



# In Conquest Born

*C.S. Friedman*

Download now

Read Online ➔

# In Conquest Born

C.S. Friedman

## In Conquest Born C.S. Friedman

*In Conquest Born* is the monumental science fiction epic that received unprecedented acclaim-and launched C.S. Friedman's phenomenal career. A sweeping story of two interstellar civilizations-locked in endless war, it was nominated for the John W. Campbell Award.

*From the back cover:*

Braxi and Azea - two interstellar civilizations fighting an endless war over a long-forgotten cause; two peoples descended from the human species and bred over countless generations to embody opposing ideals, seeking opposite paths to power.

The Braxana - dominant tribe of the fierce Braxin Holding - are brilliant, powerful, and aloof from the society they rule. They were bred by their primitive forebearers to be aggressive, competitive, and secretive beyond all prior human norms. The mysteries of their internal society are legendary even among the people they rule.

The Azeans - masters of genetic science - have redesigned their own race to reflect ancient ideals. Now they seek to unlock the powers of the human mind, using telepathy to penetrate where mere weapons cannot.

But Zatar and Anzha - master Braxana and Azean generals - have exceeded all genetic expectations of their opposed cultures, and have made this endless war a personal vendetta. Who can say what will happen when these ultimate warriors use every power of mind and body to claim the vengeance of total conquest?

## In Conquest Born Details

Date : Published November 1st 2001 by DAW (first published 1986)

ISBN : 9780756400439

Author : C.S. Friedman

Format : Mass Market Paperback 530 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Space, Space Opera, Fantasy

 [Download In Conquest Born ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online In Conquest Born ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online In Conquest Born C.S. Friedman**

---

# From Reader Review In Conquest Born for online ebook

## Carlex says

Four and half stars

---

## Don says

No doubt about it, Friedman is a good author. Here she writes an intricately detailed, sprawling story, with lots of ideas. I really liked the previous book of hers that I read - The Madness Season. So I went into this one with high expectations.

Ultimately, I was a bit disappointed with it. It is a big epic story, focusing on two main characters, one on each side of rival human civilizations. My main problem with it was that it was so sprawling, I never felt that invested either of the characters. Just when I was starting to care about a character and interested in what was going on, the book would jump perspective AND many years. By the time it got back around to the other character, the events of an earlier chapter had already been resolved, and something different was happening. I guess that's why it's called a "Space Opera", and I can appreciate that for what it is, but in the end I wanted to see the story at a bit lower altitude than the 30,000ft view I was presented with.

I'm giving it three stars because it is a solid book, the characters were complex, and the story was grand, but I'm only giving it three stars because I just didn't enjoy it more than that.

---

## Chris Moyer says

In Conquest Born by C. S. Friedman is what I'd call a hardcore space opera. It's not a quick read. It's not a simple read. Complex names, concepts and characters fly fast and furious. It also feels like a plot on two levels.

First is the background, which is well enough developed to be a major part of the story. This is the Azean-Braxian war that almost seems to have always been in progress, and has no end in sight. Azea and Braxi are both spacefaring civilizations of basically human form. They have drastically different views on how to handle conquest, genetics, mating and leadership. War is almost a defining characteristic for both civilizations, but often on the fringes of society... the border zone is far enough in the galaxy that it rarely touches the lives of most.

The other plot is of two people... not surprisingly an Azean and a Braxian. Anzha, born a genetic in Azea struggles to find her place. Zatar, born to the ruling class of Braxia, quickly makes a name for himself, striking a deadly blow to the Azean war machine and getting elevated into the leadership council.

As a far-reaching space opera, this is not your typical sci-fi novel, detailing a single journey or discovery. The scope encompasses nearly a century of current events, and frequently segues off into historical background. The unexpected (for me) ending still has me pondering, two weeks later... always something I love in a book. I was fascinated with the explorations of eugenics, psychic ability, government and space

combat.

If you're ready for a sci-fi adventure that's not your average space romp, give this one a try.

---

### **Jennifer says**

My favorite CS Friedman book, by a mile. Centuries of interstellar war between two genetically engineered super-races of humans comes to a crux in a personal vendetta between two warriors. It's engrossing, richly drawn... and compelling because it's asking us to question our own motivations and how they can be intertwined and hidden to us. Appeals immensely to those who favors strong heroines. A strong book about strong people with some excellently thrilling twists.

