



Whiskey and Water

Elizabeth Bear

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Several years ago, Matthew the Magician ended an age-old war. It only cost him everything-and everyone-he knew and loved. Turning against his mentor, Jane Andraste, in the realm of Faerie left him physically crippled and his power shattered.

But Matthew remains the protector of New York City. So when he finds a young woman brutally murdered by a Fae creature, he must bring her killer to justice before Jane uses the crime to justify more war-and before he confronts an even larger threat in the greatest Adversary of all...

Whiskey and Water Details

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From Reader Review Whiskey and Water for online ebook

Lisa says

3.5 stars. The follow up to Blood and Iron was satisfying in some ways, and frustrating in others. The worldbuilding pays off as we find out why Matthew is such a curmudgeon and where his power comes from. We get to see why he, and not Jane Andraste, is the guardian of New York City. However, it also introduces several new characters that completely change the game. . . and we're ultimately left hanging, because the next two books in the series are prequels. I appreciate authors who resist the urge to write a neverending series for the money. But the world she created is so rich that I felt another book was needed to finish the story. I haven't yet gotten my hands on the prequels as they're not available in Kindle format, but I will update this review if they change my mind.

Brendan says

I gave up after getting about five percent in, which is a shame, since I enjoyed the first book in the series. The problem is that this book is completely lost in its own fiction, jumping through dozens of inscrutable persons and places without pausing to establish a narrative for any of them. I tried to enjoy it for months without success.

Emily says

The sequel to Bear's Blood and Iron-- a book that was occasionally a little like watching two strangers play three-dimensional chess. Fascinating, but not always easy to understand, or to invest with emotional meaning. This book is more like when you've been at the chess tournament for a while, have begun to absorb the rules, and have chatted with both players in between games. Much easier to understand, both intellectually and emotionally.

But it's still three-dimensional chess. We've got Hell, with Lucifer and other various devils; the Prometheans, who want to keep the power of Faerie bound; Matthew, ex-Promethean, a wounded man of divided loyalties; Faerie, and its queen; Heaven, and the angel Michael; oh, and Christopher Marlowe, Elizabethan playwright (late of Prometheus, Faerie, and Hell). And a loose band of humans who could've almost come straight from a Charles DeLint novel. All these groups and people have their own allegiances and motives, personal, political, and metaphysical.

The most interesting thing about this novel, to me, is that it has a number of things that ordinarily would push all my buttons and make me go squee. Like sexy devils! And sexy angels! And sexy Kit Marlowe! And cute gothy people! And then-- it turns around and stays too honest and dark and brutal to actually make me go squee. It's not even the turned-up melodrama of everybody dying beautiful tragic deaths; it's something quieter than that, and harsher in its own way. But this is so much a book about stories and lies (all stories are true, we hear again and again; but all stories are lies almost by definition; the most powerful magic is the magic of deception, which is the same thing as the power to control one's own stories...). And so the book's delicate balance between tragic/gorgeous/seductive and brutal is Just. Perfect. In fact, it rather exactly mirrors what one of the characters goes through...

It's not a book without flaws. In particular, it's so dense that I couldn't read it quickly, but it also requires so much memory that I couldn't read it slowly without losing track of my threads. Bear doesn't just require you to put two and two together; she requires you to put two and x together, where x is a detail you hopefully remember from a hundred pages back. So there were plot developments where I had to say, "Okay, I buy it, if you say so." But it would be silly of me to blame the book for being too smart for me, wouldn't it?

Tiffany Fox says

I made the mistake of coming into this series any Book 2, without reading Book 1, so struggled to understand the characters' motives and importance. And there are a *lot* of characters, all of whom are playing a deep game with very little background or explanation given. Plot misunderstandings aside, I enjoyed a lot of the novel but would strongly recommend starting the series at the start!

Brownbetty says

Blood and Iron & Whiskey and Water form a duology by Elizabeth Bear. I intended to review the first one because it made me kick my feet in delight but couldn't quite manage it; it's difficult to review a book one really enjoys because one wants to convey the enjoyment of the book, but of course only the book could do that.

