



Butcher Bird

Richard Kadrey

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Spyder Lee is a happy man who lives in San Francisco and owns a tattoo shop. One night an angry demon tries to bite his head off before he's saved by a stranger. The demon infected Spyder with something awful - the truth. He can suddenly see the world as it really is: full of angels and demons and monsters and monster-hunters. A world full of black magic and mysteries. These are the Dominions, parallel worlds full of wonder, beauty and horror. The Black Clerks, infinitely old and infinitely powerful beings whose job it is to keep the Dominions in balance, seem to have new interests and a whole new agenda. Dropped into the middle of a conflict between the Black Clerks and other forces he doesn't fully understand, Spyder finds himself looking for a magic book with the blind swordswoman who saved him. Their journey will take them from deserts to lush palaces, to underground caverns, to the heart of Hell itself.

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Butcher Bird Details

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From Reader Review Butcher Bird for online ebook

Leslie says

I had no idea what this book was about when I opened it and I've not read a lot of urban fantasy stuff. I read it simply for the cover. The cover art was beautiful.

My favorite part of stories is the characters. I want to know who they are and I want to hear their voices. I fell in love with Lulu and Spyder within the first two pages. I love the dialogue and mechanics between them. I knew who they were and how close they were from the very first chapter. I loved watching Spyder develop through the course of his journey. In short, I just loved the characters all over the place and I loved the dialogue.

For me, the characters were what made the story and I hate it when authors don't give us a good image of them. Kadrey did that without an overabundance of description and managed in just a few pages what so many other authors take entire books to do. This book also did not leave me hanging with more questions than answers.

I also very much liked the writing style. This book was a fast, fun read and being prone to anxiety attacks, I was very happy that I had very few of them when worrying about the characters. I also tried to predict the importance and fates of some of the characters only to be pleasantly surprised that I was utterly wrong.

The characterization of Lucifer and his relationship to the characters had me all but jumping up and down in my seat, I was so excited.

I loved this book so much that I'm now hunting down Kadrey's other works.

Tim Poston says

Excerpt (note the 2007 date of the book)

. . . They'll spend eternity right here by this river of shit. We don't have that option. If we don't move, Shrike's going to die."

The voices of the wandering souls grew quiet, then came back louder than ever. Lulu said, "Remember how I used say it was all ironic with you named Spyder, that you're so afraid of spiders?"

"We worked that over once or twice."

"Be glad you're blind right now. I shit you not, there's a twelve-foot-tall spider strolling down the shoreline kicking people out of his way like he's Donald fucking Trump."

Crystal says

I adore Richard Kadrey's writing, but this is so very clearly a first novel for him. The book feels like it's trying very hard to be cool or edgy, making it difficult to get through to the point that I just could not finish

it. Also, I absolutely abhor saying it because it's a very, very harsh thing to say, but it's very obvious that Spyder Lee is a Gary Stu. I hate saying that, but that's the way he reads to me.

Honestly, the book was on thin ice with me once Shrike said she was a princess. Not much further past that, Spyder is getting laid. I was done.

There's a reason this book is free. I wish that perhaps Kadrey had kept this idea stowed away for some other time when his writing was stronger because the man is a damn good novelist and that's the only reason why he's getting two stars instead of one--because I know this was his first time and you're bound to not be that great your first time out.

Jason says

4 Stars for fun

Having read the first two Sandman Slim novels I decided to go back and read some older stuff by Kadrey. I was not disappointed. Like the Sandman Slim novels this book centers on demons, angels, monsters, and even Lucifer himself.

Comparing this book to the later Sandman Slim novels shows many of the flaws of this being an early work. Overall, this book plays along main stream avenues, the plot, the conflicts, and the outcome can all be seen from a mile a way. Even the ending has been played out before. This novel is more geared to the young adult crowd than the darker and dirtier Sandman books.

Even with the predictability, this is a fun read that is fast paced, action packed, and at times will make you laugh out loud. I really enjoy novels that take my Christianity heritage and try and take it for a spin.

