



Dangerous Offspring

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Steph Swainston returns to the dazzling, dizzying world of the Fourlands with the audacious sequel to her acclaimed novels *The Year of Our War* and *No Present Like Time*. Jant Comet, the messenger, has survived deadly insects, internecine politics, and even his own debilitating, life-threatening addiction. But now he faces a challenge greater than any he has met in the last several centuries, one that could shake the foundations of the Fourlands forever. For the Emperor himself is riding to the front, and nothing is as it seems . . .

Dangerous Offspring Details

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Nigel says

To push back against the invading Insects, the Immortals of the Circle build a dam and form a lake, and it finally looks as if some progress will be made in the endless war. Comet Jant, who is the Messenger, who can fly, is distracted at the last minute when he heads off to the city of his miss-spent youth in search of the daughter of Lightning, a fellow Immortal who has been a mentor and father-figure to him. The search rather unexpectedly takes him to the world of the Shift, but more unexpectedly when he gets back catastrophe has struck, potentially world-ending and it's all hands on deck to fight back against a horrifying new threat.

A climactic-feeling third volume with an epic sweep and unexpected ending that leaves the Fourlands and the Circle shaking and changed.

Laura says

Finally, this was a thoroughly good book from Swainston. The elements have been there in the earlier Castle novels - sparkly language, unpredictability, melodrama, sex, and glitter - but now it was perfect.

Carol says

This is the third in Swainston's Jant Comet series, which adeptly combines elements of fantasy and sci-fi. In this volume, Jant and his fellow immortals must deal with a desperate crisis. Their brilliant engineer has built an innovative dam and created an artificial lake with the intention of flooding out the insects from the land they have claimed. However, this project backfires horribly: the large standing pool of standing water causes the Insects to go into a breeding phase (which no one had ever seen before). This novel focuses mainly on the resulting military campaign, which is given a very gritty and suspenseful treatment. Swainston also works in an very interesting subplot regarding one of the immortal's wayward daughter and the growing conflict between them

Swainston's writing and skill with narrative structure have improved a lot since the first book. In addition to its good action and suspense, Dangerous Offspring deals with the issue of new people and ideas challenging the old order of things.

Rick says

I enjoyed this a lot, which means I'm going to have to go back and read the first two in the series: The Year of Our War, and No Present Like Time.

Here we follow centuries-old Jant Comet, the winged messenger, as he flies around, into and out of trouble taking messages for the emperor and doing battle with the insects. Lots of interesting characters inhabiting a very interesting place as they struggle to hold off the insect hordes. Despite the sweeping storyline the focus is really on the characters and their relationships and somehow manages to get into an interesting discussion of teen angst right in the middle of a struggle for survival. Good, good stuff if you like heroic battles against

encroaching hordes.

Silvio Curtis says

Set another five years after *No Present Like Time*. The immortals' Architect, Frost, has a plan to win the Insect war with engineering. At the same time, Lightning's daughter Cyan, who has grown into a stereotypical spoiled teenager, has gone missing, apparently deliberately, in Hacilith, the scene of Comet's old gang days. Comet's plan is to retrieve Cyan for Lightning and fly back to the front in time to make himself useful at the battle. Neither plan goes smoothly, of course. You see more of the Shift, the alternate world where overdoses of cat send you, and get more hints about Emperor San and the history of the universe, but most questions are still not solved.

Lachlan Robertson says

My favourite Castle novel so far. Swainston's writing is truly beautiful. She brings an uncommon sense of playfulness and style to the fantasy genre, something well needed in the current age of boring Grimdark. I missed Jant's journeys into the Shift, which were more frequent in the last books, but our narrator's time spent in the Fourlands well made up for this. All I can say is that I am grateful to know that there is more coming of the Castle and its Circle.

Daniel says

This book surprised me again and again. The beginning brings Insects back to the fore--as they were in "The Year of Our War"--and introduces a plot concocted by the immortal Circle to push the Insects back into the Paperlands and reclaim territory lost in centuries past. Jant and his immortal companions jest, talk about the past, and prepare for battle. It was all familiar, and it was all a welcomed read; I figured that I had a good idea as to where Swainston was going to take the story, and I was content.

