



Tremontaine: The Complete Season One

Ellen Kushner , Alaya Dawn Johnson , Malinda Lo , Joel Derfner , Racheline Maltese , Patty Bryant , Paul Witcover (Guest Author)

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Welcome to *Tremontaine*, the prequel to Ellen Kushner's beloved Riverside series that began with *Swordspoint*! A Duchess whose beauty is matched only by her cunning; her husband's dangerous affair with a handsome scholar; a foreigner in a playground of swordplay and secrets; and a mathematical genius on the brink of revolution—when long-buried lies threaten to come to light, betrayal and treachery know no bounds with stakes this high. Mind your manners and enjoy the chocolate in a dance of sparkling wit and political intrigue.

Tremontaine is an episodic serial presented by Serial Box Publishing. This collected omnibus edition gathers all 16 episodes from Season 1.

Tremontaine: The Complete Season One Details

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From Reader Review Tremontaine: The Complete Season One for online ebook

Burgoo says

Romance and adventure in the chocolate trade! Big fun.

<http://fedpeaches.blogspot.com/2016/0...>

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

3 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2017/04/27/...>

Driven by the excellent experience I had with Bookburners earlier this year, I vowed to myself I would check out more serials from Serial Box. Pleasantly surprised by how well the structure of the serial novel worked for me, I wanted more—and thus my attention immediately fell upon Tremontaine Season One, the collection of all thirteen episodes released from Saga Press.

But while Bookburners came out of the gate running, throwing readers headfirst into the action right from the start, Tremontaine turned out to be a more measured affair, taking a handful of episodes to establish the setting and characters before easing into the meat of the story. Another way to look at it might be: if Bookburners is perfect for fans of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, then the pacing and themes of Tremontaine would probably make it more appealing to fans of the action, romances, and politics of period dramas.

To provide a bit of context, Tremontaine is actually considered a prequel to Ellen Kushner's highly acclaimed Riverside series, which I confess I have not read—though I know that the first book *Swordpoint* and the subsequent novels set in the same universe have been praised for its diversity and LGBT-friendly characters and world. Tremontaine continues in this tradition. In episode one, we are introduced to a vibrant setting, its atmosphere seemingly reminiscent of 17th or 18th century Europe. There appears to be two sides to this city, one characterized by luxuriously dressed nobles indulging themselves with decadent balls, masquerades, and of course, copious amounts of chocolate. The other side is a darker, seedier underworld where all manner of rogues and scoundrels gather to do their drinking, whoring, and gambling.

Among the nobles, one of the most prominent figures is Diane the Duchess of Tremontaine, a beautiful woman with a calculating eye and a sharp mind seeking to restore the glory of her House. While her husband is the one who technically holds ducal authority, in truth it is Diane who has all the power. Next we meet Ixkaab Balam, a young foreign woman who hails from an influential merchant family, newly arrived by boat to make her name in this strange land. Other members of the key cast also include Micah, an autistic farm girl whose uncanny talent for mathematics eventually leads her to a university where she meets Rafe, a passionate scholar who has dreams of one day opening his own school.

With all these disparate plotlines in play, things simmer for a while before exploding. I would say that, as much as I enjoyed the first handful of episodes, I did not consider myself thoroughly hooked until much later in the novel. Tremontaine is a serial that takes a slow burn approach, steadily building its foundations so that when the long anticipated action and passions do come, they are much more impactful. This does mean that it takes a good deal of patience to get to the exciting parts, but sticking it out will pay off in the end.

However, reading Tremontaine also made me feel skeptical of the multi-author serial format for the first time. I think having several authors on the same project works perfectly fine as long as their styles are alike enough to complement each other, as was the case with Bookburners where each episode written by their respective authors flowed easily from one to the next. In contrast, the transitions between episodes did not go as smoothly in Tremontaine. This was my first experience with all the authors, a lineup that includes Ellen Kushner, Malinda Lo, Alaya Dawn Johnson, Joel Derfner, Racheline Maltese, Patty Bryant, and Paul Witcover. They're all very good writers, each with their own talents and individual flair. The problem with having so many different styles, however, is that the changes between episodes are very noticeable and distracting. Furthermore, episodes in Tremontaine do not follow the "mini-story" structure (the way many episodes in Bookburners did), with many of them having no rising action or resolution, and that together with the awkward transitions between authors made picking up at the beginning of each episode a little more difficult.

