



The Chart of Tomorrows

Chris Willrich

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The poet Persimmon Gaunt and the thief Imago Bone had sought only to retire from adventuring and start a family, but they never reckoned on their baby becoming the chosen vessel of the mystical energies of a distant Eastern land. With their son Innocence hunted by various factions hoping to use him as a tool, they kept him safe at the cost of trapping him in a pocket dimension of accelerated time.

Now free, the thirteen-year-old Innocence has rejected his parents and his "destiny" and has made dangerous friends in a barbaric Western land of dragon-prowed ships and rugged fjords. Desperately, Gaunt and Bone seek to track him down, along with their companion Snow Pine and her daughter A-Girl-Is-A-Joy, who was once trapped with Innocence too.

But as the nomadic Karvaks and their war-balloons strike west, and a troll-king spins his webs, and Joy is herself chosen by the spirit of the very land Innocence has fled to, Gaunt and Bone find themselves at the heart of a vast struggle -- and their own son is emerging from that conflict as a force of evil. To save him and everything they know, they turn to a dangerous magical book, *The Chart of Tomorrows*, that reveals pathways through time. Upon the treacherous seas of history, Gaunt and Bone must face the darkness in each other's pasts, in order to rescue their future.

The Chart of Tomorrows Details

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From Reader Review The Chart of Tomorrows for online ebook

scarlettraces says

(3.5)

Fantasy Literature says

3 stars from Marion: <http://www.fantasyliterature.com/reviews/the-chart-of-tomorrows-by-chris-willrich/>

John says

Long long long, and a lot of the goings on seemed to be less about advancing the plot and more about the author finding new combinations in which to place members of the ensemble cast as mishaps and disasters and missions spin all and sundry in different directions. Still, the story is just chock full of wonderful characters, feats of casual derring-do, magical creatures (most, here, based on Norse antecedents), and escalating stakes. Enjoyed it immensely.

Notable lines:

"It takes care and attention to remain old at heart."

"There will be stormy seas. Barbarian women. Trolls. Fun!" (Cf: "The world was mad and had trolls, balloons, and sons.")

"Keep asking yourself, Is this worse than death?" Bone said. "I find that question clarifying."

Lee Ann says

Let me start by explaining that I haven't read any of the Gaunt and Bone novels that precede this one. But I was lucky enough to get my hands on an Advanced Reading Copy of The Chart of Tomorrows. I attended Canisius College, and one of our recent alumni was hired in the last year or so as a publicist for Pyr Books, the publishing company behind Chris Willrich's novels. For our capstone course one day, our professor invited the alum to come to our class and talk about what it's like to be a publicist. The alum brought several huge boxes full of ARCs, which he let us choose from at the end of class. The Chart of Tomorrows caught my eye because I've been a huge fantasy fan for my entire reading life. There were two copies of the ARC in the box, so I snatched one up as soon as he told us we could take our pick. In fact, aside from the mystery novel that the alum handed out to every one of us (as there were some 100+ leftover ARCs at Pyr's headquarters), The Chart of Tomorrows was the only ARC that I took.

And I am so. Glad. I did.

I didn't realize it was part of a series until I finally picked it up to read. When I did realize that, I hesitated to read and review it; my review would be skewed, because I wasn't familiar with the other books, which might affect my reading of this one. And I certainly didn't have time, before the book's release in July, to read the other Gaunt and Bone novels, nor did I have the money to buy them. But, I reasoned, I was privileged enough to get an ARC, so I figured I would push through it so that the ARC would not go to waste. After all, as a Creative Writing major, I was taught just how important ARCs can be for building a readership. So if my review can potentially convince someone else to pick up the book, then, danggit, I will do what I could to help a fellow writer!