I was also flat out wrong. Just as it looks like battle is nigh, Swainston pulls a fast one: Lightning is having family problems and asks Jant to intervene. Jant agrees, and he takes flight to the town of his youth, bringing the story in tow. From here, Swainston dives into teenage angst; more anecdotes from the past; more visits to the Shift; and more pieces of the cosmology that underlie the Castle books. Some weird characters and events surface, tear up the scenery, and disappear.

Insects? Battle? Where were we?

To be frank, there were moments when I felt puzzlement alongside my surprise. I wondered what Swainston was up to, and I wondered if she wasn't getting too exposition-heavy for the series. Heretofore, she moved things along at a nice clip and dropped tidbits of history into places where they became invaluable; now, she was diving into long conversations and tangential plot lines that moved away from what I had thought would be the main story. In short, I had an "uh oh" moment.

Shame on me--and shame on my lack of faith: Swainston does all of this because she is telling a different kind of story entirely. Why--given the vitality of the first two books--suppose that Swainston would write a third volume that wraps the series up into a nice, neat trilogy? Conclusions are reached, but I was way off as

to what they were, and what they meant. In fact, Swainston takes the Castle story to depths and places that I could never have guessed, and when it ended, I felt a part of myself stay with Jant, standing on that shoreline, watching a dear friend row out of sight.

Jan says

Novodobý sv?t se mi líbil ze všech díl? asi nejvíc. I p?es slabý a vcelku p?edvídatelný d?j bylo ?tení velice poutavé svou osudovostí a jedine?nou atmosférou sv?ta. Celou sérii doporu?uji všem fanoušk?m NW.

Rowena Tylden-Pattenson says

I first came across the Fourlands when I was maybe 15, and really didn't appreciate these books. They were full of all sort of adult fantasy themes that I'd never come across before- lots of gore, sex, drugs and freakish hallucinations (if the Shift can be called that). But I think it's a testament to these books that I remembered it so well when I picked up the second one at maybe 20 (and again, didn't quite understand it), and finally managed to find the third in the series after maybe 10 years of this series. And now, finally, I think I appreciate these books the way they should be appreciated.

Let's start with Jant. What an interesting character, not just by looks, but by narrative style too. He's unreliable, both as a narrator and personality, but unabashedly himself, faults and all. I love how he's grown through this series, his immaturity showing through at points, but also taking on his responsibilities properly. His interactions with the others are excellent at points, and how, even though he is an immortal, he's still very fallible.

The world building in this series is another thing that's drawn me back time after time. At points uncomfortably grotesque or crude, it's a tantalising, weird mixture of typical fantasy and the modern world smashed together; archery and swordsmanship are highly thought of, guns unknown, yet the characters wear jeans and t-shirts. Every so often the weird world of the Shift appears and, although not as strange as I remember it, it's still like nothing I've ever read. It does make me want to go back to the previous two and give them another chance, because I think I might appreciate them better now.

Iain says

Another excellent entry in a terrific series. Might be by a small margin the best so far, actually. As much as I love the character of Jant, he shares the focus with a few more of the immortals here - Lightning, of course, but others too - and one or two other returning characters. Some questions are answered, some new ones are raised.

What makes the series work, for me, is that the immortals of the Circle are realistic characters: we see the effects of their centuries of life not only in their experience, but in exaggerating their faults. This is a key part of this particular book, which may be why I prefer it slightly to the previous instalment. The little stylistic tricks scattered around also continue, showing Swainston's skill and willingness to experiment. But they never detract from the flow of the story. Recommended.

Ruth Gilbert says

Clever, but I preferred the first two.

