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Gardens Of The Moon

Steven Erikson

About the Book

The opening chapter in Steven Erikson's fantasy masterpiece...

The Malazan empire simmers with discontent, bled dry by interminable warfare, infighting and bloody confrontations with Anomander Rake, Lord of Moon's Spawn, and his Tiste Andii. Even the imperial legions yearn for some respite. Yet Empress Lasseen's rule – enforced by her feared Claw assassins – remains absolute.

For Sergeant Whiskeyjack and his squad of Bridgeburners, and for Tattersail, surviving sorceress of the Second Legion, the aftermath of the siege of Pale should have been a time to pause, to mourn the many dead. But the imperial gaze has fallen upon the ancient citadel of Darujhistan. This, the last of the Free Cities of Genabackis, yet dares to hold out.

However, the empire is not alone in this great game. Sinister, shadowbound forces gather as the gods themselves prepare to play their hand...

Steven Erikson is an archaeologist and anthropologist and a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop. The first seven novels in his *Malazan Book of the Fallen* sequence – *Gardens of the Moon*, *Deadhouse Gates*, *Memories of Ice*, *House of Chains*, *Midnight Tides*, *The Bonehunters* and *Reaper's Gale* – have met with widespread international acclaim and established him as a major voice in the world of fantasy fiction. The thrilling eighth instalment in this remarkable story, *Toll the Hounds*, is coming soon from Bantam Press. Steven Erikson lives in British Columbia, Canada.

www.rbooks.co.uk/stevenerikson

By Steven Erikson

GARDENS OF THE MOON

DEADHOUSE GATES

MEMORIES OF ICE

HOUSE OF CHAINS

MIDNIGHT TIDES

THE BONEHUNTERS

REAPER'S GALE

Gardens of the Moon
———A Tale of the———
Malazan Book of the Fallen

STEVEN ERIKSON



BANTAM BOOKS

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Maps drawn by Neil Gower

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This novel is dedicated to
I. C. Esslemont
worlds to conquer worlds to share

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Preface to *Gardens of the Moon* redux

There is no point in beginning something without ambition. In so many aspects of my life I have held to that notion, and it has led to more than one fiery crash through the years. I still recall, with some bitterness, the response Cam (Ian C. Esslemont) and I received when flogging our co-written feature film and television scripts: ‘Wonderful! Unique! Very funny, very dark . . . but here in Canada, well, we just can’t budget for this stuff. Good luck.’ In many ways, it was what followed by way of advice that proved the most crushing. ‘Try something . . . simpler. Something like everything else out there. Something less . . . *ambitious*.’

We’d walk out of meetings frustrated, despondent, baffled. Did we really hear an invitation to mediocrity? Sure sounded like it.

Well, screw that.

Gardens of the Moon. Just to muse on that title resurrects all those notions of ambition, all that youthful ferocity that seemed to drive me headlong against a wall time and again. The need to *push*. Defy convention. Go for the throat.

I like to think I was entirely aware of what I was doing back then. That my vision was crystal clear and that I was actually standing there, ready to spit in the face of the genre, even as I reveled in it (for how could I not? As much as I railed against the tropes, I loved reading the stuff). Now, I’m not so sure. It’s easy to ride on instinct in the moment, only to look back later and attribute cogent mindfulness to everything that worked (while ignoring everything that didn’t). Too easy.

In the years and many novels since, certain facts have made themselves plain. Beginning with *Gardens of the Moon*, readers will either hate my stuff or love it. There’s no in-between. Naturally, I’d rather everybody loved it, but I understand why this will never be the case. These are not lazy books. You can’t float through, you just can’t. Even more problematic, the first novel begins halfway through a seeming marathon – you either hit the ground running and stay on your feet or you’re toast.

When challenged with writing this preface, I did consider for a time using it as a means of gentling the blow, of easing the shock of being dropped from a great height into very deep water, right there on page one of *Gardens of the Moon*. Some background, some history, some setting of the stage. I’ve since mostly rejected the idea. Dammit, I don’t recall Frank Herbert doing anything like that with *Dune*, and if any novel out there was a direct inspiration in terms of structure, that was the one. I’m writing a history and fictional or not, history has no real beginning point; even the rise and fall of civilizations are far more muddled on the front and back ends than many people might think.

