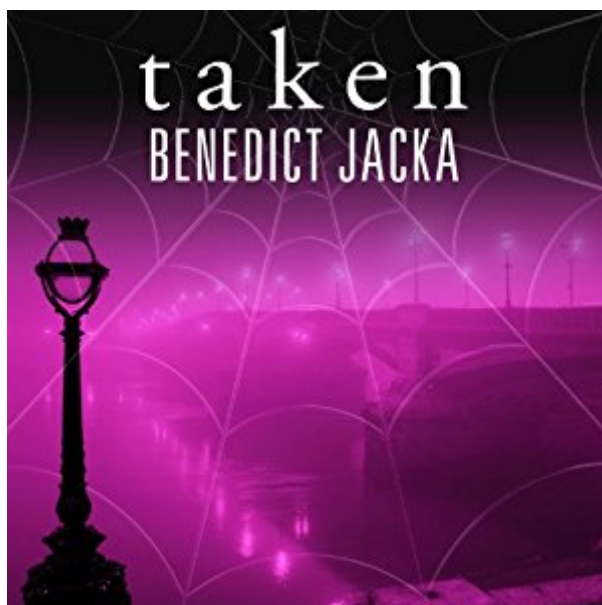


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Taken: Alex Verus Series, Book 3



Synopsis

This time last year, I could go weeks without seeing another mage. In mage society I was an unknown and, all in all, that was how I liked it. It's hard to say what changed. Whatever it was, I got involved in the magical world again and started getting myself a reputation. Alex Verus's insights into the future used to be the best-kept secret in London. Now, with the aid of his apprentice, Luna, his unique investigative talents are all the rage. He just has to be careful about picking his employers, because everyone - even the beautiful woman who practically begs him to run security for a prestigious tournament - has motives that can be hard to predict. And Alex doesn't do unpredictable. But his latest gig just might be impossible. Apprentices have been vanishing without a trace - and someone on the Council could be involved. Alex has no evidence, no witnesses, and no suspects. All he knows is that someone is keeping tabs on him. And after assassins target Luna's classmate, Alex sees that he doesn't know the half of it - and that he could be the next to disappear.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I'll be honest when I say that while I'll definitely buy the next book in the series, I was a little underwhelmed by this book. There was just so much about this that screamed of awesomeness, but somewhere in the delivery it just sort of felt a little "been there, done that". First off, the premise of this is great. Jacka has built a nicely formed world ala Harry Dresden, even giving the fictional wizard a nod in the beginning of the novel. I also liked the idea of having Alex running a magic shop,

which gives us lots of possibilities for future novels. The character of Alex is rather nice, being both a jerk and a relatively nice guy, sometimes in the same breath. True, he's your typical world-weary-everyone-hates-him sort of character, but these types are popular for a reason. Nobody really wants to read about "Mike, the guy who was liked by everyone and never had anything bad happen to him or anyone else ever", at least not unless he's going to have some bad stuff thrown at him in the course of the story. Plus a talking spider? Awesomeness. The only downfall is that despite some pretty good stuff going on in the book, there are also points in the book where I just felt a little bored and the plot just seems to sort of drag under its own weight. It just felt a little meh for the most part, especially towards the ending. Like I said, I liked the book well enough to where I'll buy the next book in the series and know that it deserves at least three stars, but not enough to where I feel particularly inspired to give it more than three stars.

Third and latest installment in this series so far, Taken is a joyful ride to what is slated to become a major Harry Dresden like Urban Fantasy series. Alex Verus is minor mage, so insignificant nobody really care about him. Well... that is, until he begins to kill off two powerful mages. People are then taking an interest. Verus is more of a Diviner than a mage, really. And he has an apprentice tagging along with her own set of problems too. And they both intelligently weasel their way out of problems and killing attempts aimed their way by spiteful foes. This book is like the first two. A joyful ride in a sympathetic England. With the same flaws and the same endearing qualities. The author does a good job depicting flawed characters. Alex and the main characters are rather well fleshed out and the plot, though simple, is enough to keep us entertained. And all through this book are hints of what could happen in the next novels, just to keep us on edge. All in all, I would say I expect much in the future and I hope I won't be disappointed with this series as I have been with so many others.