The characters were also not as strong as I would have liked. Among the main characters, my favorite was hands down Diane. She's ambitious, cunning, and merciless, not to mention she's sitting on a deep, dark secret that paints her in a very bad light. Still, I can't help it; I seem to be drawn to these sly, scheming Machiavellian types—especially when they're women. Compared to Diane though, no one else could really hold a candle to her. Kaab was interesting but I felt many of her sections felt like filler, especially when they could have gone to develop other characters like Micah, whom I loved but whose role felt underused. In particular I also felt a deep annoyance for Rafe, whose self-absorption and blind spots were done just a tad too much for me.

Still, I enjoyed my time with the first season of Tremontaine. Admittedly, it had a slow start, and if I had only a few episodes on hand to begin with, I might have given up early. Fortunately, this is where having a complete season really helps; I was able to keep going and reach a point where the story built up enough momentum to deliver on all its promises of swashbuckling action, passionate love affairs, political conflict and scandalous drama—plus enough descriptions of rich delicious chocolate to make your mouth water! Based on a world that is known for its vibrant diversity and queer-friendly themes, this prequel serial continues the trend in offering something new and different from the status quo. If you're into "vanity fair" types of stories featuring adventure, romance, and intrigue, then I urge you to give Tremontaine a closer look.

Narrelle says

I picked this up attracted by the idea of a swashbuckling LGBTQIA adventure written in a shared-world way by multiple authors.

The result is indeed a fabulous swashbuckler of a book, with terrific characters and excellent worldbuilding. The writers overlap timelines occasionally, offering difference perspectives for characters. The styles don't always meld quite smoothly and sometimes information is repeated, but on the whole the shared writing works very well.

The various and intertwined stories of Rafe the scholar, Micah the genius mathematician, Tess the forger from Riverside, Ixkaab the first daughter of a first daughter of a noble foreign house, William, the Duke of Tremontaine and his calculating wife, Diane, engage from the beginning and grow more and more compelling. Some characters become more likable; some much less so. There are plots and schemes, love and betrayal, politics and social machinations in heaping handfuls.

My only real criticism is that the story ends on a cliffhanger. I generally strongly dislike cliffhangers, preferring stories that stand alone within the world that has been built. Having said that, I absolutely have to get the next book to find out what happens next to this cast of characters, and it's making me not a little cross to have to wait till 2017 to be satisfied.

Sara (A Gingerly Review) says

FRTC.

Susan says

I'm kinda disappointed because *The Privilege of the Sword* is one of my favourite novels ever, because it hit so many fantastic emotional and narrative notes for me, and then *Swordspoint* won me over with a strange charm. This had neither? It was slow and kind of blander (which is a shame because I know how immersive the setting can be in TPOTS) and didn't have nearly as great an emotional, melodramatic crescendo of a climax. The writing by every author involved was fine, but the plot let me down.

The new cast was nice. I liked Kaab the most because she was the most 'Riverside universe' character we got and her storyline gave us APPLETHORPE and SO MUCH GAY. Honestly it was just so refreshing to have a story that was so unapologetically queer.

Rafe was faintly amusing. I liked the disconnect between his POV and how other characters saw him. His romance with Will was nice, even tho it made me feel terrible for everyone involved (Will and Diane are just clearly very incompatible).

I also didn't pick up that Micah was autistic until I read it somewhere else online LMAO... and didn't really see 'autism' as opposed to 'naïve country girl' until maybe chapter 8-9, and her fit in the finale was the only overt sign. But I liked her, she brought something different to a fantasy story, that was also really refreshing. I wish we got more scholarly characters into maths and the sciences in fantasy!

Now. Diane. I actually enjoyed her character in *Swordspoint*, and I read this purely because I thought this would be some solid fucking fun social intrigue with her at the centre.

