



The Last Hot Time

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When Danny Holman leaves the cornfields of Iowa for the bright lights of Chicago, he expects his life to change. He just can't guess how much and how fast. A violent incident on the road brings Danny the favor of a man known only as Mr. Patrise, who gives Danny a job, a home, and a new identity.

The City is a different world from the one Danny--now called Doc--knew, and literally so. Long-vanished powers have returned, and more is going on in the streets than nightlife and street warfare. Power is gathering: a power rooted in terror, madness, and death. To fight it will require Doc to face what he fears most. To defeat it will take something more than courage.

The Last Hot Time Details

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From Reader Review The Last Hot Time for online ebook

Joe says

The Last Hot Time is a strange pastiche of subgenres and tropes. And it's one that mostly works.

Taking place in a post apocalyptic era following the return of Elfland, a paramedic only going by "Doc" Hallownight, or "Hallow" comes by chance upon an injured elflord named Cloudbuilder and his human friend Mr. Patrise, who hires Doc as their resident physician.

I'll sum up the worldbuilding for you. It's well done but takes place throughout the novel. Elves are superpowerful aliens. They last visited our world at the dawn of our species and when they return are shocked we have evolved so quickly. They annihilate almost everything. People live simply as they did in various previous decades. Television is banned. Chicago is mostly gutted/destroyed but a portion of it remains. Elves like to use our world as a battle ground. Being immortal in their world but not in ours has precipitated blood feuds that converge in Chicago, which is filled to the brim with cultural remnants resembling decades from the 1920s to the 1970s. You don't see a lot of the destruction that has taken place in this world. You have women in gorgeous vintage style dresses, people attending black and white films in movie theaters, newspaper writing being the popular thing to read again, and men and elves alike in dapper suits and fedoras. Lots of gangster type shootouts straight out of the Prohibition era.

The entire story is told from Doc's point of view. The last few reveals of the book struck me as incredibly unforeseen and downright odd. I wasn't sure what secret Doc had, but it turns out on the last paragraph to be...he's into BDSM. What a completely random ending. It has literally nothing to do with the rest of the book. Right before this, he finds out that he has The Touch, and that he will most likely be part of a shadow council that rules Chicago on the downlow. The Touch means he can heal people to some degree with his mind, but he learns it too late to help a main character that dies. And he doesn't really deal with the repercussions of this. The book just kind of hangs on that note without exploring it at all.

I love the feel of this book. I like how it doesn't deluge you with details, it just presents all this visual imagery together in a really cool bit of urban fantasy. But it doesn't entirely hold up. I really liked certain characters. Stagger Lee (what a cool name!), Ginny (Ginevra) and especially Mr. Patrise always managed to hold my interest. Lucius as a character seems like the only one who was truly plucked from another time and therefore he interested me the most.

The noirish bits work the best. It doesn't deluge you with bits about magic. It's thrown in there between the fighting. I loved the slow sort of picture forming of a group of people who were all at the end of their ropes interacting in a glamorous, really decadent atmosphere. And contrasting that decadence with the outside world Doc came from and has no desire to return to, to the point where he surrounds himself in an environment where he is doing autopsies of gun victims every week.

There isn't a lot of resolution to this book, but it is different. It's quirky and the weird mix of cultural pastiches don't always feel entirely like they work together, but they do most of the time. My biggest problem is with just how random the ending was. If you want to do a BDSM storyline, I don't have a real problem with it but throwing it on as a surprise ending was a really perplexing move and didn't gel well at all with his character.

Lis Carey says

This is a new Bordertown story. It does stand on its own; nothing requires the reader to even suspect the existence of the other stories, much less have read them. Danny Holman, a young man with considerable experience as an emergency medical technician, flees his old life for the City, and along the way he gets hooked up with Mr. Patrise, who appears to be a somewhat senior gangster. Danny, with his EMT skills, becomes Doc Hallownight, and settles in, more or less, to his new life, providing much-needed emergency medical services after, and sometimes during, shoot-outs. He also acquires a girlfriend and other friends, elf and human, and slowly and painfully starts to learn a few things about himself. Elves are almost inescapably alluring to humans, but elf culture is fairly appalling, morally, when you look at it. There's more than a hint of its nature in the fact that the elves' name for themselves is Truebloods. Some of the inhabitants of Bordertown, both elf and human, have noticed this.

The book is far too short to say anything more about the plot without spoilers, but this is one of the stronger Bordertown stories.

T says

there were aspects of this book I did enjoy (mostly the general atmosphere/description of the world), but I also came away feeling like it was TMI about John M. Ford's tastes in an uncomfortable way (and not great with its nonwhite characters as well, and none of the characters I might have liked were developed enough).

