Auri. Like has been said above, there's clearly bigger things expected with Folly in the future. Like Auri, I suspect some readers will appreciate Folly's – erm, 'other-worldliness', whilst equal numbers of readers may find her a tad annoying.

One of my favourite elements of the book, which surprised me, is the world building. The Cinder Spires are an environment above what appears to be a dead, or at least a highly dangerous world below. Did this work for you?

Rob B: The world absolutely worked for me. There was enough world-building to whet the appetite. I like the concept of the Spires and think Jim's only touched the surface (pun not intended) of what this world is. There's a shining beauty atop the Spires, with a darkness lurking below on the surface (literal, not metaphorical) of the world. I have some theories about the true nature of this world and how it came to be.

I want to know more about what Benedict and Sark are, there are some hints of what 'warriorborn' are. The hints about their nature leads me to believe they aren't completely human.

Mark Y: Yes. My initial thoughts were that the warriorborn were lizard-like, for some reason. But as the book progressed the hints became bigger ('half-souls') and the feline qualities became more noticeable. I'm thinking some sort of Frankenstein-like genetic experiment programme, but I guess we'll see later if Jim wants us to.

Mark C: Definitely worked for me too, and Jim teased plenty of information about the world without directly given said information. I enjoyed the technology level, particularly the use of crystals and the reasoning behind them, though again questions were raised in my mind that weren't entirely answered. As I said earlier, discovering more about this world is as high on my priority list as is continuing the story!

Rob B: For me, I felt they were more feline in nature. Whether they are felines that evolved into humans, or are a construct remains to be seen. But Jim gave just enough detail to make them very intriguing.

Mark Y: And then there's Captain Grimm and his world of airships – albeit airships with a tendency to be run like ocean ships. How was that aspect for you?

Rob B: Very swashbuckling! It added to the tension and gave the world both a Napoleonic feel as well as an alien feel. Is it a far future Earth?

Mark C: Personally I put this as an alien world rather than a far-future Earth, but the nature of the technology present suggests some sort of regression over a long period of time. Anyway, I digress. Airships! Pirates! Sky battles! I wondered how this would all play out after that first encounter, but there wasn't quite as much as I expected – it was more about the captain, the crew, and how they work together and follow Grimm's leadership. Would I like to see more Airships in the sequel? Yarr!

Mark Y: Ha! Like you, Mark, I enjoyed the airship aspect, though I was a little disappointed that



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A Brief Retrospective of Tad Williams's MEMORY, SORROW and THORN

they were less Zeppelin-like and more '*HMS Victory-with-magic*'. This is in keeping with the tone of the book though, which is meant to be more *Peter-Pan* and less *Hindenberg*, I think.

Seeing as how it has just been mentioned though, I think one of the best parts of the book for me were the fighting and battle scenes. *Windlass* is a book where war breaks out, and for me the Pearl Harbour-type moment of the raid by Spire Aurora on Spire Albion near the beginning worked really well. What worked for you?

Rob B: That beginning did work really well and I think Jim captured the chaos of battle even more powerfully towards the end of the novel.

Mark C: Definitely agree there. The airship battle scenes were exhilarating and believable, but it was the hand-to-hand combat I really enjoyed. When you've got crystal weapons that shoot out energy, swords, guns, and claws, there is so much that can take place. Rowl's fighting was even crazier and more chaotic than the airship battles, and Jim used each event to maximum effect. There was just so much to marvel at and enjoy. Entertainment at its best!

Mark Y: You've mentioned the crystal weapons there, Mark, and that brings me to the idea of magic systems, and the characters of etherialist technowizard Professor Ferus and his assistant Folly. Does the idea of ethereal energy work for you? It's quite different to Harry's methods of working with magic – or is it?

Rob B: ...or is it? I like the magic quite a bit, as perfect a Steampunk magic system as I've read. Back to that idea of the world at which I hinted. Jim has said he wants to close out **The Dresden Files** with a big Epic Trilogy. What if that Epic trilogy changes the world so much with a release of magic that the result is the world of **The Cinder Spires**?