---

### **Micha says**

I read some C.S. Friedman years ago, so I tried this. It was well written, of course, but I felt like there was no GOOD in the story, nothing to be happy about. The ending was satisfying, but unfortunately, it didn't make up for the rest of the experience.

---

### **Kogiopsis says**

Okay, so I've been staring at this book for a couple of months. Maybe three. I bought it at a library book sale on a whim, partly for the synopsis and partly for the awesome cover.

Seriously, take a good look at this thing. I adore it to bits and pieces. You can have all your new-wave abstract photomanip covers; I'll take the old-school sci-fi art like this. Just looking at it tells you so much - the characters' personalities are there in their faces and the way they stand. Anzha, the woman, is strong and confident, aggressive; she looks directly at the reader and almost challenges you with her gaze: you can't handle her, and she knows it. And then there's Zatar, the man: armed and dangerous, solemn and calculating. Anzha challenges, but Zatar scorns: you are lesser, and he will make you admit it.

The French covers are even better in some respects:

[image error]

For one thing, they got Zatar's sword on the right side - he's left-handed, Michael Whelan; why did you put it in his right on the original American cover? - and Anzha's hair is the proper blood red color. (Zatar's hair, on the other hand, is more accurate on the American cover. Oh well.)

The point of all this: I had high expectations going into this book. I wanted it to be good - better than good; I wanted it to be great. My pre-reading review, which is down at the bottom of this spoiler tagged so as not to take up space, should tell you how I felt about starting this. 'Apprehensive' is an understatement. It could have been so stupid and cliché, particularly since it was Friedman's first novel. Sure, most of the reviews here on Goodreads are glowing, but that doesn't ensure a good book - a lot of people rate things sentimentally, particularly old sci-fi that they read in their formative years, and lots of other people rate without giving what they've read a lot of critical thought. There was a chance that all those ratings were lying

and that this would be an absolutely terrible experience.

It so, so, so was not. 'Why' is a harder thing to define, though - in part because the experience of reading it is so intense; in part because a lot of the stunning moments come at the very end, so describing them would be extremely spoiler-heavy and I don't want to ruin the shock for anyone else.

The synopsis doesn't tell you much. It's really simplified, for one thing. **To anyone who winced when they read 'endless war', I feel your pain, but don't skip the book for that reason.** I know it's frustrating when authors use 'They've always been at war!' as an excuse for conflict, but I promise it works out well here - better than I had dared hope, really.

The war is really just backdrop, too. That may seem somewhat contradictory - after all, how can you have a story about two opposing generals without a war front and center? - but it's simply explained: the story isn't about Zatar and Anzha's victories and defeats in battle. It is about them as *people*. It is a genuinely **character-driven novel**.

Yes.

You read that right.

Instead of all the ineffective, boring laser-and-spaceship back-and-forth that you expected...

...where they just keep going and going and eventually one of them dies pointlessly because it's the only way to end things, here we have a book which is about realistic human beings (well, as much as can be expected given the setting) and the choices they make.

And what incredible human beings they are, too! Oh, this pair: they are extraordinary, a balance of sympathetic and unsympathetic traits in such ratios that they wind up being sympathetic if only because they feel vital and real.

First, there's Zatar, who we are introduced to shortly after his birth - a birth which is a rare thing among his people, the Braxana, rare enough that to celebrate its occurrence this martial race breaks the current peace treaty so that he may be named in wartime.

The Braxana are not the most pleasant of peoples. Indeed, the relationships between men and women in their society very nearly put me off the book entirely in the early chapters. Basically, the Braxana are a sub-group of the rest of their race, the Braxin, and they've bred themselves to physical perfection. There's an unfortunate amount of mooning over Zatar (who as a pureblooded Braxana is even more gorgeous than most; insert eyeroll here) from some of the one-shot female characters. It's like Edward Cullen... in space! Except not, because Zatar could kick that sparklepire's ass no problem.

But anyhow. The most disturbing part of the Braxin society is that, because they have trouble producing healthy children and are periodically ravaged by a plague... *all common women are considered sexually available at any time to any man unless they have 'Just Cause', most often a task given to them by a more important man, to refuse.*

...yeah.

And it's really, really, really gross.

This might even be a deal-breaker in the ethics department if not for two things: it's not even remotely portrayed as a positive, and the most important male-female relationship in the book is one of respect between equals.