At first, I did have difficulty with all the characters and places, but the "glossary" in the front of the book did help out a lot there. I assume falling into the novel would be easier for fans of the previous books, but I spent a lot of time in the first several chapters flipping to the front pages of the book trying to remember who I was reading about. This is also a story in which time travel is very much present, and, as a matter of personal taste, time travel still baffles me, and I did have difficulty sometimes following the actual timeline. I almost gave the book only four stars because of it.

But then, in the final chapters, Willrich surprised me.

With shows out like Game of Thrones and Outlander, issues of diversity and sexism in genre fiction are rampant. There are excuses like, "Sexism and rape are realistic, it would be UNrealistic to exclude them" (but dragons are completely unrealistic, so??), and "This is a fantasy world based on medieval Western Europe, of course there are no people of color!" (but... there were people of color in medieval Europe...???) Like, as soon as boats were invented...????) This, in my opinion, is just lazy writing on the authors' parts, and of course readers will understandably jump to defend their favorites. But if you ask me, there's no excuse, especially in a FANTASTICAL SETTING WITH MAGIC AND ZOMBIES AND DRAGONS (*sigh*), not to include diverse characters, or, you know, not to get a little creative with your setting and break free of the bonds of the place and time in history upon which you base your world. Writers can also choose NOT to include rape scenes, but still make sexism/sexual assault present (see: Mad Max: Fury Road), because sometimes that issue needs to be examined (but respectfully, and not as a shock factor).

All that aside, my point is that Willrich is NOT one of those "lazy writers."

He has created a universe in which many major real-world cultures (i.e. African, Nordic, Middle Eastern, Indian, and Chinese) bear influence. And he has NOT made these cultures the "token minorities" based on ridiculous stereotypes. Gaunt and Bone are, arguably, the "stars" of the novel, but the other characters, such as Joy, Katta (who is blind, but still a hero, and who also happens to be gay), Walking Stick, Haytham ibn Zakwan, Eshe, and even the AGENDER character Northwing (!!! I was so excited when Northwing got a POV chapter !!!) play major roles in the plot, and many of them get the chance to have the story told from their point of view. In fact, the minor characters get just as much "screentime" as Gaunt and Bone, perhaps even more. And they are all complex. They all have voices. They all have opinions. They all have agency. Even the female characters do, and unless I miscounted, I believe the women might outnumber the men, or at least come close to doing so. (Also, this book most certainly passes the Bechdel test, for those who are wondering.) And it's so wonderful. Through them, particularly in this novel, and particularly in the final scenes of the book, Willrich tackles the ever-present issues of racism and sexism, and forces the reader (and the more bigoted characters) to try and look at the "Other," not as a stereotypical entity, but as individual human beings. And it's so refreshing, to have so many cultures influence one fantasy story; I was growing quite tired of medieval Europe-inspired settings.

I've developed so much love for Willrich's characters. Malin is perhaps my most favorite, as I relate very well to her, but the dynamic between her and the changeling sisters fascinated me. Inga and Rubblewreck are also favorites of mine (I've still got reservations about Alfhild, but we'll see about her). Steelfox is amazingly complex, and I even loved her father, who was only present in a few scenes but who seemed to get that women are just as capable as men. Nan and Freidar were adorable. Skrymir surprised me; I loved him in the end. I can't wait to learn more about Cairn too.

Willrich is, of course, also a gifted wordsmith. His prose and dialogue certainly pack a punch. There were many moments where I laughed out loud, too.

And the little plot twist at the end had me grinning, and eager to read future Gaunt and Bone novels.

The Chart of Tomorrows has officially inspired me to save up the money to purchase the previous novels in the Gaunt and Bone series. I would highly recommend this series for any sword-and-sorcery fan looking for a fresh spin that challenges the fantasy genre's traditions.

Nathan says

Fantasy Review Barn

I am not sure if the Gaunt and Bone series, now on book three, is literary fantasy or just cleverly designed to look like it is. Personally I enjoyed the complete perspective changes used when switching point of view such as Mad Katta's thoughts only seen through a journal while other characters are seen in a more traditional third person view. Flashbacks coming in story form takes away some of the awkwardness simply by realizing that if it is going to stand out then it is better that it is meant to. And the prose started off strong and has not slacked.