Eija says

Nelimaa-sarjan yhtenäisen juonilinjauksen muodostavat ensimmäinen osa *Kuolemattomien kaarti* ja *Uusi maailma*. Toinen osa *Aika on lahjoista suurin* vaikuttaa enemmänkin irralliselta välinäytökseltä. *Uudessa maailmassa* käydään sotaa turilaita vastaan ihan urakalla, mutta silti *Uusi Maailma* on ehkä sarjan syvällisin osa. Kirjan kantavana teemana on nuoren tytön kasvutarina. Salaman teini-ikäinen tytär Cyan kapinoi ja kokeilee rajojaan ja uhmaa vanhempaansa. Toisaalta kirja kertoo myös vanhemmuuden vaikeudesta sekä elämän muutoksesta ja sen aiheuttamasta luopumisen vaikeudesta tai helpotuksesta. Cyanin lisäksi tarinan keskiössä on Salama (yksi luku keskellä kirjaa on poikkeuksellisesti nimettykin Salman luvuksi). Myös parantajanaisestä Raynestä sai hyvän kuvan ja hänen puhettaan elävöitti kivasti murteellinen käännös suomennoksessa.

Minulla jäi tunne, että kirjasarja loppui ennen kuin ehti alkaakaan ja mielenkiintoisimmat vaiheet olisivat vasta edessäpäin. Sen verran nautittavaa lukeminen on tähän asti ollut, että jatkoakin mielellään lukisin. Toivottavasti Swainston vielä palaa *Nelimaahan* ainakin yhden kirjan verran ja kirjoittaisi sarjalle kunnollisen lopetuksen.

Tim Hicks says

Still a good read, but a tad frustrating.

Lightning's character becomes more and more of a caricature (the author even refers to him as Lord Melodrama at one point).

Swainston has added as many questions as answers in this volume, so much so that it makes me wonder if we aren't in for a ten-volume series here. There's far too much "heh, heh, I'm not going to explain that yet." Including a cryptic reference to this world having uranium but not using it.

I do like the idea that immortal does not mean invulnerable, but again the author has some 'splainin' to do later.

There are some unnecessary distractions and jokes, which are interesting but break the carefully-created sense that we really are in another world and hold up an "aren't I clever?" sign reminding us that there is an author at work, not the narrator. In an earlier book, our hero is checking out Middle Ages armour while wearing denim cutoffs and a T-shirt; perhaps there will be an explanation in a later volume. In a scene I can't describe closely without spoiling, Lightning stretches our suspension of disbelief with some archery work. The scene would have been as good without that.

We meet the Vermiform again, an entity that appears to follow Shift physics even in this "real" world. It also seems to be very powerful at times, not so much at others.

We learn that Cyan is indeed the selfish brat we saw in the previous book. In this one we also learn that she is not very smart. That bothered me at first, but seemed OK after a while. We are coming to realize book by book that most of these folks get things wrong just about as often as we do in this world.

And enough already with the logistics of troop movements, and naming everyone, and making sure there's a Circle member for swords, one for spears, one for javelins ... no doubt there's also one for nunchucks, one for coshes, one for farm-tools-as-weapons, one for unarmed combat, one who tells opposing forces that they smell of elderberries, ...

And finally, for all of Swainston's pleasure in throwing plot twists at us, several of the developments in this volume are predictable 200 pages away.

I'll read the next one, but I'm not going to be patient with it. I require some answers.

Larry Crawford says

In this last installment(1), the Insects have managed a population explosion that becomes the largest threat to the Fourlands and the biggest test of the Circle's power, abilities, and fortitude. It is also the story of conflict between 1440-year old Lightning and his rebellious daughter, Cyan. Our protagonist, Jant, or the messenger Comet, is dispatched to bring the runaway teenager back to the fold.

As throughout this trilogy, the theme of immortality is approached on many levels. Author Swainston's thoughts on the subject are profound and subtly strewn through the plot, characters, and dialogue. It seems as if its the first wish you'd make with the genie in the bottle, yet living forever--in terms of modern conceptions in religious Afterlife with personality intact--is shown to be decidedly un-human. Further, the very understandable longings for eternal consciousness sours and distracts one from life. Maybe Jant says it best:

Immortals are those who prize success and fame over happiness. They gain what little happiness they ever have from success. Their thirst for perfection and fear of being beaten drives them on.

