

Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon

Introduction: A Bold Entry into Epic Fantasy

Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon is not just a debut novel—it is a declaration of intent. Published in 1999, this first volume of Steven Erikson’s ten-book series, *The Malazan Book of the Fallen*, immediately set itself apart from conventional epic fantasy. Readers who pick up **Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon** quickly discover that they are entering a world of staggering complexity, moral ambiguity, and deep historical weight. Unlike many fantasy series that slowly introduce their world, Erikson drops readers into the middle of an ancient, war-torn continent called Genabackis, trusting them to piece together the lore, politics, and magic through context. This approach has made the novel both celebrated and polarizing, but for those who persist, it offers one of the richest reading experiences in modern fantasy literature.

In this article, we will explore the plot, characters, themes, and lasting impact of **Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon**. We will also examine why this book continues to be discussed, analysed, and recommended two decades after its publication. Whether you are a newcomer curious about the Malazan series or a seasoned reader looking for deeper insights, this comprehensive guide will illuminate what makes **Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon** a landmark work.

Overview of the Plot

The story begins in the city of Darujhistan, but quickly expands across the continent. The Malazan Empire, a vast and militaristic empire, is on a campaign of conquest. The Empire is led by the ambitious Empress Laseen, who has consolidated power after the mysterious death of the previous Emperor, Kellanved. The novel follows two primary story arcs: the siege of the city of Pale, and the subsequent political and magical manoeuvres in Darujhistan.

At the heart of the narrative is the Bridgeburners, a legendary elite company of soldiers within the Malazan army. They are led by the enigmatic Captain Ganoes Paran, a young nobleman who finds himself entangled with gods, ancient races, and powerful sorceries. The Bridgeburners are tasked with besieging the sorceress city of Pale, defended by the formidable Tayschrenn, the High Mage of the Empire. But nothing is as it seems. Treachery, ancient rivalries, and the intervention of ascendant beings—humans who have transcended mortality—turn the siege into a catastrophic event that reshapes the continent's power balance.

Simultaneously, in Darujhistan, we meet a cast of thieves, assassins, and politicians. The city is ruled by a council of wealthy traders, but underneath lies a web of secret societies and hidden powers. The assassin Kalam, the young thief Sorry (who is possessed by a god), the mage Quick Ben, and the Tiste Andii mage Anomander Rake all play crucial roles. The plot weaves through assassination attempts, magical duels, and political intrigue, leading to a climactic confrontation that is both epic and deeply personal.

For a first-time reader, the plot of **Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon** can feel fragmented. Erikson does not explain the magic system, the history of the world, or the hierarchy of gods. Instead, he reveals information through dialogue, internal monologue, and action. This technique rewards careful reading and invites re-reading. The story is not linear; it operates on multiple layers of causality, where events in the past, present, and even in other realms (such as the warren dimensions that mages use) influence the outcome.

Key Characters That Define the Novel

Ganoes Paran

Paran is the central human protagonist, though he often feels like a pawn. He is a young noble who joins the Malazan military and is assigned to the Bridgeburners. His arc involves learning the true cost of command, the corruption within the Empire, and his own latent powers tied to the god of chance, Oponn. Paran’s moral struggle—torn between duty and conscience—makes him a relatable entry point into this chaotic world.

Anomander Rake

Rake is a Tiste Andii, a dark-skinned, silver-haired race of ancient beings. He is the lord of Moon’s Spawn, a floating fortress, and wields the sword Dragnipur, which contains a dark, eternal realm. Rake is enigmatic, powerful, and tragic. He is not a villain; he is a force of nature with his own agenda. His presence in **Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon** elevates the story from a simple military campaign to a clash of cosmic philosophies.

Quick Ben and Kalam

This duo provides much of the novel’s humour and strategic depth. Quick Ben is a former priest who became a mage, possessing knowledge of multiple warrens. Kalam is a legendary assassin from the Seven Cities region. Their loyalty to the Bridgeburners is absolute, but they are also deeply cynical about the Empire. Their subplot involving a plot to assassinate the Empress adds a layer of conspiracy to the main narrative.

Sorry (Apsalar)

Sorry is a young woman from a fishing village who becomes possessed by the god Shadowthrone (the former Emperor). As “Apsalar,” she is a deadly assassin with fragmented memories. Her presence raises questions about identity, free will, and the nature of divinity. Sorry’s journey is one of the most poignant in the series.

Empress Laseen

Laseen is a shadowy figure throughout **Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon**. She is ruthless, intelligent, and feared. Her motivations are slowly revealed through the actions of her agents. She represents the cost of empire: order and progress built on blood and betrayal.