Hilary says

In an alternate America, a young paramedic drives away from his Iowa roots to the big city. In Chicago, which (like many parts of the country) shares an uneasy boundary with a land of elves and magic. Some magic spills across the border, and some elves make their homes, or make dangerous mischief, on the human side. Our hero falls in with a powerful, but cultured, gang leader and his companions. He befriends an elf, falls in love, struggles to come to terms with his own dark side.

This sounds like your average fantasy story, but it isn't. It's a gritty, urban tale, with sharply drawn characters and an absorbing plot. One of Ford's trademarks is the subtlety with which he tells his tales; as a reader, you have no choice but to think deeply, to participate in the telling, or miss most of the best and most fascinating ideas.

I had forgotten (and thus was pleasantly surprised by) the familiar setting, and the fact that the book intersects with the Bordertown series. Of those, I recommend starting with *Finder*, by Emma Bull, definitely my favorite of the novels and short stories that make up that shared universe project. And, naturally, I recommend anything by John M. Ford, a tremendous and versatile storyteller and one of my favorites.

Leons1701 says

Library book sales are always fun, and finding a J. M. Ford book that I don't already own is even better (and

getting harder all the time). Ford is probably best known for his two Star Trek novels "The Final Reflection" and "How Much for Just the Planet" which were so awesome Paramount kicked him off their writers list for making everyone else look bad (this may not be literally true). But Ford was so much more than just Star Trek (even if he did write RPG supplements as well as novels).

This is very typical Ford, witty and deeper than it might look at first glance. It's a coming of age story, as so many of Ford's novels are, but it's also a meditation on love, sexuality, power and the consequences thereof. It's got a lot of those subtle Ford touches, the main character, Danny, gets a new name when he arrives in Chicago and at some point later in the story, Ford stops referring to him as Danny and uses the new name instead. One could view this as simple lazy writing, but it seems clear Ford is making a point about Danny growing into his new identity as Doc Hallownight.

Ford never really explains his setting, elves came back and apparently all the portals are in big cities, magic works, TV doesn't and it all feels vaguely Roaring 20's like but we never really know why. There are little hints dropped here and there, but noting concrete and it totally doesn't matter. (Apparently this book may be linked to the Borderlands series, but that doesn't matter either). It's enough to grasp that this is fantasy noir, that the world is a harsher, colder place but not without hope.

Alex Sarll says

I used to love urban fantasy, but now the field has become so oversaturated and formulaic that I tend to steer well clear. But, this one is by John M Ford - and the only other book of his I've read, *The Dragon Waiting*, overcame the similar reluctance I now feel about alternate histories and vampire stories, simultaneously. This is also very good, keeping the essential strangeness of elves in Chicago intact, even as we come to know individual elves. There are nods to Dunsany, who managed a similar trick when his elves visited the Fields we Know, and a resistance ever to reveal too much - there are tantalising glimpses of the mechanics, of what happened when they returned, of what the rest of the world is doing (though cleverly, never of Britain, where preconceptions might intrude), but no solid RPG-style info-dumps. And that's part of why, unusually, I would have been quite happy had this been twice its economic 200-page length.

Cera says

A teenage boy, trained as a paramedic, runs away from his small-town Iowa home to magical gangland Chicago -- and this Chicago really is magical, as elves have returned to the world. An awesome book for the autumn, with some of the action taking place on Halloween.

I'm not sure I can say enough good things about this book, because Ford does all sorts of things I love. The main character grows to know and trust himself, and through doing so learns to know and trust others, but it's a realistic, hard-fought journey, and prices are paid before the end. There's a sense of a real cosmology underneath the story, fully worked out, but that's not what the book is about, and thus the novel creates the illusion that it is a text *produced by* the world which it describes. Just as Jane Austen doesn't explain her early 19th century assumptions to the reader, so Ford never stops his narrative to explain the rules of his magical Chicago. The pieces are imbedded in the text, there to be picked up and put together, but never in the way of the story.

Another thing I loved about the novel is Ford's respect for his human characters. Too many novels which

feature a human protagonist encountering legendary non-human creatures are about how much more interesting & exciting the vampires/werewolves/elves/etc are than the humans. Ford avoids this; his elves are Other, beautiful and frightening and compelling in their magic -- but his humans are compelling as well. Moreover, they have their own magic, the magic of natural history museums, cabaret singers and Buster Keaton films. The book ends up being a celebration of humanity and its ability to interact with the unknowable without losing itself.

Finally, Ford's prose is as always delightfully oblique; there are layers and layers going on, and thus the novel will reward multiple rereadings. I look forward to coming back to it in a year and seeing what I find.