But why was Diane... a villain?? I don't understand. I don't even see how this was the quite same character. She didn't strike me as the same woman who named Alec her heir because it amused her. This woman seems like she'd rather die than let a wastrel, eccentric ex-student slumming in Riverside take over Tremontaine. (also um this is supposed to be 15 years before *Swordspoint* but apparently Alec was only just born? no fucking way was he 15 in that novel. really?? I assumed 19 at the absolute youngest)

The woman in *Swordspoint* seemed like someone genuinely subversive and wise. Not some fucking horrible, (view spoiler)

I don't know. I adored Alec and Katharine - both deeply flawed yet so very likable. Their grandmother promised to be just as excellent and didn't quite live up to that for me.

I wanted to rec this to people to read before *Swordspoint* because lesbians but really. I guess I'll wait and see how season 2 pans out? Maybe we'll get resolution for Will, and then see how Diane actually develops into the woman we see later, but... I don't think I care.

(omg I hate having this as the only review - more like my rambling opinion - for the omnibus, ellen kushner better not come for me on ha twitter)

Ju Transcendancing says

An eARC of this book was provided by the publisher in exchange for an honest review. This review reposted from my blog The Conversationalist.

What isn't to love about sword wielding women, politics, hot chocolate, frocks, parties, manners and physics? The serial format of *Tremontaine* works very well, it's clear that the background world and universe of Ellen Kushner's is beloved by all the authors that are invited to play in the world for this story. I'd fallen off the appeal of epic fantasy for a while, but between this and *An Accident of Stars* by Foz Meadows, I'm excited about this genre again!

In particular I love epic fantasy that involves complex political intrigue and lots of diplomacy, talking around things, layers, and consequences too far reaching to see clearly. I also love characters that are engaging and interesting, sometimes I love them because I identify with them, and sometimes because I'd love to fall in love with them, and other times because they seem so wonderfully wicked – there are all these kinds of characters in *Tremontaine* and more.

I should point out that I haven't actually read the other novels that this one is a prequel for, but given how much I enjoyed this book I will absolutely be looking forward to *Swordpoint* and *The Privilege of the Sword*! This is a short review, mainly because I loved it without reservation, the story, worldbuilding, characters, blending of authorial styles were all fantastic and delivered to me an exceptional reading experience. More fantasy like this, with diverse characters who are queer, not all white, who come from different backgrounds and storylines with 'villains' who are complex and interesting characters too – you can't just think of their wickedness, instead it's tempered with compassion for them, sympathy and understanding for how they've gotten into the narrative dilemma they're in. I really can't wait for Season 2.

Dee says

I enjoyed this; it was a fun revisiting of one of my favourite settings, that contains so many things that I enjoy. Plus some tasty bonuses, like foreign traders with their own views of the world, and a glance at the political complexities of intellectual development.

Once again, the episodic nature of the initial medium led to some oddities of pacing, both within episodes and across the whole arc, but it worked better for me in this long-term unfolding-of-story style of "show" (rather than the more monster-of-the-week style of Bookburners).

I'm slightly saddened that the only het main character is the villain, or at least as close to a villain as this delightfully complex narrative has. And even then, I don't think I'm so much upset about evil straights (because heaven knows it's a nice change from evil gays) but more that it's so prevalent in fandom of all kinds to hate on the girly straight girl breaking up our beloved gay boys. Which is poisonous and unpleasant, so it's a bit sad to see echoes of that in a canon piece.

But, to be quite honest, I absolutely adore the Duchess Tremontaine, in all her brutality and fragility. She was the shining star of this, for me, and I'm so delighted to have had this chance to get to know her better.

Beta says

Brilliant! And the narrators were awesome, especially the duchess.

Tamara says

A faux-historical romp through the queered world of Tremontaine. Although a little pantomime-ish in places, it's generally an easy holiday read. At times the shift from author to author was slightly disruptive.

Althea Ann says

Riverside is back! Yay!!!