There are many urban fantasy books out there. Wizards, witches, vampires, etc. How many are written about a diviner? One of the many things that makes this series so interesting. Jacka writes tight storylines without much filler. Yet he doesn't fill his pages with pyrotechnics. Of all the urban fantasies I've read this comes off as the most 'real.' He has the ability to drop you into his world without going into long winded unnecessary filler. Easy writing style, interesting storylines and protagonist, you can't go wrong with any of these books. Every bit as good if not better than Butcher. Now I'm off to buy the latest book in this series. Highly recommended.

Let's check to see if Benedict Jacka's Fated has all the cliché elements of the "Contemporary Urban

Fantasy" genre, "Rogue Wizard" subgenre: Snarky, down on his luck, outcast, put upon wizard...check. Elitist wizard counsel filled with pompous, self-dealing buffoons...check. Damsel in distress....check. Powerful friends who are always there to help out our hero...check. Mysterious things afoot that can only be put right by an outsider...check. Yup, they are all there. That's not to say that this book should be avoided. Cliches define a genre. A Western wouldn't be much of a Western without horses and gun fights. A mystery pretty much demands a detective, a puzzle and a villain. The question is what does the author do with the elements of the genre? Jacka does an engaging job of putting together the elements that we've seen in Jim Butcher's Dresden series or Glen Cook's Garrett stories and then providing a twist so that the elements are there but the story is fresh and engaging. The twist in *Fated* is that Alex Verus is a diviner. In Jacka's world, wizards are divided into two broad categories - Light and Dark - depending on their ethical attitudes toward the "will to power," apparently - and further divided by what kind of magic they wield. Verus doesn't have death magic or fire magic or earth magic; he has the ability to see the future, which seems to be a pretty puny ability in a society where other wizards can fry you if they take a mind to do so. But here is where Jacka shines by putting Alex into situations where his divination is powerful indeed. For example, since Alex can see what would have happened if he chose to do a certain thing or travel along a certain path, he can search a house in no time flat and avoid traps that his fellow wizards with their flashier powers can't and won't. This aspect of the book reminded me of nothing so much as Nicholas Cage's character in *Next*. I found Alex to be mercifully less snarky and less of an obvious wanna-be "bad ass" than a lot of characters in this genre. I find that cliché gets tiring. Rather, Alex has rejected the glambours of the Dark mage lifestyle, although he hasn't thrown his lot in with the Light mages, because he recognizes that the cruelty and oppression of the Dark mages is wrong. Or perhaps the better way to put it is that he sees that other people are something better than tools to be used by the powerful. We'll see if this ethical direction continues in later books. The problem that confronts Alex is the discovery of a "precursor" object that is said to contain a powerful magical device. Everyone is making a grab for it, and quite by chance, the key to the problem falls into Alex's lap. Alex is put into a situation where he can prevail only by virtue of his gift and his friends. Oh, and there is a nice twist at the end, which took the story in a direction that I hadn't anticipated. Since this is the beginning of a series, we are introduced to the ensemble of allies that will - presumably - follow Alex into succeeding stories. There is Luna, the girl who is cursed and can't be touched and might be Alex's love interest, and Arachne, the giant spider-being who makes Alex's clothes, and Starbreeze, the air elemental who acts as his taxi service. I found the book and the character engaging. I'm going to read future instalments. Since that is the standard by which I

measure the quality of this kind of genre book, I give it five stars and the recommendation that if you are looking for an engaging urban fantasy, whether you are a long time fan of contemporary urban fantasy or someone looking to cut his teeth on the genre, check this one out.

Jim Butcher even has a comment and there's a little shout out early on to "Some guy in Chicago that lists himself in the Yellowpages under Wizard". In many ways this world and series is similar to Harry Dresden (altho, frankly, I prefer Jim Butcher), and for those of us that get antsy waiting for the new book by Jim, this is a more than adequate series to tide us over. One nice thing is that the protagonist is a Diviner, who has to use his wits and foreknowledge rather than blasting his way out of a situation. Very readable, not too dark.

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