Mark Y: Ooh, really good point, that, Rob. I'd not thought of the book as possibly having a cosmic link-up, like Brandon Sanderson's *Cosmere* universe or Terry Brooks' *Shannara* books. I'll bear that in mind for the future books.

Mark C: I liked the fact that the magic felt more 'real', that it could be explained rationally, and even felt somewhat science-fictional. Perhaps it's just me projecting my preference for Science

Fiction into the narrative and seeing things that may not be there. But it works well in the overall world and fits together nicely with the technology – Jim has certainly thought it all through. Whether there is a connection to the Dresdenverse is a theory that is definitely up in the air for the moment...

Mark Y: I thought the magic crystal aspect was well done. The etherialism magic reminded me a little of Chris Wooding's *Retribution Falls*, for some reason.

Let's get to the gritty stuff now. Surely our review can't be totally positive! What are the parts that worked less well for you, and why? What might critics *not* like about the book?

Rob B: That battle towards the end was a little too chaotic, if anything. It wasn't entirely easy to keep track of whose side everybody was on. Other than that, no real complaints.

Mark C: Personally I found very little to criticise. There were a couple of times where the focus switched away at what could have been a pivotal moment and then picked up later on, and I suspect some will not be happy with the general lack of explanations about the world, but there really isn't much to grumble about. *The Aeronaut's Windlass* really is a thoroughly entertaining story written by an author who knows what he's doing.

Mark Y: I think I'd agree with much of that myself, Mark. The focus switching is a writerly trait I think we see too much of in books personally, although it didn't bother me too much this time. If I had to pick something to criticise, then I will say that the name of Grimm did worry me at first – I just thought it was too pantomime. I'm pleased to say that the actual character won me over, though. As for anything else...I think Folly (no relation to Molly) may irritate some readers a tad. But her actions are understandable in the context of the book.

Fun though this has been, let's try and bring this to a close. In summary, and in conclusion then, would we recommend this book? Where do we hope the series will go next? What would you like most to see in the next book?

Rob B: I would absolutely recommend this one. I want to know more about Benedict, see Folly evolve, and see more of the various Spires. I'm willing to go where ever Jim takes this thing.

I can't wait to see some fan art of the characters and the world, either.

Mark C: Ditto. I trust Jim more than enough for him to lead the way, though I would like to know more history of the world, and see a little more about the ether and the etherealists. I also think it's a crying shame that Rowl was not featured on the cover in some way – I'm pretty sure he'd agree with me in saying that he was just as much a main character as anyone else! A simple closing comment from me: *The Aeronaut's Windlass* is highly recommended.

Mark Y: I don't think I can add much more than that myself. This is clearly the first book in a series, but, like Rob, a series I want to read more of. I was a little worried initially as to whether the book would meet my hopes, but I'm pleased to say that on the whole I was very, very pleased with this book and not disappointed in the least. Well done, Jim.

The Aeronaut's Windlass by Jim Butcher

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640 pages

ISBN: 978-0356503653 (Orbit), 978-0451466808 (Roc)

Review by Rob Bedford, Mark Chitty and Mark Yon – SFFWorld.com © 2015

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Phil Boswell

Reply

October 14, 2015 at 6:49 pm · Edit

Nice review. I've been watching some of Jim's talks on YouTube, and he was speculating that later books in the series might feature different characters on the covers, so Rowl is in with a good chance!

Mark Yon

Reply

October 15, 2015 at 7:12 pm · Edit

Thank you, Phil. I/We look forward to the next book covers. Who will be next? ☺



Phil Boswell

Reply

October 16, 2015 at 7:59 am · Edit

As far as I could tell, he has no idea!

E.M. Faulds

Reply

October 29, 2015 at 3:53 pm · Edit

I really enjoyed his Alera Codex series as a fun and entertaining read, so I will be checking this out.



tropical toes

Reply