Interestingly, my first thought upon reading *Blood and Water* was, "This reminds of a lot of bad books, only good!" Bear's books deal with Faerie, a subject that seems to hold an inexorable fascination for numerous authors, a small number of whom have actual talent. This is a good chunk of the mythology and folklore of much of the English speaking world, so naturally it exercises quite a draw. I consider the topic to have been covered to my satisfaction by Emma Bull, and now Elizabeth Bear.

Generally, one of the problems I encounter with books dealing with Faerie is that the mundane world is drawn too mundane. I live here, and I happen to know it's pretty quirky: so does Bear. I had never previously considered how the Fae would react to a body-modding otherkin. If you wish to know the answer to this important question, it is contained within her books. Her Faerie is just as solidly real as the mundane world, although not immutable, and only deceptively familiar.

Bear's Faerie doesn't blunt the nuance of real life; instead it spins binary into nuance, and gently and elegantly bends stereotype into corkscrews. Gender is bent, when it is not flipped, religion is refracted, history is played backward at 45rpm, and true love is unhelpful. Neil Gaiman wishes he wrote this book. If I had to sum it up in a sentence, that sentence would be a quote from the book: "All stories are true." Bear means quite a bit by this.

Having read this book, I forced my mother to read it so that she might tell me what she thought of it: she disliked it. She complained to me that there was no one solid relationship that was not in some way damaged or untouched by ambition and betrayal. I, on the other hand, liked the fact that there was no one villain unredeemed by affection, or some form of altruism. Although Bear is working with archetypes, there are no two-dimensional characters.

Lena Sweeten says

Beautiful Prose

This is one of the most beautifully written novels I've read in years. Like Ray Bradbury, I think Elizabeth Bear also loves to be drunk on words. But although it was the sheer pleasure of reading her lush descriptions, it was the thrall of a great story that kept me reading through to the end. A fantastic gallery of characters, a creative play on dozens of myths and legends, this is a book for anyone who wants to recapture the wonder of fantasy in the best sense of the genre.

Robert Beveridge says

Elizabeth Bear, **Whiskey and Water** (Roc, 2007)

The war between Faerie and the Prometheans ended in an uneasy truce when Matthew Szczegielniak, the man with the most unpronounceably heroic name in all of fantasy literature (yes, that does include Moorcock's improbably-named characters), turned coat and destroyed the Prometheans' world-breaching bridge. That was seven years ago. (If you missed it, you can read about it in *Blood and Iron*, the first tale in this duology, which is in itself, the first half of a two-part series on the Prometheans, with the second half comprised of *Ink and Steel* and *Hell and Earth*.) Needless to say, the powers that be, the powers that aren't but want to be, and a handful of the powers who were and are no more have all been working behind the scenes during this peace, and everything's about to come to a crux at the beginning of *Whiskey and Water*.

The novel opens with Matthew, protector of New York in name only these days, finding himself at the scene of a murder that has the air of faerie about it. Jane Andraste, Matthew's old boss, has been trying to rebuild her power base since the war, and sees the murder as an opportunity to declare open war on faerie again. But Faerie and the Prometheans have never been the only pieces on the board, and that is even more true here. Matthew is a rogue faction himself, with allies everywhere but not enough power to form them into a solid alliance. Faerie itself is only loosely held together, with the Cat Anna, the Unseelie queen, plotting to overtake the Faerie throne just as Harry, daughter of the current queen, does the same. And Lucifer, the ruler of Hell, switches alliances as often as humans change their underwear.

Whiskey and Water features an even more labyrinthine plot than *Blood and Iron* did, and thus can be a lot more confusing if you're not paying close enough attention. It also means that the book has more opportunities to get tangled up in itself, and this does occur on occasion; there are places you're simply bound to have to go back and re-read a couple of pages, because there's more going on here than there is in any decent history of, say, the Watergate scandal (and the really good books about Watergate are tricked out with lists of *dramatis personae*, time lines, summaries, and that sort of thing, while here you're on your own). Because of this, the book does tend to bog down, even in places where the pace should be lightning-fast, but that's a minor quibble most of the time; this is a wonderfully ambitious novel, and on the whole, it succeeds. Recommended. *** 1/2

Kerry says

I might sound from this review that I didn't like Whiskey and Water. That's not true. I loved this book; maybe not quite as much as the preceding volume, Blood and Iron, but still lots.