Side note, not actually a spoiler: (view spoiler)

I'm not going to lie: Zatar does use this custom. What he doesn't do is abuse it, or kill the women in question as others of his class do. Does it make him less likeable? Sort of. Minor spoilers: (view spoiler)

He is without a doubt a product of his society. I don't say this to absolve him of his flaws, but to explain why they make sense and why he can be a sympathetic character even through them. In a culture that values cunning, trickery, and betrayal from any quarter he schemes and manipulates his way into power; to lead a people who revere war, he puts himself on the front lines as no one of his class has ever done before and thus wins their respect. My one major objection is that a lot of his motives are unclear in the beginning - for a long time he seems to be more of a good person than the other Braxana just because, which is frustrating. Later, though, a lot of factors are revealed and while some of his actions still seem without cause, others make good sense.

And then there's Anzha.

Guess who my favorite character was, I DARE YOU.

Damn... where to begin with Anzha?

Well, talk about a rough childhood. She was literally rejected by her entire race before she was even born, just because her genetic code didn't match the Azean ideal. (WTF, Azea? And here you seemed like such a world of peace and lurve - but there's all this hatred.) Thankfully, her parents fought for her and so the government, which had advised them to abort her, gave in: it allowed her to be born, but under heavy restrictions which basically cut her off from what could have been her people.

Of course then when she's about six years old, Zatar poisons her parents with pretty much the most horrific poison that's ever been imagined. (This happens in Chapter 3; it's not a spoiler.) The poison - the Black Death - uuuuuuurgh. Hidden because it might turn your stomach: (view spoiler)

After that experience - which, by the way, Anzha both witnessed and *felt* because she's a powerful telepath - she goes temporarily blind. And once she recovers from that, she goes on to become a stone-cold badass. There is doubtless not a single warrior race in the galaxy that she couldn't gain the respect of. Fighters who battle to the death for the entertainment of the masses and then drink the blood of their defeated enemy? She'll win them over before she's twelve. Hardy people on a frigid planet whose rite of passage is spending half a year crossing a massive icefield? She'll earn their respect before she even sets out. (view spoiler) Empire says that she's not a citizen, can't go to the military school? Yeah, right. All of this, though, is fueled by something potent: pure hatred. She knows who killed her parents and so drastically reshaped her life, and she is coming for him. God, this woman is so fantastically awesome.

But put them both in a room-

I can't begin to describe the sheer intensity of it.

Their first face-to-face meeting is one of the most incredible scenes I think I've ever read.

This is why the synopsis of this book appealed to me: I love the idea of nemeses. I love the idea of a rivalry which is, by definition, filled with hatred - but at the same time tempered by respect, because anyone who doesn't respect their nemesis gets defeated. I love the strength of the emotions involved. You can't purely hate someone if you also respect them, after all, because respect means that you begin to see their good points. The relationship between nemeses becomes something so tangled and passionate that it is the furthest thing from simple opposition. They relish the challenge, the tension of each confrontation whether it be in person or separated by light-years of space. There is always, it seems to me, an undercurrent of something that in a different set of circumstances could have been the most intense sort of love, because here are two perfectly matched minds. They can get away with being obsessed with each other, too, because their opposition is so single-minded.

Anzha and Zatar are a flawless example of everything I love in that kind of dynamic. This part of their first meeting encapsulates it perfectly:

"I will kill you," he said softly, "by my own hands, in my own time." The words welled up from his subconscious, from that part of his soul which ungered for the sword and chafed at civilization's imposed restrictions. He hadn't even realized that he knew them. "In my own way." How would she take this? Would she even understand? He hardly did himself. But she seemed to. Her eyes gleamed, and her body tensed. *This is what she wants*, he realized. "I will kill you," she answered, "by my own hands. In my own time. In my own way. No other will have you," she added, smiling her pleasure at the anticipated triumph.

...

He looked into her eyes - gleaming, triumphant - and sensed the rare extasy there would be in orchestrating her death. *I could lose myself for a while in the killing of you*, he thought.

(Paragraph removed because it doesn't make sense out of context.)

Maybe I'm revealing too much of myself in writing this, because surely the only kind of person who would find this so compelling would be someone totally savage. I don't think I'm that kind of person, but anything is possible, I suppose.

But look at that quote just for the words. It's a vow - a call-and-response almost, almost, like a wedding vow. And change one word in Zatar's last thought - he could be a lover contemplating his beloved, not a warrior contemplating his enemy.

That is the fine line between emotions, when they become this intense.