Gardens of the Moon’s bare bones first saw life in a role-playing game. Its first

draught was as a feature film co-written by the two creators of the Malazan world, myself and Ian C. Esslemont; a script that languished for lack of interest ('we don't do fantasy films because they suck. It's a dead genre. It involves costumes and costume dramas are as dead as Westerns' – all this before a whole slew of production companies shoved that truism in their faces, all this long before *Lord of the Rings* hit the big screen).

And that was just it. We were there. We had the goods, we knew that Adult Epic Fantasy was film's last unexplored genre – we didn't count *Willow*, which only earned merit in our eyes for the crossroads scene; the rest of the stuff was for kids through and through. And all the other films coming out in that genre were either B flicks or egregiously flawed in our eyes (gods, what could have been done with *Conan!*). We wanted a Fantasy version of *The Lion in Winter*, the one with O'Toole and Hepburn. Or *The Three Musketeers* adaptation with Michael York, Oliver Reed, Raquel Welch, Richard Chamberlain, etc, just add magic, mates. Our favourite television production was Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective*, the original one with Gambon and Malahyde. We wanted sophisticated shit, you see. We were pushing Fantasy in that sizzling, scintillating context of jaw-dropping admiration. We were, in other words, as ambitious as hell.

Probably, too, we weren't ready. We didn't quite have the stuff. Thinking past our abilities, trapped in the lack of experience. The curse of the young.

When life took Cam in one direction and me in another, we both carried with us the notes for an entire created world. Constructed through hours upon hours of gaming. We had an enormous history all worked out – the raw material for twenty novels, twice as many films. And we each had copies of a script nobody wanted. The Malazan world was there in hundreds of hand-drawn maps, in pages upon pages of raw notes, in GURPS (Steve Jackson's Generic Universal Role Playing System – an alternative to AD&D) character sheets, building floor-plans, sketches, you name it.

The decision to begin writing the history of the Malazan world began a few years later. I would convert the script into a novel. Cam would write a related novel entitled *Return of the Crimson Guard* (and now, all these years later, and fresh on the heels of his *Night of Knives*, Cam's first epic, *Return*, is going to be published). As works of fiction, authorship would belong to the actual writer, the person putting word after word onto the page. For *Gardens*, the conversion meant almost starting from scratch. The script was three acts all set in Darujhistan. The main events were the assassin war on the rooftops and the grand, explosive finale of the fete. There was virtually nothing else. No back story, no context, no real introduction of characters. It was, in fact, more *Raiders of the Lost Ark* than *The Lion in Winter*.

Ambition never goes away. It may shuffle off, grumbling, feet dragging, only to slide across into something else – usually the next project. It doesn't take 'no' for an answer.

In writing *Gardens*, I quickly discovered that 'back story' was going to be a problem no matter how far back I went. And I realized that, unless I spoon-fed my potential readers (something I refused to do, having railed often enough at writers of fantasy epics treating us readers as if we were idiots), unless I 'simplified', unless I slipped down into the well-worn tracks of what's gone before, I was going to leave readers floundering. And not just readers, but editors, publishers, agents . . .

But, you know, as a reader, as a fan, I never minded floundering – at least for a little while, and sometimes for a long while. So long as other stuff carried me along, I was fine. Don't forget, I worshipped Dennis Potter. I was a fan of DeLillo's *The Names* and Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*. The reader I had in mind was one who could and would carry the extra weight – the questions not yet answered, the mysteries, the uncertain alliances.

History has proved this out, I think. Readers either bail on the series somewhere in the first third of *Gardens of the Moon*, or they're still sharing the ride to this day, seven going on eight books later.

