



The Queen of Swords

R.S. Belcher

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1720. Escaping the gallows, Anne Bonney, the infamous pirate queen, sets sail in search of a fabulous treasure said to be hiding in a lost city of bones somewhere in the heart of Africa. But what she finds is a destiny she never expected...

1870. Maude Stapleton is a respectable widow raising a daughter on her own. Few know, however, that Maude belongs to an ancient order of assassins, the Daughters of Lilith, and heir to the legacy of Anne Bonney, whose swashbuckling exploits blazed a trail that Maude must now follow--if she ever wants to see her kidnapped daughter again!

Searching for her missing child, come hell or high water, Maude finds herself caught in the middle of a secret war between the Daughters of Lilith and their ancestral enemies, the monstrous Sons of Typhon, inhuman creatures spawned by primordial darkness, she embarks on a perilous voyage that will ultimately lead her to the long-lost secret of Anne Bonney--and the Father of All Monsters.

The Queen of Swords Details

Date : Published June 27th 2017 by Tor Books

ISBN : 9780765390097

Author : R.S. Belcher

Format : Hardcover 368 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Science Fiction, Steampunk, Westerns, Horror, Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction

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From Reader Review The Queen of Swords for online ebook

Cupcakes & Machetes says

My reviews of the first two books in the series: The Six-Gun Tarot & The Shotgun Arcana.

“To our brave captain,” he said and tipped the bottle toward Anne, who took it and drank. “She who pisses on gods and kings with equal contempt. Bravo!”

Third helpings of a seven layer cake. I’m fat on amazing writing at this point. I have no intentions to stop eating.

This is a full dive into Maude Stapleton’s background and the origins of the Daughters of Lilith and I couldn’t have asked for a more thrilling tale. This is feminine power and wily women at it’s best.

Constance, Maude’s daughter, has been kidnapped by the Daughters of Lilith to be used as a sacrifice to prevent a great evil from escaping onto Earth. That evil has been working shenanigans for years in the shadows, tricking the Daughters into believing that this is the only option. But when Maude is your mother, she’ll use every nasty trick in the book and risk her own life to save her only child.

Maude was raised by Anne Bonny, the pirate queen. Anne was her many great-grandmother and a Daughter of Lilith. Maude trained with her on the beaches of Charleston since she was a child. Anne instilled in her a great sense of right and wrong and the training to back up any decisions Maude might make to bring justice forth.

The story flips back and forth between the present of Maude and Constance’s situation and the origins of the pirate queen in the 1700s and how she became such a force of a woman. Anne was a rebel, a thief and a leader. I won’t call her fearless as she definitely had moments of fear, but, she spit in the face of anything worth fearing and charged ahead. Stubborn and resilient, with a burning hatred of slavery. A pioneer of human rights. If the entire story had only been about Anne, I wouldn’t have even missed Maude. But, that’s unfair to Maude as she’s a great character as well.

While I missed Golgotha, the adventure was so fun and interesting that I wasn’t all that disappointed to not see my favorite paranormal frontier town. (A few characters from there did make short appearances.) Instead, for much of this book we’re in the depths of Africa, treasure hunting and chasing ancient evils. Finding the origins of the Daughters and the dark truths that lie in a city of monsters in the middle of the Sahara. A solid third installment in one of my all time favorite series.

Tammy says

The nitty-gritty: Belcher is in high form with this epic adventure tale that spans generations, a story that puts its female characters front and center. Stand back, men!

It’s always a pleasure to read a new R.S. Belcher story, and it’s even more exciting when that story is set in one of my favorite universes, Belcher’s weird western world of Golgotha. Technically, this is book three in

the series, and you *could* start here if you wanted to, as Belcher does a great job of filling in some of the blanks, and the story is self-contained. However, I would advise you to read the first two books first: *The Six Gun Tarot* and *The Shotgun Arcana*. The story starts soon after the end of *The Shotgun Arcana*, and lots of references are made to those explosive events. Even I struggled a bit trying to remember what had happened, so new readers may feel lost in places. But folks, this story is just too good to send you away if you're behind with this series. Belcher's books get better and better the more he writes, and this is my favorite *Golgotha* book by a landslide.