And while I have been mesmerized by a unique style I have also just enjoyed my reading experience thus far. Because I have characters to root for, not because they are wonderful humans but because even in this land of strange and noteworthy most of them have very a very human feel. Wants, desires, loyalties are something universal, as are lusts, irrational hatreds, and greed. All things that make even the villains worth reading about (though villain is hard word to justify seeing how in Chart of Tomorrows several of the 'heroes' end up on opposite sides of the brewing fight).

By suggesting that the Gaunt and Bone series could be literary in nature it would not be a stretch if one were to guess the series borders on the 'weird' side; new weird seems to attract authors with the ability to turn a phrase and track insane little details. Chart of Tomorrows doesn't disappoint on that end. It continues with a unique time moving trick that allows some characters to grow dramatically between books while others have only seen a year or two go by (tracking time is not my strong point). It has trolls, people switched with trolls at birth, and a heart hidden away from a body. And if you have stuck with the series you already know about Bone's unique condition, the hidden world in a scroll (used to great effect this time around), and the magic carpet with major identity issues.

Here is the thing though. Despite the fact that the page count keeps getting inflated, book by book, I am not all that positive that somewhere along the line the author didn't pull a fast one on me. The dense language and nonlinear plotting doesn't make the series an easy read but I think I am a fairly intelligent reader and somewhere along the way I realized I wasn't that sure what the hell is going on. Two children we have

watched grow became the center of something earth shaking. Why was their path inevitable? I also have no idea what a few of the characters added outside of lengthy passages that left me cold. Too many characters played small parts without really seeming important enough to warrant their page time; it is the author's story to tell but I missed the shorter and (slightly) more focused style of the first book.

If I could level one more small complaint it feels like we got a bit heavy handed with the anachronistic social issues. I am not, and I want this clear, complaining that the book featured societies accepting of things like gender fluidity. I applaud that a character can choose to be genderless without the book dissolving into medieval persecution. But the way it is handled, particularly in dialog as people not familiar with the concept come to terms with it, feel very twenty first century. I felt the that supporting text explaining things took away from the impact that just letting the character clearly be seen could have had.

Still, there is something about the whimsical nature that Willrich has laced this series with and that something has held from book one to three. While the weird vibe allows for a world where it seems anything can happen nothing ever feels like there isn't an explanation for it somewhere. Not, mind you, an explanation the author feels he has to tell the reader each and every time. Rather there is a feeling that there are some rules this strange and wonderful world lives by; be it genie powered balloons or time shifting or carpets with homicidal tendencies.

Is this the final book in the series? I honestly don't know though it reads like it could be. If so I will consider the series quite a success. It did something different, borrowed from earth and various cultures without ever converting to stereotypes or clichés. It mixed and matched cultures, creatures, and ideas and came out completely unique. While overall I don't feel the final book was the best representative of the series it did end with a lot of excitement. And to bring things full circle I think literary fantasy is a perfectly apt description of this mostly indescribable series.

3 Stars

Copy for review provided by publisher.

Clay Kallam says

Another long-running series is by Chris Willrich, and the latest installment of the Gaunt and Bone novels, "The Chart of Tomorrows" (Pyr, \$18, 540 pages), is unfortunately a bit of a disappointment. The complex plot devolves into confusion and the revival of characters who appear to be dead, and the charm and wit that elevated the first two books gets lost in a too-long page count.

The characters are still interesting, and the mix of Chinese philosophy and proxies for various medieval cultures (Mongols, Vikings, etc.) move things along, but in the end it seems like Willrich was just trying to figure out a way to finish the book – and apparently finish the series, though the door has not been closed.

As always, it's easier to put together a great setup than it is to devise a fully satisfying payoff, and that's exactly what happened to Willrich in "The Chart of Tomorrows."