I have been asked, would I have done it any differently in hindsight? And I honestly don't have an answer to that. Oh, there are elements of style that I'd change here and there, but . . . fundamentally, I'm just not sure what else I could have done. I am not and never will be a writer happy to deliver exposition that serves no other function than telling the reader about back story, history, or whatever. If my exposition doesn't have multiple functions – and I do mean multiple – then I'm not satisfied. Turns out, the more functions in it, the more complicated it gets, the more likely it will quietly shift into misdirection, into sleight of hand, and all the back story elements, while possibly there, end up buried and buried deep.

This was fast-paced writing, but it was also, bizarrely and in ways I still can't quite figure, *dense* writing. So, *Gardens* invites you to read rip-roaringly fast. But the author advises: you'd best not succumb to the temptation.

Here we are, years later now. Should I apologize for that bipolar invitation? To what extent did I shoot myself in the foot with the kind of introduction to the Malazan world as delivered in *Gardens of the Moon*? And has this novel left me dancing on one foot ever since? Maybe. And sometimes, on midnight afternoons, I ask myself: what if I'd picked up that fat wooden ladle, and slopped the whole mess down the reader's throat, as some (highly successful) Fantasy writers do and have done? Would I now see my sales ranking in the bestseller's lists? Now hold on – am I suggesting that those ultra popular Fantasy writers have found their success in writing down to their readers? Hardly. Well, not all of them. But then, consider it from my point of view. It took eight years and a move to the UK for *Gardens of the Moon* to find a publisher. It took four more years before a US deal was finalized. The complaint? 'Too complicated, too many characters. Too . . . ambitious.'

I could take the fish-eyed retrospective angle here and say how *Gardens* marked a departure from the usual tropes of the genre, and any departure is likely to meet resistance; but my ego's not that big. It never felt like a departure. Glen Cook's *Dread Empire* and *Black Company* novels had already broken the new ground, but I'd read all those and, wanting more, I pretty much had to write them myself (and Cam felt the same). And while my style of writing did not permit imitation (he's a terse one, is Cook), I could certainly strive for the same tone of dispirited, wry cynicism, the same ambivalence and a similar sense of atmosphere. Maybe I was aware of the swing away from Good versus Evil, but that just seemed a by-product of growing up – the real world's not like that, why persist in making Fantasy worlds so fundamentally

disconnected with reality?

Well, I don't know. It's exhausting just thinking about it.

Gardens is what it is. I have no plans on revision. I don't even know where I'd start.

Better, I think, to offer the readers a quick decision on this series – right there in the first third of the first novel, than to tease them on for five or six books before they turn away in disgust, disinterest or whatever. Maybe, from a marketing position, the latter is preferred – at least in the short term. But, thank God, my publishers know a false economy when they see one.

Gardens of the Moon is an invitation, then. Stay with it, and come along for the ride. I can only promise that I have done my best to entertain. Curses and cheers, laughter and tears, it's all in here.

One last word to all you nascent writers out there. Ambition is not a dirty word. Piss on compromise. Go for the throat. Write with balls, write with eggs. Sure, it's a harder journey but take it from me, it's well worth it.

Cheers,

Steven Erikson

Victoria, British Columbia

December 2007

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The Malazan Empire

Onearm's Host

Tattersail, Cadre Sorceress, 2nd Army, a reader of the Deck of Dragons

Hairlock, Cadre Mage, 2nd Army, an unpleasant rival of Tayschrenn

Calot, Cadre Mage, 2nd Army, Tattersail's lover

Toc the Younger, scout, 2nd Army, a Claw agent badly scarred at the Siege of Pale

The Bridgeburners

Sergeant Whiskeyjack, 9th Squad, past commander of the 2nd Army

Corporal Kalam, 9th Squad, an ex-Claw from Seven Cities

Quick Ben, 9th Squad, a Seven Cities Mage

Sorry, 9th Squad, a deadly killer in the guise of a young girl

Hedge, 9th Squad, a sapper

Fiddler, 9th Squad, a sapper

Trotts, 9th Squad, a Barghast warrior

Mallet, 9th Squad, the squad healer

Sergeant Antsy, 7th Squad

Picker, 7th Squad

The Imperial Command

Ganoes Stabro Paran, a noble-born officer in the Malazan Empire

Dujek Onearm, High Fist, Malazan Armies, Genabackis Campaign

Tayschrenn, High Mage to the Empress

Bellurdan, High Mage to the Empress

Nightchill, High Sorceress to the Empress

A'Karonys, High Mage to the Empress

Lorn, Adjunct to the Empress

Topper, Commander of the Claw

Empress Laseen, Ruler of the Malazan Empire

House Paran (Unta)