Chiara says

I was really uncertain about picking up this book, I actually left it in the bookstore and only ordered it online after because I couldn't stop thinking about it. Something about the cover was just fascinating (you don't see an elf in a leather jacket holding a gun everyday). I saw a lot of 4 and 5 star reviews and yet I was still blown away by how much I loved this book. The world and the characters are just fantastic. It's really a really character-driven story, and I love that, because the characters, many as there are, are all unique and fascinating in their own ways.

I was especially surprised by how much I loved the main character and how quickly. He is definitely not what I expect in a character who looks like a noir hero on the cover of his book, but I mean that in a good way, since I don't usually like noir or its heroes. One review mentioned it's a growing-up story (which I interpreted as coming-of-age) and I really see that and I think that's what really drives the plot. I loved seeing Danny grow into Doc and I loved the friends he made along the way.

My only complaints are that there isn't a sequel and (mild spoilers) one of my favorite characters died. I did learn (when I was ordering the book) that the book, while not on most of the official lists for the Borderland series, is closely related to those books, so I ordered an anthology of Borderland stories along with it that will hopefully satisfy my need for a sequel.

Debbie says

This is a relatively short book in the days of scifi-fantasy publishing where most books are around 400 pages minimum. It also manages to pack in a lot behind the seemingly simple plot of gang warfare in the streets of a Shadow Chicago where elves and humans coexist in a world of twisted laws and politics. Ford's writing style, slow and a bit superficial, sets the tone, reminiscent of the old gangster movies of the Depression era. This is intelligent fantasy and Ford appears to make an effort to not have the reader pick out everything the first time through. I'm going to have to read this at least another two times before certain things get cleared up. The characters were great, but I would have liked to have seen them a bit more in-depth than they were portrayed. That, as well as the ambiguity over certain plot points lessened my enjoyment from this book.

John Carter McKnight says

I've long since lost my taste for literary fiction. *The Last Hot Time* is everything literary fiction is not: it's

painterly, where the craft is more powerful for not drawing attention to itself with how clever it is trying to be. It is not mundane; it captures transcendent passions. It does not turn up its nose; it gets its hands deep into the muck of our souls.

The Last Hot Time tells a coming of age story, and a very good one. But what it mostly does is capture a hundred shades of sweet pain. It is melancholy, and the fear of losing a love not yet found, and knowing oneself too well, the kind of absolution that burns away guilt but never responsibility, the fear from knowing that you'll have to peek behind the curtain rather than being comforted by the illusion.

It is layers upon layers of nuance in a very short book. It is imagery that will stay with you forever. It is a reminder of why True Names matter and why words hold power. It might make you cry. It will likely haunt you. It is not perfect, but it is all the better for not being so.

Find a copy. Clear a late night. Savor that feeling when you turn a corner to unexpectedly confront perhaps not *great* art, but true art.

Anna says

This is fantasy/film noir set in modern-day Chicago.

Yeah, I was confused, too. And reading the book didn't make things much more clear.

The Last Hot Time follows Doc, a young paramedic, as he navigates the new and confusing world he's found himself in.

This book had the potential to be really interesting and really fun, but I had a few issues with it.

First of all, hardly anything happens. The book spends so much time explaining the world and the people to Doc and to the reader that there isn't much time or room left for action. It's a very slow book (which works in some cases) and I didn't like that at all.

Second of all, even with the endless world descriptions, I was very confused. Periodically, it'd feel like the author had forgotten to tell us something about the world and the reader had to figure it out on their own. It felt like the author had this brilliantly developed world, but knew it so well that he'd often leave out details because he assumed the reader should know it as well as he did.

Third, most of the characters have several names and nicknames that aren't obvious through context clues and aren't mentioned in any clear way. So in the final third of the book, I was very confused as to why "The Fox" character was important and who they were when (after several pages) I finally realized that it was a character we'd known all along. This happened often enough that it was frequently unclear to me who was speaking and which characters were in the scene.

Fourth, I just really didn't quite understand how the ending happened. Things were happening (kind of sometimes) and it was getting slightly dramatic and then - (view spoiler)

This was probably the most bizarre book I've read in awhile, but not necessarily in a good way. It had potential, but didn't quite fulfill my expectations. I won't be recommending this to anyone anytime soon.

Maura Heaphy says

Learning that this novel is set in the the Terri Windling-Emma Bull-Will Shetterly-etc. "Borderland" shared-universe explained a lot: I felt that there was a fascinating world to be explored here, but the author was coasting, letting the knowledge he assumed the reader would have do the work for him. As someone who

hasn't read any other Borderland stories, I found the descriptions of the world -- the magic of the areas affected by elven magic, and the hints about the dystopian world the central character is escaping from -- either ploddingly encyclopedic, or frustratingly offhand.