(view spoiler)

One of the best parts of their dynamic, though, is the respect. They plan around each other, not around the movements of the whole fleet, because each knows that the other is the true enemy, the true threat. Zatar thinks of Anzha as "some demonic creature midway between woman and the essence of War; she embodied all the variables that he could not predict, all the tricks of fate that were wont to bring a warrior to his knees. She and she alone could reduce his offensive to chaos."

Urgh. I just adore them both. The final scene - in Chapter 28 - it was just - just -

And the ending... well. 'Ambiguous' barely begins to cover it. So much is revealed in the epilogue that makes everything click, including some really fascinating worldbuilding. It doesn't feel out of place, though; indeed, it feels like the perfect ending to the story.

Apparently there is a sequel. I'm not interested. This book is so complete in and of itself, such a beautiful alchemy of unlikely parts, that I have zero desire to return to the universe it presented at another point.

**THIS IS BY NO MEANS A BOOK I RECOMMEND TO EVERYONE, OR EVEN MOST PEOPLE.**

I found it to be extraordinary, but not everyone will. If I could characterize the kind of reader likely to get the most out of it, I would, but I'm really not sure what that is. Approach with caution.

If you decide to read it, there are two things you need to be aware of:

1. It's written like a lengthy series of interconnected short stories at points. Viewpoint and time shifts dramatically between chapters, so be prepared - just because a character is a first-person narrator for ten or twenty pages doesn't mean you'll read more than mentions of them in the rest of the book. Some of the formats are odd and take some work to make sense of. It works - the book doesn't feel disjointed - but it's rather odd.
2. This was Friedman's first novel, and as a result it does have some early-novel flaws. In particular, the segments told in letters have a lot of 'as you know, Bob' to them, and some of the description can be ham-handed. There's more telling than showing in the early chapters. It's pretty much the best demonstration of what 'raw talent' means that I've seen: all the writing and plotting and characterization ability is present, but it's only barely been refined and so is still a little rough at the edges.

Those reasons - plus my strong objections to the Braxin culture - are why this is a four-star rating and not a five, despite how much I loved it and how giddy it made me afterwards.

Pre-review:(view spoiler)

---



## **Laurie says**

I was excited to read this as I had loved this author's first book in the Magister series, one of the few fantasy novels that managed to engage me. The premise of *In Conquest Born* is intriguing: two far-future civilizations--both genetically engineered to evolve as two separate species so that they are hardly recognizable as human, are fighting an endless war far from earth in some distant part of the galaxy. The author builds complex, multilayered civilizations, each with their own mores and societal hierarchies that probe interesting facets of human behavior and question our ideas about the reality of morality in an objective, godless universe. However, with an intensive focus on at least 27 different characters with unpronounceable names, I found it difficult to identify the protagonists. You live with some characters for many chapters only to have them disappear and never show up again, while other minor characters pop up at the end to play a major role. Additionally, while I don't like one-dimensional heroes, all of the characters were so deeply flawed and vicious, ego maniacs it was hard to feel even remotely connected. She also had this weird, Ayn Rand-like philosophy running through the characters words and emotions where only violence and hatred could fuel their ability to wield power and make huge changes to the course of events. I'd say this was a good first draft of a book that should have been great. Oh well.

---

## **Mark says**

A racist rape-y culture is in endless conflict with an even more racist culture...so why would I want to read this? Turns out, I don't.

---

## **Kat Hooper says**

Originally posted at Fantasy Literature.

If you like epic space opera with imaginatively detailed world-building and a focus on characters rather than gadgets, try *In Conquest Born*, C.S. Friedman's extremely impressive first novel. This complex, sprawling story begins with the births of two enemies-to-be from two different worlds that have been fighting each other for generations:

Zatar, a Braxin, is bred for beauty and aggression because those are the qualities his brutal, elitist, and misogynist culture admires. Ruthless, clever, and perfectly poised, he is preparing himself and his world for his ascendancy to a throne that does not yet exist in his oligarchic government. Part of making himself most qualified for this potential position involves manipulating, discrediting, or simply getting rid of any man who might stand in his way. (Women are no threat in Braxa... or are they?)

Anzha is an outsider in her Azean society because of her red hair — it's an indication of foreign blood somewhere in her lineage. Nonetheless, her psychic powers, which are revered in Azea, are strong and that, along with her unrelenting drive to prepare herself for revenge against the Braxin man who killed her parents, causes her to rise up in the Azean military ranks. When Zatar and Anzha finally meet, they each know they have met their match, and they immediately set out to destroy each other.