Tavore, Ganoes' sister (middle-child)

Felisin, Ganoes' youngest sister

Gamet, House Guard and veteran

In the Emperor's Time

Emperor Kellanved, the founder of the Empire, assassinated by Laseen
Dancer, the Emperor's chief adviser, assassinated by Laseen
Surly, Laseen's old name when Commander of the Claw
Dassem Ultor, the First Sword of Empire, killed outside Y'ghatan, Seven Cities
Toc (the Elder), disappeared in Laseen's purges of the Old Guard

In Darujhistan

The Phoenix Inn Regulars

Kruppe, a man of false modesty
Crokus Younghand, a young thief
Rallick Nom, an assassin in the Guild
Murillio, a courtier
Coll, a drunk
Meese, a regular
Irilta, a regular
Scurve, the barman
Sulty, a serving woman
Chert, an unlucky bully

The T'orrud Cabal

Baruk, a High Alchemist
Derudan, a Witch of Tennes
Mammot, a High Priest of D'riss and eminent scholar, uncle to Crokus
Travale, a pious soldier of the Cabal
Tholis, a High Mage
Parald, a High Mage

The Council

Turban Orr, a powerful councilman and Simtal's lover
Lim, an ally of Turban Orr
Simtal, Lady of Simtal Estate
Estraysian D'Arle, a rival of Turban Orr
Challice D'Arle, his daughter

The Guild of Assassins

Vorcan, Mistress of the Guild (also known as the Master of Assassins)
Ocelot, Rallick Nom's Clan Leader
Talo Krafar, an assassin of Jurrig Denatte's Clan
Krute of Talient, an agent of the Guild

Also in the city

The Eel, a rumoured master-spy
Circle Breaker, an agent of the Eel
Vildrom, a city guard
Captain Stillis, Captain of Guard, Simtal Estate

Further players

The Tiste Andii

Anomander Rake, Lord of Moon's Spawn, Son of Darkness, Knight of Darkness
Serrat, second-in-command to Rake
Korlat, a night-hunter and blood-kin to Serrat
Orfantal, a night-hunter
Horult, a night-hunter

The T'lan Imass

Logros, Commander of the T'lan Imass Clans serving the Malazan Empire
Onos T'oolan, a clanless warrior
Pran Chole, a Bonecaster (shaman) of the Kron T'lan Imass
Kig Aven, a Clan Leader

Others

Crone, a Great Raven and servant to Anomander Rake
Silanah, an Eleint and companion to Anomander Rake
Raest, a Jaghut Tyrant
K'rul, an Elder God, the Maker of Paths
Caladan Brood, the warlord, opposing the Malazan armies in the North Campaign
Kallor, Brood's second-in-command
Prince K'azz D'Avore, Commander of the Crimson Guard
Jorrick Sharplance, a Crimson Guard officer
Cowl, a High Mage in the Crimson Guard
Corporal Blues, Sixth Blade of the Crimson Guard
Fingers, Sixth Blade of the Crimson Guard
The Hound Baran, a Hound of Shadow
The Hound Blind, a Hound of Shadow
The Hound Gear, a Hound of Shadow
The Hound Rood, a Hound of Shadow
The Hound Shan, a Hound of Shadow
The Hound Doan, a Hound of Shadow
The Hound Ganrod, a Hound of Shadow
Shadowthrone/Ammanas, Ruler of the Warren of Shadow

The Rope/Cotillion, Companion of Shadowthrone and Patron of Assassins
Icarium, Builder of the Wheel of Ages in Darujhistan

Mappo, Icarium's companion

The Pannion Seer, a Prophet Tyrant ruling the Pannion Domin