I have to admit it did take me a bit to figure out what Belcher was doing with this story, but once everything clicked, his grand scheme quickly fell into place. The story moves back and forth between two time periods and two main characters: Maude Stapleton in 1871, a young woman who has already had her share of adventures but is about to be thrust right back into the action; and Anne Bonny in 1721, the pirate queen of the title who has just come to shore after months at sea, given birth to a baby boy, and promptly left him with her father in order to go on a treasure hunt (and who is based on a real person!). Both women are part of a secret group called the Daughters of Lilith, specially trained female assassins who pass their skills down through the generations.

Maude was trained and indoctrinated into the Daughters when she was a young girl, by none other than her great-great-great-great-Gran Anne Bonny (And right here, I know you're doing some math in your head, but trust me, it's not going to work out. Just go with it), and now she is training her own daughter Constance, who is already a force to be reckoned with. But someone is after Constance, another group of Daughters who believe that Constance is the very last one, and in order for the line to continue, her blood must be drained and used to fill up the sacred flask.

Despite Maude's fierce fighting abilities, Constance is kidnapped and taken away on a ship to a mysterious village in Africa called Carcosa, a sacred place where the blood-letting ritual will be performed. Maude will do anything to save her, and so she takes off after the ship, hoping to stop the ritual before it can start.

In alternating chapters, we get to see Anne's similarly dangerous journey as she also sets out for Carcosa one hundred and fifty years earlier, hoping to find treasure. Anne's "take no shit" attitude gets her in lots of trouble, but she certainly ends up getting what she wants. As each woman gets closer and closer to their goals, their paths begin to converge, despite the separation of time. But an evil being named Typhon is waiting in the shadows, eager to destroy the Daughters of Lilith and end their line forever.

The Queen of Swords, despite being a *Golgotha* novel, does not actually take place in Golgotha (although the characters talk about it quite a bit, especially Maude who considers it her home). And if you're hoping for a true pirate-centric story, you may be a little disappointed (but not for long because there are SO MANY OTHER GREAT THINGS!). Our pirate queen, Anne Bonny, starts the story off on board a ship, but she soon arrives on land and stays there for the rest of the story. One of my favorite parts is near the end, when Maude and her traveling companions uncover the lost ship the *Hecate* and sail to Africa to intercept the women who have kidnapped Constance. And that's when we get our memorable pirate moments. Not only is the *Hecate* a magical ship, but Maude digs up her grandmother's old pirate garb from the past and wears it on the journey. It was a great touch that shows just how connected Maude and Anne are.

I'm always amazed when male writers can create such multilayered, kick-ass women characters, and Belcher is one of best at this. I wasn't kidding in the beginning of my review when I said "Stand back, men!" The ladies have taken over the show, and I couldn't be happier. In this story, the women are in charge of everything, and the men are relegated to side-kicks, assistants and "bearers" (literally, pack mules!). It's the men who get left behind when it's time to trek into the dangerous forest (from which no one ever returns).

And what's even better, the men take all this in stride. In other words, they're smart enough to realize when the woman is in control, and they graciously allow her to be. What a refreshing change of pace!

Of course I loved Maude and Anne, but every other character is just as well drawn. One of my favorite side characters is a statuesque and terrifying woman named Nourbese, the queen of the Amazons, who Anne must fight to the death. I won't give away the results of their fight, but let's just say the twist in their relationship was wonderful. I also enjoyed the male characters, and even though this is a female-centric story, I couldn't end this review without mentioning two of them. Belrose is a French mercenary who Anne hires to accompany her on her dangerous journey. I also loved the journalist Alter Cline who joins Maude on *her* journey, and definitely gets more than he bargained for. Even though there is a spark of attraction between them, Maude has already given her heart to another man: Mutt, a fantastic character from the last two books who is waiting for Maude back in Golgotha (and who I do hope makes an appearance in the next book!)

Belcher also adds an interesting and heart-felt side story about Maude's determination to get back custody of Constance, and to wrest control of her rightful inheritance from the tenacious grip of her father. Because this story takes place during a time period when women had little or no rights, especially when they were married, I loved Maude's courage—as well as her attempt to work with a female attorney (unheard of!).

I loved the first two *Golgotha* novels, but they weren't as tightly and carefully plotted as this one. Everything about this story snaps together like a well made puzzle, and it's clear that Belcher has taken his writing craft to new levels. The satisfying ending resolves many things, but there are clearly more stories to come. Personally, I'm hoping for a return to the dusty streets of Golgotha in the next installment. The evil isn't gone for good, and Maude and her fellow Daughters have plenty of work ahead of them.

