



## Bloodstone

*Karl Edward Wagner*

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**Bloodstone** Karl Edward Wagner

**KANE**

The Mystic Swordsman becomes the living link with the awesome power of a vanished super-race.

In the dark swamp where toadmen croak and cower, slumbers an ancient relic of the days when creatures from the stars ruled the Earth. In the booty captured in a savage raid, Kane discovers a ring, a bloodstone, which is the key to the power that lies buried, inactive but not dead, within the forest.

Now Kane, whose bloody sword has slashed and killed for the glory of other rulers, can scheme to rule the Earth - himself!

**KANE**

is a new super-hero - part savage, part savant - whose diamond sharp sword cuts through time and darkness to reveal a mindbending new world.

## Bloodstone Details

Date : Published March 1st 1983 by Warner Books (NY) (first published January 1st 1975)

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Author : Karl Edward Wagner

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## From Reader Review Bloodstone for online ebook

### Derek says

Wagner layers his story extremely effectively, starting with some surprisingly concise and cogent world-building regarding the political situation in a small frontier section of the world, and the internal politics of the involved city states. From there, Kane plays a dangerous and intricate military/political game against both sides, to manipulate the situation according to his own plans.

By this point, a bare third into the book--which also included a harrowing journey into an infested swamp to a lost city that conceals ancient power--I remembered why I gave this book five stars originally. Even in its early parts, where Kane plays his game of *Red Harvest* between the two city states, it makes for top-notch adventure and skullduggery.

And then there's the Bloodstone, which injects Lovecraft by way of Jack Kirby in a way, and is absolutely delicious reading.

Wagner's worldbuilding falters in the handling of science and sorcery late in the novel: up to that point all indications were that this is a scientific or superscientific universe. Then Wagner grafts in the notion of sorcery as a separate concept and characters wind up making discussion on the topic to no real point. In a story that flows so naturally it was a strange misstep, and I think detracts from the images of cosmic races and civilizations that dominate the rest.

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### Charles says

As I understand it, this was the first Kane novel that Wagner wrote, although not the first published. The character seems to still be developing somewhat here and I didn't think the book was quite as good as some of the later novels. Still, it was very enjoyable.

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### Algernon says

- *What are you, Kane ... man or demon?*  
- *I've been called both, though both races have damned me often enough. And I claim neither - although once men called me brother.*

Note: this is my first try to insert an image into a review. I hope it works, because Frank Frazetta did a great job in capturing the essence of Kane - the immortal hero cursed to leave destruction in his wake for all eternity.

This is my third Kane book by Karl Edward Wagner. I've been trying to read them in order, but any one of these first three can be a starting point for new readers. They are consistently good, in their pulpy adventure way. This time the adventure is spiced up with slithering giant snakes, batrachian swamp warriors,

chimaeras made of ectoplasm, virgins maidens tied naked on altars of sacrifice, bloody battles against supernatural enemies and evil entities coming out of slumber to conquer the world. It doesn't sound very original or very enticing in synopsis, but Wagner is a real master at infusing the story with a brooding atmosphere, creating a mythical world rich in history and races, as dangerous and filled with adventure as The Hyborian Age chronicled by Robert E Howard or the world of Newhon by Fritz Leiber.

The epic journey of the bloodstone starts with a ring adorned with a precious gemstone of dark green veined with blood-red streaks ( I have one of these in my gem collection, I hope it will not start controlling my mind any night soon). Kane follows the trail of the stone through ancient manuscripts to a ruined city lost in the swamps : Arelarty - a colossal mausoleum to an ancient race destroyed in a war forgotten by history books. The theme gives the novel a post apocalyptic vibe, unearthing the misteries and technologies of what appears to be an alien people who have regressed back into savagery. Kane contemplates from this the possible future of human civilization:

*"I wonder how mankind would fare, should some cosmic disaster blast our civilization into forgotten rubble. Perhaps we would return to the trees and caves of our bestial ancestors - skulking apemen that a mad creator's folly transformed into men - and not even legend would remember the dead majesty of our race."*

While the chapter dealing with the re-discovery of the ancient city and its dark secret is one of the best I've read so far by Wagner, a lot of the book is told from the perspective of Teres - a valkyrie maiden born and bred to the sword who is caught up in Kane's machinations of fomenting war between two neighboring kingdoms. I liked the way her story arc developed, how she is not the passive scantily clad eye candy that looks good on the book cover and easily swoons into the arms of the brawny hero. She is more like Red Sonja than a damsel in distress. Her interaction with Kane offers an opportunity for one of his best speeches when she mentions that immortality is not considered a curse:

*"What do mortals know? Flesh can heal, but the soul can be scarred! To be doomed to wander through eternity ... branded an outcast, no land to call home, no man to name friend! Whatever he seeks to love - to grasp - slips through his embrace inevitably. Age consumes the bones of his hope. The loneliness! Only memories, cold phantoms to torture his dreams. And the hideous, smothering boredom that creeps more stifling with each decade, as the taste of life's frantic delights and transient interests grows stale and dry upon his spirit!"*

When she is shocked by Kane's amoral attitude and bloodthirsty temper, he replies with one of the most revealing quotes regarding why Kane is the focus of the epic: he is meant to challenge us to think for ourselves and not accept blindly archaic notions about good and evil.