Spyder is a typical fantasy cardboard cutout of a young man that has been down on his luck, who suddenly finds his life transformed, he grows up, and you can fill in the rest.

Kadrey does a fabulous job at combining action and humor...I loved the following:

""Be glad you're blind right now. I shit you not, there's a twelve-foot-tall spider strolling down the shoreline kicking people out of his way like he's Donald fucking Trump.""

""All losers are romantics. It's what keeps us from blowing our brains out.""

"You know, my father was Baptist and my mother was Lutheran and sometimes I ended up going to both churches on the same Sunday, so I shouldn't be happy to see you," said Spyder. "But I am.""

Butcher Bird is a fun read and would make a great starting point to readers unfamiliar with Richard Kadrey. His Sandman Slim series is among my favorites and "Aloha from Hell" book 3 is my most anticipated novels remaining this year...

Great stuff!!!

Loren says

The book started slowly and the characters' hipster snark grated on me enough that I might have put the book down except that it had come so highly recommended. The pace picked up the deeper in I went, to the point that it was hard to put the book down to go to the publisher's party Friday night.

I'm told that Sandman Slim (Kadrey's newest) is even better.

In Butcher Bird, it was refreshing to read about a truly honest, truly compassionate male character who wears his heart on his sleeve. The other characters in the book (including Lucifer and the protagonist's would-be girlfriend) consider him a holy fool, but Spyder seemed like someone I would love to have as a friend. I wonder if there will be another book of his adventures.

Sarah says

Bitten by an insect-headed demon, Spyder Lee has been given the ability to see worlds beyond - or rather, parallel to - his own. The three Spheres containing life have been separated for their own good, but still intermingle, unaware of each others' presence. Spyder now finds himself one of the few people in his Sphere able to see the inhabitants of all three: angels, demons, monsters, myths, and madmen. He can also see the Black Clerks, dark-coated men who claim to keep the balance in the spheres by preying on the weak, slowly picking them apart piece by piece, creating people sliced and stitched together like macabre dolls.

Another person with the knowledge of the three Spheres is Shrike, a blind swordswoman and dethroned member of royalty, who saves Spyder from being eaten by the insect-demon with a quick slice of her transforming white walking cane. Through a series of events that bring to two of them into awkward partnership, they are commissioned by a cursed woman of high influence to retrieve a book containing all knowledge of how the universe works. To find this book, the two of them - along with a small team of mismatched allies - must go down to the inner sanctum of Hell, Pandemonium, and steal it away from its current owner: Lucifer. They also have to make it back out alive.

This read was fun and fast-paced, not terribly deep but not achingly shallow either. It does have some faults: the language in it is strong and frequent, but if you're over the age of 15 and living in the modern world, this really shouldn't be a problem. Several characters seem to have very similar personalities and the dialogue is at times interchangeable between said individuals. But the action is very nice, the concepts are entertaining, and the plot takes a few nice twist-and-turns along the way. I enjoyed reading this very much and would recommend it to others.

James says

Man, if this is the state of contemporary literature, there is little hope for the written word. Like wading through a prose version of the mediocre dregs of Deviant Art; all edge for the sake of edge. This is the kind of tripe middle aged "social outliers" write in coffee shops in the hopes that some pale beauty will take notice. This is writing without skill and blind to art.

Jeremiah Genest says

There are basically two versions of hell and more importantly Lucifer existent in modern fantasy, and pretty much the western imagination, Dante's and Milton's. Oh sure there are a few other versions out there, like Blake's, but frankly they don't have the staying power of those two models.

Butcher Bird is Milton all the way. Milton as imagined in the hazy postmodern pagan relativistic world we exist in. It's Gaiman's Lucifer and the Lucifer we've seen in so many other fantasy novels. Frankly I was less than impressed. Though to be honest the Hell was geographically related to Dante, somewhat.

Kadrey is also, in the Cory Doctorow tradition, so sure he's cool and that his subcultures are cool that he rather loses sight of the actual storyline. And his author stand in, the main character, gets annoying as a result of that.