Big thanks to the publisher for supplying a review copy.

My review of *The Six-Gun Tarot* .

My review of *The Shotgun Arcana* .This review originally appeared on Books, Bones & Buffy

Fraser Sherman says

3.5 stars — this is good, but I definitely like Belcher's weirdness in Golgotha better than spread out across the world. The occasional problems I have with his language seem worse here — Maude's father at one point gives a speech about his inner torment that feels way too twentieth century (and I'm sorry "the Load" is just a lame name for the burden of the Daughters of Lilith). And Typhon is one of those villains who likes to make sinister observations about the meaningless and illusion of life, and those never work for me. And Maude's borderline metahuman fighting skills were easier to take in Golgotha where pretty much nobody's normal (seriously, disarming someone with a letter?).

All that said, this is full of action, with a capable heroine, lots of other capable women and a good storyline (though the big bad reminds me of Hellboy's Oghdru Jahad too much). Definitely worth the reading.

Brandon St Mark says

This book was so very good.

Maude is my favorite character in this series, so I guess this was bound to be a favorite of mine. Given the ending of this, there should at least be one more book, but the ending is open enough to allow for many more, and I will be reading them all as soon as they come out.

I can't recommend this series enough, but if you can't find it in yourself to read all of it's entires, you'll be fine to read just this book. Maude and Constance are great role models for younger women, and the themes of this book are, sadly, still relevant, and honestly can apply to women, men, and anyone in-between.

Clay Kallam says

I usually don't like to jump into a series in the middle, but "The Queen of Swords" (Tor, \$25.99,364 pages) looked fun, and reasonably intriguing, and the roll of the reading dice turned out pretty well.

R.S. Belcher's series involves a battle between the Daughters of Lilith and the Sons of Typhon, with the latter out to destroy the world, and the former out to save it. (As usual, the motivation for wanting to destroy the world is a little shaky, but a writer's got to do what a writer's got to do.)

The scene shifts from 18th century Africa (for the most part) to 19th century South Carolina (for the most part) and there are the requisite battle scenes between the incredibly deadly Daughters, who use speed and precision and enhanced senses from years of training, and the incredibly abhorrent Sons, who are deformed and enhanced mentally and physically. Adding spice to the stew is an internecine battle between the Daughters, and it's clear "The Queen of Swords" is far from the final volume.

Oh, and the title also refers to the tarot card in question, and all the chapter titles are tarot cards as well. Keep that tattered tarot reference book at hand to make a book that is basically intended to be fun even more so.

Wing Kee says

Good but a diversion that made me miss the main series.

World: The world building is good, it's a departure from the main series and gives a large world building chunk of lore and history to the readers of the magical powers both good and bad at work. I liked that it as a Maud story as I love her in the series and her powers and where it's from is interesting. The world building is solid.

Story: The story is good. It starts of slow just like the first book and builds characters and the stakes until all shit breaks loose at the third act of the book. The history and the lore of the world with the Father and Mother and all the powers and machinations is fascinating and gives the world and the story a lot more weight. The drama with Maud and her dad was also interesting and the giggled at the melodrama in the court and also the end of that storyline, it was highly entertaining. I did not really care for the Pirate Queen story though as I am not partial to Pirate stories and I find their adventures mostly tedious and full of cliches. Then

there is the departure from Golgotha. I thought we would be getting both a story of Maud in South Caroline, and also a Golgotha story but that's not the case and all the threads that was there in the second book left hanging are left hanging and I want to know about those more than all the other stories, I want my western.

Characters: Maud is an interesting character and my favourite in the series so far so having a story that's focused on her is great. Her journey in this book from her youth and also from what she is doing with her Dad in the court room is great, it gives her depth and weight and I love that. Constance is also well done with her development over three books. The Pirate Queen storyline is also amusing with her personal voice distinct and filthy as all pirates should be. The rest of the cast with the villains and the villagers and all in between are alright and fill in the book as need but nothing really stands out. Last books villain was way better defined and developed and when the confrontation came last book it was amazing, this book, not so much.

It was a good book, but it was missing the main reason I read this book in the first place.

Onward to the next book!