But here's the thing. Elizabeth Bear doesn't write a simple, straightforward tale where event A leads to event B which leads to event C and so on. Instead, she takes you on a magical, lyrical, strange and fantastic trip into a complicated and convoluted world where nothing is ever exactly as it seems and the author rarely lets you have anything for free.

The writing is beautiful - I think of it as poetry in prose - but I found myself never 100% sure what was going on. All the same, I didn't particularly care. These books are about the journey more than they are about the destination. It may also be that since I have never really "got" poetry (I have come to suspect my brain doesn't work that way), I have the same problem here. Or is poetry also about the words and the journey rather than A goes to B goes to C? It's not something I have a lot of experience with.

The words Bear uses and the ways she puts them together are beautiful. In the end I only wrote down one quote from the book, but she weaves words into beautiful images. I am not a visual reader, I gather the feeling of a book from the words themselves and these words are beautiful. As an example, this is a sentence that really spoke to me. The imagery and the way the words are put together are lovely.

The loneliness was an ache in her breast, a hollowness like a scooped-out heart, a gasping stillness that echoed when she listened into it.

So while I have to admit that I didn't understand everything in this book and I'm kind of vague on a lot of character motivation or the exact progression of the plot, I found reading it a delight. I know where the characters are at the end of the book compared to where they were at the beginning and I want to read more about them. You kind of pick up the story by osmosis rather than following a clear plotline.

Maybe the bottom line is that Bear is very smart and I'm kind of dumb. I don't care. These books are beautiful and I'm going to keep reading them. (Although, if anyone wants to send me a quick synopsis to help me with the plotline, I wouldn't complain. I'm also very interested to read some of Bear's science fiction, to see how she writes that and if it is similar or different to her so lyrical fantasy.)

I've already pre-ordered the next two Promethean Age books, these two set back in the sixteenth century, and I'm looking forward to getting to read them.

Whiskey and Water
Novels of the Promethean Age, Book 2
Elizabeth Bear
9/10

Eric Mesa says

This book was hard to read. I enjoyed it, but it was definitely hard. Goodreads says it's the second book of this series and it probably is (the info is populated by GR people who volunteer to be librarians and is sometimes wrong). So I'm sure part of my difficulties come from jumping in past the initial narrative. Ms Bear has created a semi-alternative world that is complex and full of complex characters. This realism to the characters is what drew me in despite how much I had to work. Ms Bear also did a great job at making this an acceptable entry point into the series as she explained characters' relationships to each other whenever they were introduced.

What made it hardest was the fact that it presupposed a LOT of fantasy knowledge. If I hadn't read a few books from fantasy bundles recently introducing me to things like The Summer Court, The Unseelie, and Kelpies I would have been utterly lost. If you are a huge fantasy geek, you will probably love this book.

Second hardest was the fact that everyone had at least two names or identities. The Kelpie was also known as Whiskey and Usebaugh (not spelt correctly) and the Queen of the Unseelie was known as Aine or The Cat Anna.

So what was this actually about? I'm not 100% sure. In addition to everyone having two names, everyone also had at least one if not two ulterior motives. Do you like the intrigue and back-stabbing of A Song of Ice and Fire? That's got nothing on this book. I will say that, somewhat realistically, there's a lot of churn for what seems like very little gain. Which - depending on whether you're a journey or destination type of reader - might be fun or frustrating. I used to be exclusively the latter and now I've moved towards the middle.

Just as time travel can be a real mind screw to get your head around, this book employs a similar theme to Bill Willingham's Fables, Vol. 1: Legends in Exile - the stories people tell about mythology affect things. In the most non-spoilery example, there are 3 different characters of the Christian Devil to represent different stories about him. There's Lucifer, Satan, and one who goes by Christian. I think one is from the Bible, one is from Milton, and one is from Chaucer.