*"And by what sanctity do your cherished values stand pristine from the tide of challenging ideas"*

Even more than Conan the Barbarian, Kane is a Force of Nature, beyond good or evil, right or wrong. He is not driven by an intrinsic sense of justice, but by the need for survival in a cruel world, and by the call of adventure and new experiments to relieve the boredom of immortality.

Karl Edward Wagner may occasionally go overboard in saturating his text with lurid adjectives (bufanoid and rubrous had me diving for a dictionary) but I am looking forward to my next sword and sorcery offering from him.

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## **Brian Hastings says**

Kane is the best "fantasy" character created since Robert E. Howard. I'm not joking or flattering. This is one of the best authors to ride the line between fantasy and horror; using a far superior main character that cannot be classified villain or hero. Kane is strong, intelligent, skillful in both fighting and the dark arts, and an expert at manipulation.

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## **Devyn Kennedy says**

I really wanted to like this book. I mean that. And, honestly, it came close many a time to reeling me into it, only to fall short and leave me wanting.

Allow me to start by telling you what this book did well. Wagner has a talent for setting a scene, one which I can easily relate. His descriptions of people and of the world that they inhabit is enchanting. He knows how to turn a phrase and really pull the reader into the story.

As a writer myself I can understand the love that Wagner has for setting a scene and really trying to make the world as lush and real as possible, even when it is fantastic. He and I, it would seem, both have taken a perverse pleasure in doing such, in feeling as they we have crafted a beautiful description.

In those instances where Wagner sets the stage for his characters he is a master. In those moments I am so fully immersed and impressed that I can't help but feel gleeful that I am reading this book.

However, the real damning problem comes when Wagner has his characters speak.

Speech is a tricky thing. You have to craft speech that is unique to each character, that reveals what is necessary for the reader so that they may understand what is happening, and the dialect must be fitting to whatever period in time you are trying to conjure. Naturally this is a rather tricky skill.

Now, I would not expressly say that Wagner fails out right. However, there are times when the speech feels too plain, too modern in the mouths of the speakers. That is not to say that our characters should speak with "thy's" and "thine's" or whatever other thing, but there must be some cleverness or some sort of alien quality to reel the reader in. At times Wagner falls very short of this, however, I would say that is only a small part of the problem

The other part of the issue, for me, is that when Kane explains something he goes on, droning so that there is little mystery left for the reader to puzzle out. Because of this we know what is going to happen and yet we lose a sense of danger and excitement.

Characters explain the motivations of everyone and comment on why they are doing this. They fill the reader in on detail after detail and, well, it sounds strange.

This, in other words, becomes an issue of telling instead of showing and as we all know, it is always the job of the writer to show rather than tell.

Another issue is that Kane, being an immortal, feels like he lacks motivation to do things. This is a small

issue as he does do things and tries to accomplish things, it more so feels like we lack a why.

Wagner, though skilled in many ways, has the issue of not knowing what to explain and what not to explain. This is common enough when we are unsure of our voice as a writer, yet, though there are some rather powerful passages, there is nothing that pulls this tale through the rough for me.

thesmokingpenandpad.blogspot.com

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### **Jim says**

I enjoy KEW's writing more each time I read it. He quickly sketches the world, diving right into the action & keeping it up throughout. It's amazing how well he describes the fantastic. I can easily envision the horrible swamps & almost feel the flies biting. The characters are really well drawn with impeccable motivations yet there is nothing simplistic about them, especially Kane. What a fantastic character. He's got a line on something new, a very big deal to the immortal. He's lived so long that the hope of anything new is a great draw as is power. I'd say his schemes are Machiavellian, but Kane is the elder & probably gave him lessons.

I'm reading this after the first 3 stories in the Centipede Press edition of Night Winds so I can read all the stories in chronological order. You can find them in my review here:

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

Centipede makes very fine books, sheer pleasure to read. Great illustrations.

If this is your first Kane book, go ahead & read it. Not a bad introduction, although I like the short stories the best. There's not a real need to read them in chronological order.

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### **Joseph says**

More classic 1970s acid gothic sword & sorcery (and maybe in some way the origin of grimdark?).

Spoilers for a book published in 1975: In this one, even more than in Darkness Weaves, Kane is a straight-up villain -- he begins by convincing the ruler of Scolari to sponsor an expedition into a nasty swamp to find a legendary, pre-human city; then, when after much travail (and attacks by bufanoid locals) he finds the city (and the thousand-foot domed building called Bloodstone), he murders the last surviving member of the expedition, before returning with a story of not finding anything interesting.