Themes and Philosophical Depth

Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon is not merely a story of battles and magic. It is a meditation on power, mortality, and compassion. Several recurring themes are established in this first book that echo throughout the series.

Empire and Colonialism

The Malazan Empire is a conqueror, but Erikson does not present it as purely evil. The Empire brings infrastructure, law, and unity, but at the cost of local cultures and lives. The Bridgeburners are soldiers who often question the morality of their orders. This nuanced view of empire resonates with real-world history.

Gods and Ascendancy

Gods in this world are not abstract entities; they are active players who can be killed, manipulated, and even created. The term “ascendant” refers to mortals who have gained enough power to rival gods. **Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon** introduces the idea that power attracts chaos, and that every mortal action has divine consequences.

Compassion and Sacrifice

Erikson has stated that the central theme of the Malazan series is compassion. In **Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon**, we see characters making sacrifices for their comrades, sometimes with no reward. The Bridgeburners’ loyalty to each other, despite the betrayals from their own command, underscores this theme. Even seemingly villainous characters are shown to have motivations rooted in pain or duty.

Memory and History

The past is never dead in this book. Ancient races, forgotten wars, and buried gods influence current events. The very title “Gardens of the Moon” refers to a mythical place that holds secrets. Erikson’s background as an archaeologist shines through; history is layered, and digging deeper reveals uncomfortable truths.

Writing Style and Narrative Technique

Erikson’s prose in **Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon** is dense, poetic, and often jarring. He uses a third-person omniscient narrator who can jump between characters’ minds within a single paragraph. Dialogue is terse and philosophical. Action scenes are vivid but not over-described. Magic is mysterious and terrifying—warrens are described as alternative dimensions that can be traversed, but the rules are never fully explained.

One of the most debated aspects is the lack of exposition. A typical fantasy novel might begin with a map, a prologue of ancient history, or a character being taught the basics of magic. Erikson does none of that. Readers are expected to infer. This creates a steep learning curve, but it also makes the world feel real and lived-in. The reader is an anthropologist discovering a new civilisation.

Another hallmark is Erikson’s use of dramatic irony. Often, the reader knows more than the characters, especially regarding the scheming of gods. This creates tension and dark humour. The book is also deeply intertextual, referencing concepts from other cultures, mythology, and even Erikson’s own earlier works (such as the prequel novellas).

Reception and Legacy

Upon its initial release, **Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon** received mixed reviews. Some praised its ambition and originality, while others criticised its confusing plot and lack of clear protagonist. However, as the series progressed and readers revisited the first book, its reputation grew. Today, it is considered a foundational work of dark epic fantasy, often mentioned alongside *The Wheel of Time* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

The novel has been praised for its diverse cast, including strong female characters (such as Laseen and Sorry) and complex personalities from various ethnicities (the Bridgeburners are notably multiracial). It also subverts typical fantasy tropes: the “chosen one” is not a hero but a flawed soldier; the villainous empire is not one-dimensional; magic comes at a high cost.

Critics sometimes note that **Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon** reads like a novel written by a role-playing game designer (Erikson co-created the GURPS supplement *Malazan* with Ian C. Esslemont). The plot does resemble a tabletop campaign, with multiple factions, unexpected twists, and a focus on tactical combat. This style appeals to some readers but alienates others.

Why Read Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon?

For readers who enjoy intellectual challenges, world-building depth, and moral complexity, this book is a treasure. It is not a quick, light read. It demands patience, attention, and a willingness to be confused. But the payoff is immense. The characters stay with you. The themes resonate long after you turn the last page.

If you are new to the series, it is recommended to approach **Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon** with a few strategies:

- **Read the glossary** provided at the end of the book – it helps with names and terms.
- **Do not expect to understand everything** on the first read. Trust that it will make sense later.
- **Focus on character relationships** rather than the overall plot.
- **Consider using a companion guide** (like the Tor.com reread) for clarification.

Many readers find that the experience is transformative. The Malazan series does not simply tell a story; it creates a feeling of immersion in a world that is ancient, brutal, and beautiful. **Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon** is the key that unlocks that world.

Conclusion

Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of The Moon is a bold, uncompromising opening to one of the most ambitious series in fantasy literature. It challenges readers to abandon their expectations and embrace a narrative that is as chaotic as it is profound. With its intricate plot, unforgettable characters, and deep thematic resonance, this novel has earned its place in the canon of great fantasy works. Whether you are looking for military tactics, godly intrigue, or philosophical explorations of power and compassion, this book delivers. It is a gateway to a universe that rewards persistence and offers rewards that few other series can match. If you have not yet ventured into the world of Malazan, let **Malazan Of The Fallen Gardens Of**