I think this review probably seems a lot more negative than I intend it to be. I'm more just trying to explain why I didn't quite get it - why I read and read and am not sure exactly what happened. I've been reading constantly since I was a kid - sometimes reading adult fare as a kid and sometimes reading YA as an adult and there are very few books (outside of time travel) that have ever left me feeling so befuddled. And yet, I enjoyed all the characters - they have pathos and real motivations for their actions. They're earnest, mean, tricky, petty, megalomaniacal, horny - they're "real" human beings And that's great. I'll read more of Ms Bear's work and I might even read more of this series.

I guess in the end, this review is a great meta example of how I felt while reading.

Lawrence says

I just couldn't get through this one. This (obviously) follows Blood and Iron, but with different characters driving the story, and too many characters driving it. I got about halfway through this with no clearer idea of what is happening than when I started it. Some of the characters are interesting, and have interesting struggles, but none are compelling.

Ben Babcock says

Significantly better than the first book in this series, *Whiskey and Water* picks up the loose ends from Blood and Iron and sustains them through half the book, building to a much more satisfying climax consisting of multiple battles and tense magical standoffs. My gripe: why did I have to wait for book 2 for all that heavy worldbuilding to pay off?!

As with its predecessor, *Whiskey and Water* suffers from a surfeit of mythology and mythological characters, particularly when it comes to Devils. The complex, and apparently ineffable, rules of magic and Fae once again serve as the cornerstone for the major plots. This time around, I simply gave up trying to make sense of the magical guidelines and tried to enjoy the *story*. It worked. Sort of.

Several familiar characters return in this sequel, including Matthew Szczegielniak, Jane Andraste, Carel the Merlin, Morgan le Fey, Elaine (now Queen of the Daoine Sidhe), and the eponymous Kelpie, Whiskey. Joining them are some new faces: Kit Marlowe (the one and only); Devils Lucifer, Satan, and Christian (an unconvincing antagonist at best); archangel Michael; and several mortals who may or may not die over the course of the book. And again, it's difficult to tell who the "good guys" are.

Nominally, Matthew and his cohorts are supposed to be the protagonists. Jane Andraste serves as an antagonist, for her attempts to rebuild the Promethean Club may result in another war with Faerie. Meanwhile, Lucifer has his own agenda, as does the charming Christian, who poses as an apprentice to Jane. I found this aspect of the plot entirely unfulfilling. I never understood Christian's motivations--sheer malevolence, or was he working toward a greater plan?

There were few characters I could just sit back and enjoy. Donall Smith was one, because he seemed like a genuinely honest and good person. Like the other mortal characters, he suddenly becomes involved in an epic, centuries-old conflict. Unlike the other mortals, however, Donall actually has the guts to stand and fight. Aside from him, the best parts of *Whiskey and Water* happened around the climax of the book, when every petty conflict comes to a head simultaneously.

The rules that govern the Promethean Age seem too mutable. I'll again compare this series to the *Dresden Files*, by Jim Butcher. The Dresdenverse has a complex set of rules, but I seldom feel burdened or confused by them. However, that may be due to the excellent writing and characterization in the *Dresden Files* books. The Promethean Age series' complex ruleset may be its single worst feature, but it's the characters and conflicts upon which the success of these books rests. And for me at least, there's just *too much magic*, too many beings who are, at least from a human's very limited perspective, apparently omnipotent.

The preponderance of powerful beings presents a problem: when unstoppable force meets immovable object, something's got to give. When Dragon faces off against Prometheans, when Hell and Heaven duel, and when one Fae queen plots against the other, the battlefield quickly gets complicated, and the plot can become hard to follow. Unfortunately, Elizabeth Bear's problem is that she tries to do too much and is forced to try to balance too many characters and too many conflicts. As a result, while I enjoyed the book--particularly the ending--I'm still somewhat confused, and not entirely certain of exactly who won or even for whom I should have cheered. While I'm all for moral ambiguity, I like to at least have a hero.

Megan Baxter says

We're back in a New York, but one that, like the rest of the world, has become very aware of the existence of the Fae only a shadow away. (A huge dragon and magician war will do that.) Most of those who have had contact with them bear scars and reminders. But there are those whose scars are other and aspire to Fae-given scars as a source of power rather than of pain.