Bonnie McDaniel says

I had a rough time rating this book. Parts of it I liked, and parts of it I didn't care for. That may be because it's the third book in the series and I haven't read the other two. Copious references are made to previous events, but the author does a nice job of summing them up, so I don't think that's the problem. This book has two main characters and two timelines, and it seems to me what I'm having trouble with is the fact that one character and timeline resonated for me, and the other simply did not.

Well, let's start with the character/timeline that absolutely worked: Anne Bonney. I would LOVE more books about her. She was a real person, a female pirate in the 18th century, and as far as I can tell, the author pretty much stuck to the facts of her early life. The branch point into the author's alternate history and universe begins in 1721, when Anne goes on a quest for her last great treasure, and falls into a world of gods, magic and vaguely Lovecraftian monsters. This quest takes her into the heart of Africa, where she meets a priestess of an ancient society of women called the Daughters of Lilith, who are fighting another ancient society of monsters called the Sons of Typhon. This priestess, Raashida, convinces Anne she is destined to take on what is called Lilith's Load, and protect the world from the Sons of Typhon. Anne does this, and her bloodline now belongs to the Daughters.

(A lot of Anne's story takes place in Africa. Since the author is a white male, this is a rather sensitive and potentially problematic storyline. He seems to have done his research and handles the various tribal cultures and customs with respect, and also tackles the racism and colonialism of the era. But I don't know enough about the real history to comment.)

Cue a hundred and fifty years later, with Anne's multiple-greats granddaughter, Maude Stapleton. In one of the previous books, Maude released Typhon from his prison, and this comes back to bite her, big-time. As far as I was concerned, Maude's storyline bogged the book down, because it felt like the author was losing control of his world. As just one example, Anne Bonney is still around when Maude is a child, specifically nine years old and several years after that, since Anne is mentioned as having given Maude her initial training. Which would have made Anne Bonney about 140-150 years old? Of course this is a fantasy, and there's several hints given as to how this might have happened (ingesting the Blood of Lilith), but all the

people who have no idea this underworld of gods and monsters exists go around ignoring the fact that they're talking about Maude's *great-great-great-great-grandmother*? Who was *still alive* till 20-odd years ago? Come *on*, people.

Also, Maude is damn near as invulnerable as Superman (at least until she meets the Sons of Typhon), and there's no kryptonite to be found. Now, I like a badass female fighter as much as anyone, but the Daughters of Lilith take this rather over the top (their fighting techniques supposedly inspired *all* the martial arts in existence). There's also a convenient metaphysical place known as the Record which Maude discovers she can tap into (fifty years earlier than any other Daughter being able to do it), where she can converse with the spirits of the previous Daughters (and her own mother, apparently), and solve all her problems. I could go on, but you get the idea--it felt to me like the worldbuilding was coming apart, and my suspension of belief stretched to the breaking point.

Which is sad, because Anne Bonney was wonderful. I would love reading the story of how she rescued the tree people and acquired her sentient warship, the *Hecate*. She was a realistic, flawed, human character. Unfortunately, at the end of the book we're left with Maude Stapleton teaching and nurturing the next generation of the Daughters of Lilith, and after her disappointing story in this book, I'm not inclined to go any further.

Crini says

lady assassin AND pirate? sign me the hell up!

So it just got better because LOOK AT THAT COVER.

Jaye says

This book returns to the setting of the Golgotha books. Maude Stapleton (a supporting character in the earlier volumes) takes center stage here. Maude is a Daughter of Lilith, a member of an ancient order of female warriors, sworn to defend all life against antediluvian horrors. Maude's daughter Constance is thought to be key to some ancient prophecy, so other Daughters seek to kidnap her. Maude's actions from the last book have caused the ancient monster Typhon to stir from his slumber, and he seeks the destruction of all. Between chapters set in the present are others detailing the adventures of Maude's grandmother, the pirate Anne Bonny, who journeyed to the forbidden city of Carcosa, and became a Daughter herself. As ever, I can't wait to see what the author does next, though I'm given to understand that new books in Belcher's other series are due later this year.

Melissa says

I haven't read the first two in the series and judging by the book I thought it was an offshoot series. It is not, but firmly a part of a series. I was not lost as I think Anne Bonney and her descendants take center stage in this one but not center in the other books. I enjoyed it as much as I thought I would but it made me crave more of Anne Bonney's story and I think I'll get some of it when I go back to read the other books in the series.