I finally gave up on it because, in a narrative in which a lot happens, I couldn't see anything like a plot developing. Page after page goes by in which Doc, our innocent young protagonist, is introduced to one exotic and slightly shady denizens of this magic-infested realm after another. We learn what they're wearing, what they're eating, and drinking, what they're singing. (Central to the action is a 40s-style nightclub, complete with top-hatted doorman and tuxedo'd waitresses.) Each one patiently explains his or her backstory, and "powers," someone fires a tommygun, Doc patches someone up ... and then he meets someone else. It's like the first day at a very puzzling internship, when you've been told everything about the switchboard and the coffee machine, but nothing about what the business actually does.

Perhaps they all come together, and something happens. I just didn't find it interesting enough to wait and find out.

Sasha Twyst says

Calling this Urban Fantasy seems a little misleading, but with the Tommy guns, poker games, Chicago landmarks and elves, it's hard to use any other shorthand. It would be more accurate to call it literary jazz, backed by dancers made of magic dust, but that probably isn't a category at Barnes & Noble.

This is my first and only John M. Ford book and I can't remember how it got into my "to read" stack. I know I've had it for a while. I'm glad I read it when I did, after having gotten back in the habit a bit, because this is a book that takes attention, even as short as it is. Every detail is important, some coming back without warning or recap. The language is smooth and nuanced. It's obvious from page one that you're dealing with a masterful author. I think the readers who will enjoy this most are the active ones, the sort that dive into a book and chew on every sentence, extracting every flavor of meaning before trying the next one.

The story is simple enough: a young man from the country is going to Chicago. Almost there, he witnesses an attempted hit. Having some experience with trauma due to being an EMT, he helps and immediately falls into the circle of a powerful man with dangerous enemies and magical connections.

I think this story was just short of perfect, but that shortness is significant. There are a lot of characters and while they all have distinct voices and are each given the spotlight here and there, Mr. Ford doesn't always make them so distinct as that you don't have to remind yourself of who you're dealing with (particularly the women). Also, there are details that get mentioned all of once, but which are hugely pivotal down the line and if you can't recall them, the book turns from brilliance to utter nonsense; I loved it, and there are still bits I don't entirely understand, even though I'm sure if I went back and reread it, I would see them foreshadowed over and over.

I wish the author had taken a little more time. The book is narrow, only 200 pages or so, and I think a few more might have let us wrap ourselves up in the characters a bit more, given them perhaps a few more distinctions and fleshed out some of the ones of which we only really get a shot of; a chaser would have been appreciated.

After I finished the story, I found that the author had passed and I was sorry to hear that. I'm going to have to

go back and look up more of his work. I'm glad this one somehow made it into my library. It was definitely worth the time.

Liralen says

This is one of those books that makes me want to go back through all my ratings and put everything down another notch just so I can rate this higher.

Again, I find myself loving it for what it doesn't say as much as what it shows. Definitely a true example of why it's important to show and never tell. Ford's prose always gets me. Solid, detailed, distinct and perfect for the character. I love how Danny's perspectives change, how his *name* changes, how he changes through the whole of it, and how the shape of the things about him changes as he grows.

It's dense, structured, with multiple layers on every meaning. Beautiful and harrowing. With quotes for those that love literary things. There's always more to be had with each piece and each action.

Caitlin says

How have I missed this author?

There is a great tabletop role-playing game system called Shadowrun that was originally published in 1989. In it magic returned to the world in 2011, bringing with it mythological creatures and turning some humans into orks, trolls, dwarves, and elves. In the gaming system it's initially 2050 and it's a cyberpunk urban fantasy world that prefigures a lot of the popular fiction being written now, where mega-corporations rule the world and operate sort of like organized crime syndicates - sort of William Gibson meets Tolkein. It's an awesome gaming system and I've never understood why it isn't more popular. Related to this are the Borderland Series based on a similar fictional universe and created by Terri Windling. There are a number of collections of short stories edited by Ms. Windling and several novels of which my favorite is *Finder* by Emma Bull.

The Last Hot Time is set in a similar sort of universe. Its Chicago and the elves have punched through into our universe bringing with them all kinds of magic and transitory places. This is a coming-of-age story whose main character is plopped down into the middle of things in this alternate Chicago. A paramedic by trade, training, and vocation, Danny Holmann becomes Doc and learns about life, friendship, and the possibility of love.

If you can imagine elements of high fantasy crossed with a film noir feel you'll get a sense of the flavor of this wonderful and original book. Ford writes well and tells a great story and now I want to find everything he wrote. As an aside, Mr. Ford is the person who introduced Klingonaase to the world in his *Star Trek* novel, *The Final Reflection*. How geektastic is that?