---p.313

This is a very discerning work--both recondite and sagacious--and very unique even for speculative fiction. Some of its finer points are turning outlandishness into subtly, and expanding genre cliches in new directions. This assessment, of course, applies to all her work.

William says

Steph Swainston's third novel set in the Fourlands is "The Modern World" (retitled "Dangerous Offspring" for its US release). For the past few years the Insects have been kept at bay, the Castle's forces keeping them from expanding their Paperlands. However, the armies of the Fourlands have been content with just stopping the Insects invading, they haven't attempted to win back any of their former territory, at least until Frost – the Castle's immortal architect – comes up with a plan to reclaim some of the Paperlands. The Insects can't swim or so she sets about the construction of a giant dam across a river that forms the border of the Paperlands. Once the lake behind the dam is filled the insects there will be drowned, and once the waters subside the Fourlands' armies can march in and reclaim the territory. As the dam nears completion military forces from across the Fourlands as well as all the Castle's immortals gather to prepare to strike. The plan is a good one based on their knowledge of the Insects but some unforeseen events mean that the Fourlands end up in more danger than ever and the entire resources of the continent are forced to gather to withstand a potentially devastating Insect assault. The danger is so great that the Emperor himself is forced to ride out from the Castle for the first time in millennia to lead the Fourlands' armies.

Meanwhile, the novel's narrator Comet has his own problems as he is tasked by his immortal friend Lightning to search for Lightning's teenaged daughter Cyan, who has run away from her minders on a visit to Hacilith, the Fourlands' biggest and most dangerous city. A spoiled young noblewoman with little experience of the real world but a big sense of entitlement and thirst for new experiences and adventure, Cyan finds herself quickly out of her depth and Comet is forced to venture into Hacilith's underworld (a place he is very familiar with) to retrieve her. As the time for the strike against the Insects approaches Comet and Cyan then join up with the Fourlands army and Cyan increasingly clashes with her father, forcing him to confront how out-of-touch with mortals he has become during his thousands-plus years of life.

Although the main part of the novel is taken up by the two plots described above, there are a number of interesting subplots, including a venture by Comet and Cyan to the world of Epsilon where they are pursued between worlds by a demonic hunt in the novel's most thrilling sequence. There are also three particularly good flashbacks, the novel opening with Comet reliving the memories of a past disaster in the Insect war, as well as two interludes unusually narrated by someone other than Comet – Lightning reminiscing about his tragic first marriage and the Castle's Doctor Rayne telling how she came to be immortal.

After the good but slightly disappointing second book this is a definite return to form. Swainston returns to the Insect War that is at the heart of the series and the battle scenes are the best in the trilogy, while the intrigue between the immortals is equally entertaining and has a direct impact on the battles. Refreshingly, although it makes a couple of appearances in the story, Epsilon and the worlds of the Shift don't have quite the same impact on the main plot as in the previous books, instead the plot being largely decided in the Fourlands. The characterisation is again very good, the new major character Cyan is convincing although (since her character is basically a spoiled teenager) inevitably irritating. The chapters devoted to Lightning, Rayne and Frost allow a bit more character development for immortals other than Comet and even the enigmatic Emperor has a bit more of his character revealed, although in his case each answer only brings up more questions. Thought there is less time spent on world-building than in the first two books there is still some extra depth added to the world, although some minor aspects do seem a bit unconvincing - while a certain amount of anachronism is an integral part of the Fourlands, it does seem a bit out-of-place to have Comet complaining about his old haunts being replaced by trendy wine bars.

The quality of the writing is again high, whether it is describing the horrors of war, the petty complaints of a spoiled teenage or the wonder of Comet's flight over the land, and seems a bit more polished and memorable than the prose in "No Present Like Time", with a number of good quotes and passages. Lightning and Rayne's flashbacks also have their own distinct voices, which make a nice change from Comet's admittedly entertaining narration.

In summary, this is another excellent Fantasy novel which adds more depth to the Fourlands and its characters, while at the same time delivering a compelling plot with some excellent scenes.