This story flits back and forth between timelines. The time is stamped on each chapter but even if you didn't pay attention to it, you would not be lost. In this instance Anne's story is more of a supportive role to tell Maude's story but she doesn't take the back seat. In fact, I think she may have stole the show... but it fits her character well.

The weakest parts were with the Sons of Typhon and with Typhon himself. He doesn't quite make my most feared villains but perhaps that is because I haven't read the other stories. He lacked depth but I'm not real sure that bothers me. He was a good backdrop and a reason for the tale we got and I really wanted more of Anne and the sisters of Lilith and that background story.

I give this book 4 stars. While I think you could dive into this one as I did and not be lost, be prepared to want more of Anne's story. I have a feeling you'll be wanting either her own book all to herself or at least the other books in this series. I want both. I recommend it to those that enjoy fantasy and pirates you would sail with around the world.

(Tori-Smexybooks) smexys_sidekick says

My review will appear in the July issue of RT Book Reviews

Kellan says

The latest Golgotha book has a rocky start, but it quickly stabilizes and becomes an amazing adventure that delves into some fairly complex issues with, if not the most unique view, a still refreshing one for weird fiction. The he majority of this cast is female, and all (including the returning characters Maude and Constance) are portrayed with a depth and complexity of character that is all too rare in novels written by men, especially in genre fiction.

Brian Palmer says

Maude, trying to recover her daughter from her well-meaning if overbearing rich merchant father, is forced to come from Golgotha, the town in the west where she has settled, to North Carolina. Although trained in the many secrets of the Daughter of Lilith, a secret society her umpteen-great grandmother belonged to, Maude is determined to fight this battle legally, with the aid of the suffragette movement that is beginning to swell in the US.

But the Sons of Typhon are also stirring; a similarly ancient society opposed to the Daughters of Lilith, they have been swung into action by the reappearance of Typhon himself -- inadvertently freed by Maude previously in Golgotha. They have an interest of their own in Maude's daughter, even as internal politics of the Daughters of Lilith mean there's a third, preternaturally talented group hunting her.

This reveals new sides of Maude's family and the relationship between Typhon and Lilith. The A-plot is exciting and action-packed. I really enjoyed the book and the series to date.

Rebecca says

Oh, wow. Seriously, this series just keeps getting better.

This is a significant departure from the previous Golgotha books in some ways - it's not a Weird West story, there's a lot less body horror, and it's a lot more streamlined. Instead of throwing a non-stop parade of oddities at the reader, it focuses on one storyline.

This could have been a problem; I love weird west and I love overfull, complex worlds. But the prose and the storytelling and the character building are beautiful and well-crafted and the world is still rich and I loved everything about it.

I loved having a story where almost every character is female, but it didn't read like a "girl's book." I loved the interconnected timelines. I loved the way characters grew and changed through the story. And always, always, I love Belcher's prose.

I want more of this world; I want more of both Golgotha and Maude; I just want these stories to continue forever.

JustSomeGuy says

My issues with this book are the same I have had with Belcher's other works - he jams in so much that it ends up being overload. While this book is formally the third book in the Golgotha series, this is almost a spin-off as it follows Maude Stapleton in her adventures as a Daughter of Lilith as well as the adventures of her grandmother, notorious pirate Anne Bonney. The adventures of the two are told in dual timelines that of course join at the book's finale in a sensible, albeit, drawn out way. The book does tie into the events taking place in Golgotha and while you do miss the characters based in that fateful Nevada town, Maude being one of the most compelling characters in the series keeps you invested in her exploits that start in Charleston, but lead her to London and then the heart of Africa. Having watched Black Sails recently, I'm suffering from a bit of overexposure to the fictional adventures of Anne Bonney, so the timing of reading this when I did was a definite factor in how much I was able to enjoy the book. The mythical backstory of Typhus and Lilith and just about everything that takes place in Africa was pretty much lost on me because of how long it felt to get to that point. Meeting other Daughters and the threat of the Sons, as well as the eventual realization of yet another villain we will see in the next book in the series were welcomed developments although the number of beatings Maude takes yet still persevering became eye-rollingly repetitive. Considering how deep I am into the series, I will be sticking with it and while I hope the author can curb his penchant for crowbarring in so much into each book, I know from reading him that isn't going to happen. In the end, it's his creativity that wins out and is why I'll keep coming back for more.