Shortly thereafter: Breimen and Scolari, two small countries, find themselves at war with each other; both countries' war efforts are being aided against each other by Kane who is, of course, playing them against each other so that he can use the ancient, pre-human powers of Bloodstone (and the army of frog-men inhabiting the aforementioned lost city) to swoop in and take over himself. Oh, and there's also Teres, daughter of Breimen's ruler (and who prefers armor and swordplay to all of that standard princess stuff) to complicate things.

Needless to say, nothing goes to plan for anybody, and Kane finds out that those ancient, pre-human forces may have some plans of their own ...

Not as good as Darkness Weaves -- I believe Bloodstone may have been written first, even though Darkness Weaves was published first -- but still pretty solidly entertaining.

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### **Stephen says**

5.0 to 5.5 stars. This is the first time I have read a "Kane" novel by Karl Edward Wagner and I am kicking myself for not having read him sooner. This is sword and sorcery action at its best and Kane has instantly become one of my favorite characters.

Best way I can describe Kane is to call him Robert E. Howard's Conan if Conan were immortal and completely amoral. This lack of morals (okay let's just call him a bad guy) is largely the result of Kane's immortality. Kane is VERY, VERY OLD and his extended life has left him unable to form lasting attachments to people. Plus, having long experienced all that life has to offer, many times over, has left him bored and jaded. Thus, he spends his time trying to keep himself entertained, which usually involves fighting, starting wars, hatching evil schemes and generally causing a lot of death and dismemberment to those around him.

I found it very cool to be able to follow around the bad guy as the main character and finding yourself both cheering for and against him. In addition to Kane himself, the world he inhabits is rich with history and peopled with diverse races both human and non-human. This world building is superb and could be the source of endless tales. I am certainly going to read the rest of the Kane stories and HIGHLY RECOMMEND this one!!

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### **Arun Divakar says**

The world of this book is one where forces of darkness lie just beyond the visible horizon. At those places where the light doesn't reach, things stir in anticipation for the carnage to come. Monsters lurk there and the magic at play in those realms conjure up things that are best left unsaid. When this tale begins, these forces are known to all and like the legends are not much of a threat to anyone. The kind of tales to say around a fire at night or to scare children with. Just when the people of the world had forgotten all of this and gotten into their petty little squabbles and power struggles, a man appears in their midst. He is an enigma but in a time when brutality determined status in society, he was far more ruthless than those around him with any weapon that he chose to fight with. And so we are introduced to Kane who among other things is an immortal and is pretty good in anything that he does. Kane's ambitions are beyond what the mere mortals think and he unleashes a force that the world had all but forgotten eons ago. Bloodstone is the story of a small but overwhelmed group of people fighting an alien evil and a man whose mind is far beyond their comprehensions.

While anti-heroic characters are all the rage in fantasy now, Kane is not someone who will fit into the hero bracket even on such scales. He is well and truly the antagonist and the chief trouble maker of the tale. Being an immortal, Kane transcends good and bad of the normal human thought process and appears to be a totally nefarious entity when you consider his plans. There are occasional glimpses of love, tenderness and affection in him but they are all brushed away in the grander scheme of things. His is a wretched existence knowing that he would outlive everyone and everything and is doomed to an existence of watching humanity perish

like mayflies against the ravages of time. It is precisely this attached detachment that makes Kane an interesting character study. Having been written in 1970's the story is atmospherically heavier than its focus on character development. The places, the magic and the geography tends to get a preferential treatment when compared to the growth and development of the characters themselves. While Kane is an interesting enough character, Wagner keeps Kane mostly in the darkness under a cloak (literally and figuratively) and only gives us glimpses of him in this book.

Read it as a start to a series that defined heroic fantasy in the early days but if you read and judge it with an eye for fantasy of the present day then it might not be enjoyable. Recommended !

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### **Richard Stacey says**

Dark Crusade still the best Kane novel in my opinion. But- this was a guilty pleasure... Kane doing his thing-going to some kingdom and playing off factions against each other while he manuevers for power and the chance to harness the powers of the alien "bloodstone". It's all a bit hammy somehow but made for an enjoyable read. I don't know why so many say Wagner doesn't handle women well- I thought Teres was a pretty interesting character and didn't see any sexism that would not be normal in the setting of the world of Kane which seems pre-medieval.

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### **Geoff Hyatt says**

I counted 13 exclamation points on a single page and innumerable uses of the words "ravening" and "batrachian" throughout the entire novel. So, basically, this book rules. Death rays! Giant snakes! Human sacrifice! All forms of bladed weaponry causing all manner of sloppy red mayhem! Ancient evils! Alien submarines! Ravening batrachians!