1. I honestly didn't realize this "serial novel" was a Riverside book when I picked it up, so was quite delighted to find that it is. I still have my doubts about the story being 'shared' by a number of different writers, but I'll see how that goes when I move along to the sequels. This first installment, however, is by Ellen Kushner herself, and even though it's really just an introduction, it's got the magic!

Here we meet the Duchess of Tremontaine, a savvy but less-than-compassionate woman seeking to restore the family fortunes (and, it seems, not succeeding).

Ixkaab Balam is a young woman from a Mayan-influenced culture, sent away by her chocolate-trading merchant family for unspecified transgressions. She has a secret ambition to become a renowned swordswoman, and is full of fantastic notions of honor and chivalry, ready to run off to Riverside and get into trouble at the drop of a brightly-colored scarf.

Finally, Micah is a farmer girl who's a socially awkward math genius. On an errand, she gets lost and falls in with a number of students who immediately appreciate her remarkable skill at card games.

How will these three stories connect? On to the sequels to find out!

If you are a fan of 'Swordpoint,' 'The Privilege of the Sword' and 'The Fall of the Kings,' do not miss this one!

-

2. The first scene, with Ixkaab and her family, felt a little bit too YA for me... but as this second installment progressed, it felt more stylistically in keeping with the first episode of the serial novel.

SPOILERS IF YOU HAVEN'T READ THE FIRST EPISODE!

(view spoiler)

As one expects from a serial, it ends on a cliffhanger/teaser... On to the next episode!

I've only read one of Alaya Dawn Johnson's novels, but liked it very much - and she did a great job with this segment. I'll have to keep an eye out for more of her books.

-

3. The third episode in this serial novel.

Looks like they recruited a gay male author to do the (first?) gay male sex scene! It was pretty hot, actually,

if somewhat vague (keeping it R-rated?)

Going down to three stars, though, because, as I was afraid would happen in this kind of multi-author venture, there is some inconsistency. (view spoiler)

However, quibbles aside, I still enjoyed it! On to the next!

-

4. I'm very much enjoying this serial. I've heard good things about Malinda Lo's writing, but this episode is very much in keeping with the overarching style of this story, so I'm not sure how much insight it gives into her personal oeuvre.

(view spoiler)

-

5. This episode had a multi-flashback format that was inconsistent with the style of the previous episodes, and didn't really feel necessary. The content was good, though! The plots thicken...

(view spoiler)

-

6. This episode was brought to me (and you?) by a couple of authors I'm not familiar with - but I thought it was one of the best so far.

(view spoiler)

-

7. Mixed feelings about this episode... I'm never a big fan of dream sequences, and I also thought that the "recap and summary from an omniscient perspective" was unnecessary and too large a chunk of the chapter. However, the ball of the title is an epic (and humorous) scene, which makes it all worthwhile.

-

8. In this episode, more plots and underhanded dealings are revealed, with a side of romance. (view spoiler)

-

9. Somehow, this feels like one of the more low-key episodes in this serial, even though two key events happen here: (view spoiler)

It went quickly, therefore moving quickly along to the next...

-

10. High drama in this episode! One of the best ones yet!

The segment starts with foreshadowing, telling us about a legendary poison which makes the victim behave in an irrational and paranoid manner... we can guess that someone will be using this herb, but who will it be? In addition to the politicking and plotting, we get an action-packed showdown in the form of a sword duel, and a hefty dose of romance.

-

11. I said the last episode was "one of the best ones yet" - but this one is absolutely the best one yet!

Finally, the Duchess' deep, dark secret is revealed - and the plots thicken as the stakes in the games increase.

-

12. While the great secret of the Duchess of Tremontaine was revealed in the last episode, this segment

features big chunks of flashback, where we learn all the bloody details of what exactly happened, seventeen years ago.

And in the 'present,' an attempt at blackmail, involving that very secret. But is the blackmailer really ready to go up against the master of spider-craft?

-

13. That's it! The end of the 'season.'

Overall, I really liked this. It ends with plenty of open opportunities to continue the story, but enough resolution to feel satisfying.

I think my biggest quibble with the story over all is (view spoiler)

Anyway, I definitely plan on continuing the story and finding out what's in store for the troubled house of Tremontaine...