C.S. Friedman began building her worlds while she was in high school and continued developing them for years before submitting *In Conquest Born* to DAW. It shows. The world-building is excellent — both the Braxin and Azean societies (and others) are deeply explored from multiple perspectives. Among other things, each has its own art forms, attitudes toward women, sexual preferences, inherited strengths and weaknesses, and ideas about genetic manipulation and psychic abilities.

Friedman explains on her website that *In Conquest Born* originally began as “a collection of interconnected stories” which she developed into a novel which was partly re-written when her editor encouraged her to make the tale less “fragmented.” Still, the story feels somewhat disjointed because it covers a huge span of time (it’s a long time before Zatar and Anzha actually meet) and each chapter is a vignette told from one of several perspectives. This technique is advantageous in that it allows us to thoroughly explore Friedman’s worlds, but has the disadvantage of causing us to spend a lot of time with minor, and often expendable, characters. (But then, Zatar and Anzha are repulsive enough that it’s nice to have a break from them.)

Friedman’s plot is exciting — there’s political intrigue, treason, space battles, torture, planet explosions, and horrible deaths. The compelling plot is made even more readable by Friedman’s pleasantly sophisticated writing style which contains just a touch of black humor. She gives us lots to think about, too — nature vs. nurture, free will, parallel evolution, genetic modification. If I had liked her characters better and had been effortlessly carried along by a more cohesive plot, I’d have surely given *In Conquest Born* my highest recommendation. I have no doubt that C.S. Friedman has the skill to write a perfect novel and I look forward to reading more of her work in the future.

I listened to Audible Frontier’s version of *In Conquest Born* which was read by Joe Barrett. He gives a very nice reading which is not overly dramatic. His female voices sound much like his male voices, so a couple of times I assumed a newly-introduced female character was male until I was corrected by the text. Once I knew not to expect Mr. Barrett to use a feminine-sounding voice, I had no problem with his reading.

*In Conquest Born*, first published in 1986, was nominated for the John W. Campbell Award. A sequel, *The Wilding*, takes place generations later.

---

## **Cody says**

IN CONQUEST BORN is the greatest space-opera I have ever read, and I will even go so far as to say that it is the greatest space-opera penned by a human hand. This novel is the first foray I have into the multi-faceted, three-dimensional world of C.S. Friedman and I have to say that it was a pleasant experience and I’ve come away enriched in a way I never thought possible when it comes to the science-fiction genre.

The novel takes place far, far in the future in a galaxy that I can only assume is not our own. There is a war, raging for countless years with both sides never coming to an agreement. These sides are both human, one being the peaceful-honor bound Azea whose love for human genetics have solved several issues including aging, and brought rise to the unique ability of psychic awareness. Combating them is a human race called Braxana, a self-proclaimed master race whose ways are a bit more militant and chauvinistic when compared to their enemies. Within each of these races, there are a thousand planets each teaming with their own culture and values.

Of the two races, we receive the two main characters (the novel is riddled with major characters and minor ones) Ahzra, an uber-psychic hell-bent on destroying Braxi, and Zatar, apart of the ruling class of Braxa.

What starts out as just a usual exchange between rivals instantly becomes a personal vendetta against the two for two very different reasons.

The book is told through episodes, with each chapter in a different unique voice and character view (sometimes Zatar, sometimes a memory bank from a computer, sometimes even just a no-named citizen of some planet that has come under attack.) The novel is told in such an epic fashion that, upon its close, you don't even register the fact that there is no space combat involved.

The novels driving point, and why I think it's the greatest space opera ever written, is that it takes the science-fiction norms (epic war, races who hate, cybernetics, etc.) and puts them out of focus so your immediately immersed in a world that is plausible. Instead, real, intelligent characters are brought to the center stage over the canopy of heritage, and how each generation inherits the evils of their fathers and how, because of this, no war will ever really be ended. Not altogether a unique topic for a novel, but one I find refreshed in a space-opera (a genre so populated with bizarre aliens, bad writing, and light sabers.)

This is a book I recommend to everyone. At 500 pages, it's a brief read I think. A new addition just came out to print, so most bookstores should have it.

If this is what I can expect from C.S. Friedman, then by all means bring on her other novels.

---

### **StarMan says**

A space opera that was better than expected, due to intriguing characters and maneuverings (political and personal). I wished there had been more true ACTION, which makes me waffle between a 3.5 and 4 star rating.

VERDICT: 3.67 stars, rounded to 4. Especially considering this is Friedman's first novel, it is darn impressive in many ways.