Bloodstone is the first Kane novel KEW wrote, but it was published after Darkness Weaves. Although Darkness Weaves is more accomplished, Bloodstone has a level of breathless pulp insanity that makes it well worth reading if you dig that sort of thing. As always, the immortal and amoral Kane is more a force of nature than a person--any character-based drama comes from those who unwisely make allegiances with him. ("Hey, let's hire a hyper-violent, psychopathic, superhuman genius and give him unchecked power. What could go wrong?") In this case, Teres, a warlord's daughter who can best any man in dueling or drinking (well, any man except for Kane) is a tough and cunning player in a surprisingly twisty plot for a hack 'n' slash actioner (and a refreshing female presence in, as one Goodreads reviewer put it, "The Kingdom of Badassia").

KEW's sword & sorcery novels have recurrent elements; they often revolve around two warring factions, a double-agent working both sides, and a magical wild card thrown in to add complications and compound conflicts. He manages to work these narrative elements into new and entertaining ideations in each novel. Bloodstone is a heavy metal fantasy that makes no apologies, likely to have fans of the genre reading with big, dopey grins. You know who you are.

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## **David says**

Wagner's first Kane novel is a magnificent, sword and sorcery landmark. A Grimdark grand-daddy that must be read by all Fantasy fans. As fresh and relevant today as it was when published in 1975. A timeless classic that has withstood the test of time. This is a book you'll want to buy multiple copies of for yourself and for your friends.

Updated: After I've thought about this book for a few days I wanted to note that this is not the best book for Kane/Wagner virgins to begin reading. Though BLOODSTONE is a masterpiece of Fantasy, it is a flawed novel and not the best place to start reading the Kane stories. Flawed in that the story without a protagonist. Kane here is mostly the villain and works more as a supporting character/antagonist.

For Kane/Wagner noobies, please go to the short story collections or DARK CRUSADE or DARKNESS WEAVES first.

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## **Jim says**

I bought the Centipede Press editions of the Kane stories & am reading them in chronological order. To do so requires reading this book after the first 3 short stories in The Centipede Press edition of Night Winds which varies from the original paperback. See my review of this edition here:

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

for the full Kane chronology.

It's tough to break away from Night Winds, but it's worth it. KEW was a master at weaving together Kane's tangled web. If there is one thing Kane wants it is power. There is one thing he won't stand for & that is being subjugated to any will save for his own. He killed his own brother proving that point to the mad god that created mankind. He was cursed for that act to wander the Earth until the violence he brought to the race brought him down, but he thinks he finds a way around that.

It's sword & sorcery, but with a lot of SF, fantasy, & horror elements blended into a great adventure. KEW's vocabulary had me looking up a few words, not something one would expect in such a book. It wasn't overdone, though. He's quite descriptive & does a great job with the characters & their motivations.

I know KEW mostly as a short story author, but he does just as good a job on this novel. Fantastic as was the art work in this edition. Highly recommended.

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## **John Mayer says**

I cannot claim to be objective in my rating of this book, but I think Wagner was the best author of heroic - or, in the case of Kane, villainous fantasy - of the 20th century. I and members of his family have begun a website (if such things are permitted here) in his honor: [karledwardwagner.org](http://karledwardwagner.org)

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## Lee Broderick says

Fomenting war, seeking to conquer the entire human race as a way of staving off boredom (and hoping that the eventual and inevitable destruction of his projected empire would prove just as fun and distracting); it's hard to think of how one novel could more clearly demarcate Kane from Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd or Robert E. Howard's Conan. Kane is in no way generous, altruistic or noble.

The politics and depiction of a land at war made me wonder if this could have been an influence on the modern master of black fantasy Steven Erikson. Karl Edward Wagner's prose and scope are not quite in that league though. This remains a pulpy, overwritten work even if the quality of his writing has improved over his earliest effort ( *Darkness Weaves* ). How many times must a race be described as batrachian or bufanoid? True, there are only so many synonyms for toad-like but once we know what these creatures look like the adjectives are redundant and don't need repeating every time.

One other aspect of the book drew my attention as a notable departure from the earlier Kane novel - Wagner's depiction of women. Where once they were literally ornaments in his fiction, existing for nothing more than carnal excess, here they are full characters. Teres is one of the more interesting female characters in sword and sorcery fiction - female warriors are perhaps not new but Wagner strikes a different note from others. Neither a brawny man-substitute nor a scantily clad fantasy, she instead is clever and acts in a believable way according to her motivations and pressures, wears practical clothing/armour and carries the scars of battle lightly. In fact, she's arguably the true heroine of the novel. Gerwein, too, although a much smaller character, is a strong woman who plays an utterly sexless role (even if it's as another traditional trope - the sorcerous priestess).

It's fun, fast-paced and not quite the self-parody that sword and sorcery so often threatens to be.

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