Note: The rest of this review has been withheld due to the changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision [here](#).

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at Smorgasbook

Rebecca says

Most of my previous comments on Bear's writing continue to hold here--it's gorgeous and inventive, and extremely understated in a way that's sometimes rewarding and sometimes really frustrating. This book nicely ties up a lot of the strings left dangling in *Blood and Iron* (and would make little sense if you had not read the first book).

I very much loved the portrayal of the Morningstar, and the masquerade ball in hell is a brilliant sequence. Matthew had never quite worked for me as a character in the previous book, and here he makes a lot more sense (although I still do not fully understand his relationship with New York). The archmage Jane, on the other hand, continues to feel more like a plot device. I wish Bear had been a little more evenhanded with the Prometheans--I feel like she believes her argument for them has been made, yet she continually undercuts it in ways that I feel don't fully make sense. I never really understood how their magic worked, or why it would be such a terrible thing for humanity if they had won their war. Really, to some extent, it feels like the bad guys won--the Prometheans' ends did not perhaps justify their means, but the fae's ends and means are both unjustifiable.

The revelations about Nuala's true identity are the kind that make you reevaluate the entire series in a startling way. I'm not sure it all actually works, though, in retrospect.

But the characters are really engaging, from broken Jewels (although I still think she could have been combined with Lily) to Whiskey the Kelpie (who I would have liked to see even more of). The labyrinthine plot comes to a surprisingly satisfying conclusion--I'd been restless at the end of the first book, but this closed things off in a way that I rather liked.

Milady133 says

I liked the book, but it's a difficult reading and there are many OCR errors in the electronic version. First of all, I'm not a native English speaker, so part of my struggles with this book may come from that side. I usually don't have any problems reading in English, but some characters in this book use a lot of old style language such as "thee", "thy" and so, I was able to understand these parts, but it's made the reading more difficult, more so as there are a lot of OCR errors, not as much as to make the book unreadable, but it should have been proofreaded more thoroughly before publishing it.

So I have been doubting if giving a two or a three stars review, because I have really liked the story, but finally I have decided to make it a two stars review. There are some things that I didn't like or found difficult in the story that others may find that it's exactly what they liked more, so if someone thinks the blurb is interesting, he/she should at least give it a try.

I found the story confusing because there are lot of characters in the story, some have similar names, and they are presented just as they intervened in the plot, without giving a background or a hint in their motives, those are revealed as the plot develops. Usually that's something that can make the book more attractive, at least for me, but in this case it hasn't worked.

The book has a lot of mythological references to Scottish, Irish and British folklore about Fae world, and cultural references to classic English poets. That's other thing that made it difficult for me, I knew some of the references because I have read other books where I have learned this context, kind of, but sometimes I felt that I was missing something in the dialogues because I lacked some knowledge in the historical or popular background of the character.

I don't know if it would have been easier to read this book if I had read the first book in the series before. I got the book in the Storybundle website, it came with a pack of other books, and when I read other reviews in here they said the books could be read independently. The story seems to be independent, there are references to things that may have taken part in the first book, but I don't think that you must read the first book to read this second one in the series. But maybe in the first book some of the characters are presented and part of my difficulties could have been avoided if I had read the books in order.

I don't think I'm going to continue reading the series, I have too many books in my TBR pile, and I don't think these books are going to be translated and published in Spanish. I could benefit from a good Spanish translation with lots of footnotes, but these books aren't popular enough to get a translation, and even if some Spanish publisher decided it, then they would need a GOOD translation, which seems impossible with some publishers.

Denise says

As much as I loved Blood and Iron, this sequel outshines the first book by far. Seven years after the war, Elaine rules as Queen of the Daoine Sidhe, Matthew has broken his former mentor and continues to protect New York on his own, Jane Andraste is rebuilding her army and all hell is about to break loose again in Faerie, Hell and on Earth alike. Bear's stunning, intricate worldbuilding accompanied by beautiful writing and the masterful way in which she juggles her myriad fascinating characters and compelling story threads makes this wonderful fantasy novel a masterpiece.