PROS: Two powerful and determined opposing characters/civilizations, interesting developments, much trickery.

DOWNERS (minor): A bit difficult for me to keep track of all the characters. Not quite enough action.

---

### **Ramsey Hootman says**

This is one of those books I've passed over on bookstore shelves for years. Finally downloaded a sample and was hooked. In a purely literary sense, it's pretty rough. But that didn't matter. It was clever, it was interesting, it was epic in every sense of the word, and it had me turning pages all the way to the end. Which is all that really matters. I'm a sucker for alien culture stories of any kind.

My one criticism is that the end is rather abrupt and, honestly, did not feel emotionally satisfying to me. I think because most of the book spent so much time playing up extremes - everything was the MOST sensual

or frightening or [whatever] that [whoever] had ever experienced, so there was nowhere further for the climax to go, if that makes any sense. I didn't feel like the emotional resolution really worked for the characters, either. A "bad" ending will usually sour a book for me, but in this case I'm going to call it a minor quibble. Because so many of the chapters are almost self-contained stories, I was satisfied on many counts on many occasions, and the ending was more of a minor disappointment.

Also, I do have to comment on the edition I was reading - I downloaded the 15th anniversary edition on my Kindle. And the thing is ridiculously riddled with typos. "To" instead of "too," actually incorrect words like "fly" instead of "try," and a ton of misplaced commas and other miscellaneous punctuation. There was even one paragraph that had been split by a break right in the middle. It felt like someone had manually re-typed the entire thing and not gone back to proofread. Yeesh.

---

## **Stephen says**

4.5 stars. This was my first C.S. Friedman book and I just got done re-reading it to see if it was still as good as I remembered it. Short answer: yes it was. In general, I would describe this as smart, plot-orientated, "psychological" space opera. The story revolves around two generals (generals isn't exactly correct but close enough) from two very different cultures that have been at war for a very long time engaged in a very "personal" vendetta. Anzha, an Azean, is an exceptional telepath from a very reserved society that manipulates genetics in order to breed for mental superiority (reminding me a little bit of the Union government in C. J. Cherryh's Cyteen). Zatar, a Braxana, has been bred with superior mental and physical attributes as a member of a "class-ruled" warrior society that believes in racial purity and looks down upon all of races.

Early on in the book, these two individuals become "personal" enemies and the book follows them as they rise through the ranks of their society, acquire more power, and seek to use that power to destroy the other.

So much for plot synopsis. What really sets this book apart from lesser works of space opera, in addition to the excellent writing, is the way the different plot threads come together at the end to create a "much bigger story" than the surface plot of two "super generals" fighting an interstellar war. An excellent read and one that I HIGHLY RECOMMEND!!

---

## **Deirdre says**

I actually wanted to like this but somehow it didn't work all that well for me.

The Braxana and the Azean have been at war for generations. Braxana have a complicated society that's obscure to all but the initiated. Azeans are masters of genetic science and have their own rules that are also complicated and strange. Neither like each other and both consider that they know best. Zatar and Anzha are two generals on each side and they have made this war their own.

Somehow it just didn't work for me, it was interesting but I just didn't care all that much about any of the characters and when there were leaps in time I often didn't follow what was happening quick enough. I can

see why some people would love it, but I could also see why some would dislike it. Maybe if I had read it earlier in my life I would have preferred it. I'm going to read the sequel to see if I want to keep them both.

---

## **Andreas says**

Certainly impressive for a first novel, *In Conquest Born* details the struggle between Anzha and Zatar, prime representatives of their endlessly warring nations. The structure of the novel is unusual, as every chapter is somewhat like a short story in itself, often with different narrators, viewpoints and styles. The advantage is that exposition can be made from several angles. The disadvantage is a certain feeling of disjointedness as the device weakens the motivation to find out what happens next.

The narrative is epic with regards to time, space, and character development. The characterization is masterful indeed. Friedman goes on a deep dive into the conflicting cultures of the novel, especially the secretive Braxaná. This is, in fact, more a story of people than of technology. Few scenes have more than two or three characters, and we are treated to a well written exposé of the workings of the mind. It is very far from hard SF. While it could be called Space Opera, I would define it a psychological SF story.

Friedman proves that she can write a very complex novel without leaving the reader hopelessly confused. For that she definitely deserves credit. I enjoyed this odd semi-classic, despite the fact that it was a slog at times. At the end was the reward. The surprise ending made everything clear, tying up the many many tangents.

<http://www.books.rosboch.net/?p=759>

---