Many thanks to Serial Box and NetGalley for the opportunity to read. And thank you to Ellen Kushner for creating the world of Riverside.

As always, my opinions are solely my own.

Laurie Boris says

I fell into this story and this world so easily, and immediately started loving all the characters, especially Micah, the daughter of turnip farmers who loves math and dresses as a boy when she comes to the city with her cousin to sell their wares at the market, because nobody bothers her when she dresses as a boy. And what a unique proposition: a novel with a common universe of characters, each chapter written by a different author. There were slight differences in voice, and except for one scene that broke the fourth wall and threw me out of the story a little, the flow was well-maintained throughout. I'm curious to read the continuing series.

Sarah (CoolCurryBooks) says

Tremontaine is the prequel to Ellen Kushner's *Swordpoint* and also a story published through Serial Box, a service that provides serialized "episodes" of written stories somewhat in the manner of TV shows, with different authors writing each episode. The edition I'm reviewing gathers together all thirteen episodes of Season One into a single volume.

Duchess Diane Tremontaine teeters on the edge of financial and social ruin when a ship she'd heavily invested in goes down at sea. At the university, Rafe believes that the common convictions on natural philosophy are entirely wrong, but he lacks the facilities with mathematics to prove his point. Micah, a brilliant young country girl, may just be able to formulate the mathematical proof he needs. And Ixkaab Balam, a newly arrived daughter of a prosperous merchant family, seeks adventure in Riverside and a way to redeem herself in her family's eyes.

Like the rest of the Riverside books, Tremontaine is a fantasy of manners with a focus on political intrigue and queer characters. Unlike the other two Riverside stories I've read, Tremontaine has a larger perspective that looks outside of the city. The nobles love to drink chocolate, but the drink isn't native to their city – it

comes from Kaab's homeland and is her family's most important export. Chocolate and trade are thus wound throughout the series to the point that it was constantly making me crave chocolate of my own.

I had mixed success with the serial formatting. For the most part I wasn't thrown off by the change of authors, but there were some style changes that were really jarring. Episode Seven in particular felt almost painful, and I ended up skimming large parts of it to get through. I wonder how I would have felt about it if I'd been reading each section as it was released.

My stand out favorite character was Diane, who's Machiavellian manipulations put her on par with Lord Vetinari of Discworld. Woe to the many who underestimate this society lady. While no one else quite matches the delight I feel for Diane, I liked all of the other characters as well. If I had to pick a second favorite, it would probably be Micah, an autistic girl with a love of turnips and mathematics who always seems at a comfortable distance from everyone else's drama and angst.

If you've never read any of the previous Riverside books, I think Tremontaine is actually where I'd recommend starting, since it has the advantage of being chronologically first. I would highly suggest it for anyone interested in books with LGB characters or fantasy of manners in general.

Originally posted on The Illustrated Page.

I received a free ARC from the publisher via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

Sherwood Smith says

So many interesting experiments going on in publishing today. One of the most successful to my eyes is the adaptation of Ellen Kushner's Riverside stories and novels to serial publication via Serial Box—and a group authorial experience.

I thought Season One a *coupe de foudre* on a number of levels. I wondered how a group effort would work, especially in attempting to emulate Ellen Kushner's supple, witty style. And I wondered if the season would repeat storylines I already knew.

I should not have worried. The writers working together in this project provided a seamless experience that expands and deepens the Riverside universe. It is clear they work as a team with Kushner overseeing both plotting and prose.

In season one, we had as anchoring character the complex, fascinating, and quite dangerous duchess Diane—closer to middle age, though still young and passionate, and with a past that we get to explore.

We met Rafe, the mercurial student whose desire to change the University (and prove what he is sure is truth about planetary movement) is matched with his other desires. He brags that he's never repeated an encounter—until he meets a fascinating older man, and everything in his life changes.

We met Micah, the brilliant mathematician plucked by Rafe and his friends from the vegetable sellers, and Kaab, another mercurial character who is a deadly knife assassin as well as a spice trader for her secretive, sophisticated family. She begins to learn the sword from yet another fascinating character, the mysterious Applegate . . .