All that said, I did find the world interesting and well written about. He successfully does some different things with the magic shadow-world school of contemporary fantasy that was refreshing. I'll read the sequel.

Natalie says

I absolutely adored Sandman Slim, also by Richard Kadrey, and Butcher Bird had an interesting premise, so I figured I couldn't go wrong. I was wrong. This book felt so heavy handed and klunky, the characters... what's like the evil moustached version of a caricature? Like that. I also felt like Kadrey was trying **really, really** hard to prove how cool he is and how cool his hero is. Whereas Stark from Sandman Slim just *was* a bad ass, this hero (anti-hero, really), Spyder, jumped up and down and shook you by your lapels and screamed, "Look! Look! I'm totally bad ass!"

Elizabeth says

Spyder is a tattoo artist with his own shop in San Francisco, living a pretty good life until a demon tries to kill him while he's out having a piss behind his favorite watering hole. He's rescued by a cute blind woman who cuts the demon's head off, but the morning after he's able to see things. All the other creatures living in our world, the demons, angels and monsters that everyone else manages to forget just after seeing he sees and remembers.

He goes to find the blind woman who helped him, hoping that there is a way to go back to normal. She can't help him, but her next client is a powerful magician and the blind woman usually has a partner, so he's invited along. If they can help the magician maybe she will be able to remove his ability to see and remember. Sadly the magician is a crazy old woman who hires them to break into hell and steal a book for her, and if they can't get the book she plans to kill them.

I really liked the characters and the world. This was an awesome, if at times disturbing, read.

Kristen says

Interesting. It was good. And I liked the trip to Hell - it reminded me of Milton. Language doesn't bother me - but if you have misgivings about reading things that might make a sailor blush, you might want to reconsider this one. Fu*# is in ever third sentence (ok, that's an exaggeration, but there were times when it felt like it). I had 2 small problems with this book - first, the smoking is so in your face - I mean, I know people smoke and so do book characters. But every time I put the book down, I felt the urge to sniff my clothes to make sure none of the stench of cigarette smoke rubbed off on me. Second, the way I pictured the blind swordswoman (her name escapes me at the moment) originally, from Kadrey's description, was of this little old lady. So when she and Spider get intimate, well, I had trouble with that mental picture. But I assume that was just me. It was good enough that I am on the hunt for more of Kadrey's stuff. And I love the artwork on the cover - for me, that was well worth the \$15 bucks.

Kiki says

I would give the first half of this book two stars and the second half four, if I could. The beginning is like a summary of a better book, lacking in sufficient world building. I'm guessing that this is because Kadrey came from short stories, and you generally get plot, character or theme in short stories, not all three. His later books are much better in this respect, so he either got a better editor, or just plain got better.

OK. I'm going to be all kinds of judgey about people now, so skip this part if that sort of thing bothers you.

I have a fair amount of tattoos. I would probably have a lot more if shops weren't run by people like Spyder and Lulu. I really hate people like Spyder and Lulu. They are enormous douchebags. I think tattoo fandom, like all fandoms, tends to be very insular and protective of itself. If you don't fit their highly selective idea of who belongs, then get ready to be shunned and/or mocked. At the very least you'll feel pretty uncomfortable.

They are slightly less loathsome in the back half, which is part of why I liked it more. You learn that Spyder and Lulu are assholes because they are WOUNDED by LIFE. Which, sure. Fine. Kadrey maybe should have included some of the character building in the beginning, too.

Like Kadrey's other works, the secondary characters are totally ace. Primo, the Count, the lost bookseller, etc.. Love them. I would read books about any of them. Also, this book has the kind of Lucifer I love. I wish he could be the devil in the Sandman Slim books. I vastly prefer a Lucifer who says, "Fuck you. I was RIGHT," to one who just wants to go home and have Daddy love him again.

I will conclude this review by praising Kadrey for changing his headshot after this book. The one included here is the most ridiculous.