And of course there are the Tremontaines. Yep, plural: for those who know the storyline, we got to meet the duke at last.

And so the Tremontaine team gave us laughter and heartbreak, tension, release, mad passion and cold calculation as fortunes are made and broken.

Leseparatist says

I read the season without having read the original novels by Kushner, and knowing very little about them beyond the fact that they are a staple where queer sf is concerned.

The truth is, I started reading Tremontaine season 1 a long while ago. I got through the first three episodes on my own before becoming frustrated with the format, particularly when some sections appeared to become repetitive (giving us the same information to clue in a reader who read the last part a month ago would be okay, but I felt like some of the overlap was due to different authors of the episodes re-treading the ground just to be sure). Then I decided it was just too expensive for me to go on buying the episodes and resolved to wait to see if some discount would become available after the season concludes.

Months passed and I didn't forget about Tremontaine, but its flaws seemed to stand out in my memory more than its strengths. Still, when I saw the whole season on offer on NetGalley, I clicked on it immediately and got down to reading.

The world of Tremontaine is immersive and interesting. A faux-European city engaged in trade with faux-Southern American empire, populated by scholars, traders, immigrants, the working poor, criminal element and aristocrats (usually more than one of the above applies to any given character). The characters are purposefully diverse in a way that mostly works (I'm still not sure some elements of Micah's characterisation weren't a bit too on the nose by-the-numbers), the world vibrant, the storylines - well, here is where I'm less convinced. I really enjoyed the second half of the season (and particularly the last 3-4 installments). Frankly, it is only at that point that I felt like the novel came together and the pacing improved a lot (in that there was enough relevance to what I was reading to keep me wanting to find out what happens next). Still, it's binge-reading that benefits the book and makes it possible to appreciate the way the format can be made to work for it; instead of chapters, we get episodes which get different directorial / authorial flair, sometimes with a really good result (like when flashbacks flesh out the world in episode 12, or like when we get more insight into the life of a particular character, or simply different stylistic devices are used, as in episode 10). I liked Joel Derfner's chapters the most, and, unfortunately Malinda Lo's first chapter - the least. And so, if the authorial variety allows for some advantages, there are also moments when it works less well, like when Malinda Lo's more descriptive (and at times kind of unbearable for me, but YMMV) style gave me some definite pause with how annoying it made Rafe and the Duke sound. I wrote about all of that when reviewing individual episodes.

And now on with the spoilery part of the review. (view spoiler)

The final complain would be addressed at the way the season ends - very little feels resolved and while I appreciate the value of making the readers want more, I wish there was some more finality to the season finale. Still, I am inclined to check out the next episodes, so objective achieved, I suppose. I just hope there'll

be more plotting and less swordplay, but that's probably my problem, not the book's.

I read episodes 4-13 courtesy of NetGalley, in exchange for an honest review.

Debbie says

Due to life, it took me several weeks to finish this book. But like a good cup of hot chocolate, this was a book to be savored. It was twisty and full of political machinations, and I loved it. (Though side note: The plot was not nearly twisty enough, or subtle enough in its twists for me. But maybe that was the point? Since the book mimicked a season of a TV show, foreshadowing could be a little heavyhanded deliberately.)

I had not read the original Riverside books, though they are on my shelf. I will have to rectify that very soon because I am very intrigued by this world Kushner has created. And given how much I liked Tremontaine, I suspect I'll like the original books as well.

The good: It's complex, and gritty, and full of really compelling characters. The characters aren't black and white good and bad. They're as complex as the plot, fully realized, and realistic. They do selfish things in their own interest. They struggle with ethical quandaries and don't always do the right thing - and often, in this book, take a morally ambiguous path. Also, the diversity! I swoon at the diversity. The ending was satisfying, even though it was open ended. There will be more adventures and I look forward to reading them.

The bad: I think I gained about five pounds while reading this book, because I kept craving hot chocolate. And I have the good stuff from local family-owned and run chocolate shop, which means extra calories. My pants are a bit snugger than they were pre-Tremontaine.

Review copy courtesy of the publisher via NetGalley.