Althea Ann says

I felt like I am part of the target audience for this book. On the other hand, I felt like the book did a bit too

much poking about that: “Hey! This is a book just for people like you! Who like tattoos! And bars! And are into mythology and fantasy! You’re badass and cool! Check it out!” Yeah, ok. Unfortunately, I sort of felt like the ‘cool’ stuff was a veneer laid over a fairly typical and not-that-riveting quest fantasy. Who the characters were didn’t really affect or inform what happened to them.

Spyder, a tattoo artist, is hanging out in a San Francisco rock & roll bar with his lesbian buddy Lulu when he gets attacked by a demon. He’s rescued by a blind ninja swordswoman, (Shrike, the ‘Butcher Bird’ of the title) but after the attack realizes that he can now see the supernatural reality that most humans are unaware of. The streets of SanFran are filled with grotesque and bizarre beings; and even if this sight could be viewed as a gift, it feels more like going crazy.

For reasons that seem somewhat contrived, Spyder, Lulu and Shrike have to band together for a quest through Hell to retrieve a McGuffin, in return for which a probably-evil witch has promised to help them. Along the way, there are some vivid and memorable scenes - I’d say the visuals are the best part of this book. (Some had a very Gaiman-esque feel). However, the plot itself just didn’t have the tension I felt it ought to have had.

I did enjoy the book – I just didn’t feel like it lived up to its full potential. I believe this was the author’s first novel; I’d definitely be willing to try another by him.

Thomas says

I've had my fill of urban fantasy. It's as played out as a Scarface t-shirt.

Really, I should only be mad at myself. I read about this book on the movie news website CHUD, and they never reviews books. It was five stars all the way, and promised an exciting new voice. So I picked it up in the bookstore, and there was a blurb from William Gibson, telling me: if you like Juxtapoz, you'll love Butcher Bird!

The cover art gave me misgivings. It's very well painted, but it had me thinking "This is that guy who trys to screw your girlfriend." I felt like I was being marketed to, But I bought it anyway, itching for that *Perdido Street Station* vibe.

The whole time I was reading this I wanted to scream "Dude, I already read Vertigo comics!" And What makes it all so ghastly; returning to those same secret alley markets, and fanciful zeppelins, and Miltonesque Hellsapes, is how cool this book keeps assuring you it is. If you get a chance, check out the author's photo. Man, ease up a little! Or go all the way and write "This ain't yer Daddy's Urban Fantasy!" over the picture. (Oh crap- he's probably a really nice guy)

Now I feel like a jerk for coming down so hard on this book. Honestly, I did have affection for the characters, and there were some moving moments... But that guy from the cover (Spyder) would *definitely* try to screw your girlfriend.

It was just way too familiar, and the addition of tattoo culture did nothing to enrich the *urban fantasy* settings.

Osiris says

Te maldigo, ¡oh Richard Kadrey!, por no hacer una continuación.

Pero bueno, la reseña, se trata de Spyder, un tatuador quien un día descubre que hay una esfera de realidad entrelazada con nuestro universo donde existen demonios y ángeles y justo cuando descubre eso un demonio intenta comerselo, pero justo cuando va a pasaar eso una mujer ciega que pelea con una espada lo salva, pero después resulta que la mujer ciega (Shrike, aka The Butcher Bird), es una asesina y le pide a Spyder que lo acompañe en una misión (¿por qué no?) y de empiezan un viaje hacia el infierno para obtener un libro que tiene los nombres reales de todo en el universo.

El libro es, como mi párrafo anterior, una serie de ideas/escenas una tras otra sin darte mucho tiempo de pensar lo que está sucediendo, y en varios casos sin dar mucho pié a explicar bien que sucede, y es que ese es el gran fallo, para el final todo va tan frenético que todo se termina por resolver en un par de páginas.

Algunos personajes son excelentes, como por ejemplo Lucifer, algunos son molestos, como Spyder, y otros son medianamente interesantes, como Shrike.

Al final de cuentas un libro, como se diría en las películas, dominguero, acción, one liners que te hacen reir, algo de pretención, divertido sin más ni más, aunque eso si, me quedé con ganas de más, es una lástima que desde que publicó este nunca hizo la continuación, en fin.
