



Last Call

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Set in Las Vegas, Last Call concerns the fate of Scott Crane, former professional gambler, recent widower, blind in one eye--and also the lost natural son of the man who is determined to kill him. In this novel, Crane is forced to resume the high-stakes game of a lifetime--and wager it all.

Last Call Details

Date : Published December 1st 1996 by William Morrow Paperbacks (first published 1992)

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Author : Tim Powers

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From Reader Review Last Call for online ebook

Adam says

Last Call should be revered as many things, one is a great novel of the American West with a focus on that dark heart of it all, Las Vegas. A dark fantasy or magic realism pitched somewhere between Leiber and Pynchon and Eco. Secret history, noir, and Jodorowsky styled surrealism combine in a dark demented trip through the major arcana, poker, chaos theory, the Fisher King legend, and wealth of literary allusions(Rudy Rucker, T.S. Eliot, M.R. James, and many more). Great eccentric characters makes this an absurd comedy as much as it's a thriller and quest story. Powers tempers some of his weirdness(not much though) into this mature and excellent novel.

Clouds says

Summary: Reminded me of a mash-up of early Stephen King and Neil Gaiman... I loved it!

I'm running miles (and miles!) behind on my reviewing, but I have to say something about this book - so let's bullet point:

- I thought it was a fantasy/thriller based on poker.
- I hadn't read any Tim Powers before and I found it hard to get psyched about the concept
- It won me over pretty damn quick.
- It's excellent - really, truly, I was a fool for not reading it sooner!

Let me get one hang-up off my chest - the blurb on the front:

"The Game: Poker. The Stakes: One man's soul."

That's a great tag line - punchy and dramatic. Shame it's entirely wrong.

"The Game: Assumption. The Stakes: A dozen people's bodies."

Doesn't quite have the same ring, does it?

This is a book about tarot cards. I know a fair bit about tarot - I've got half a dozen of them tattooed on my back. The idea here is that tarot cards (and myths) are symbolic representations of murky gods that lurk in the the human subconscious, and by manipulating that symbolism you can do a kind of magic.

So a hand of cards, read in combination, represent a certain fate - good luck, good health, falling out of love, etc. By trading those hands in card games, when the gods of the cards are paying attention, you can trade fates.

With us so far? Good. It's a great concept.

So one guy - our Big Bad - has figured out a couple of tricks with the cards, which has allowed him to claim people's bodies from them, pushing their minds down into the collective subconscious while he flits between multiple bodies like a kind of possessing spirit. But his collection of bodies is getting old, and it's time to 'harvest' the next crop of bodies, which he laid claim to thirty years beforehand.

Our hero is trying to avoid that fate.

His gang is cool and quirky. The atmosphere throughout is tense but grounded. The fantasy edge is deniable and dreamlike, but powerfully creepy at times.

I didn't **love** the hero, Scott - he felt a little bit flat, like an 'everyman' character. There's no denying it's effective, but it's never a tactic I can fully endorse - (my favourite protagonists have a bit more individuality!) but I think it's partially this trait that reminds me of Gaiman... that and the exploration and reinterpretation of symbology in myth...

Now, I still have 40+ books I've read that have reviews outstanding... some of which I read over a year ago... so I really should write something... but in conclusion: **this is great book, far better than I expected - give it a go, you're in for a treat!**

After this I read: Spillover

Kemper says

“Good evening and welcome to ESPN’s coverage of the 1st World Championship of Assumption Poker Tournament at the Mandalay Bay Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. I’m your host Mike Honcho and with me is three time poker champion Billy “Busted Flush” Stark. Billy, you can certainly feel the excitement and tension in this room tonight.”

“Mike, you got that right. We all used to think that poker tournaments for money were a big deal, but ever since the recent revelations that magic is real and that much of that power can be harnessed by the use of plain old playing cards, the entire gaming world has been turned upside down.”

“Tonight, we’ve got the ultimate in magic poker challenges, a game of high stakes Assumption where the winner will not only be able to claim the very bodies and souls of the other players to become virtually immortal, he will also become the new magical King of Las Vegas while the ladies will be competing to become the Queen. This opportunity only comes around about every twenty years. And if the game didn’t have enough drama, Billy, I understand that several of the players have some history and bad blood between them.”

“Bad blood and spilled blood in some cases, Mike. First, let’s check out Georges Leon, the current king. Georges overthrew the last king of Vegas, legendary gangster Bugsy Siegel, and then extended his own life by essentially killing one of his own sons. Georges has launched the current Assumption craze by using the card game to get people to unwittingly sign over their bodies for his future use.”

“Certainly a player to be respected and feared, Billy. But tonight he’ll be facing another son of his, Scott Crane.”

“That’s right, Mike. Georges actually attempted to take Scott’s life force when he was just a kid, but the boy was saved by his mother even though he lost an eye in the process. And since he’s one of the mystical Jacks who can assume the kingship, you know what that makes him? A one-eyed Jack.”

“Can Scott hope to contend against his father, Billy?”

“Well, Scott was a professional poker player, and he’s a blood heir to the throne. However, the recent

unexpected death of his wife, and subsequent alcoholism has left him vulnerable to his father and other threats from Dionysus. And those aren't even his biggest problems, Mike. You see, Scott has actually already lost his claim on his body in a game of Assumption he played twenty years ago with his father when neither knew who the other one was."

"That certainly makes it long odds against Scott Crane. But what about his foster father, Ozzie Crane?"

"Now, Ozzie is one crafty old card player, and he knows all the ins and outs of the magic business. But he's stayed away from the magic end of thing for years so we're not sure what he'll bring to the table."

"Adding to the family drama, we've also got Diana, a daughter of the goddess Isis that Ozzie saved and raised. This young woman will be playing to save the lives of her own sons and take on the role of Queen."

"Exactly, Mike. We've also got several other wild cards in the mix like Arky Mavranos, a friend of Scott's who is dying of cancer and came along to try and tap into some Vegas magic and find a cure."

"You've got to respect a man who rejects traditional medicine and pins all his hopes on finding a miracle in a casino, Billy."

"There's also a variety of other Jacks who want to take the throne and see Scott and Diana as the leading candidates to take out. It has been one wild week here in Vegas with gun fights, magic, kidnapping, murder and beheadings. And that's before the card game has even started!"

"These players certainly better hope that it's true that what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas or the survivors will be looking at some long jail time, Billy."

"Whatever happens, you can be sure that it should be a thrilling game, Mike. I just hope we all live to see who wins."

"We'll be back in a moment to kick off this game of Assumption right after a word from our sponsor, Budweiser."

Fredosphere says

I loved this. Many of Powers' familiar obsessions are on display: a drunk loser of a protagonist, a villain chasing immortality by possessing other people's bodies, and a magic system that blends pagan, occult, and Christian elements into a weird hash. Yet, the critic was correct who claimed Powers never writes the same book twice. This particular magic system, involving Vegas-style card games played with antique decks of Tarot cards, is dazzlingly original. One example: a magic poker chip transubstantiates into a communion wafer. That is vintage Tim Powers right there.

Powers puts you in the scenes with his descriptive detail: the sights, sounds, and smells of the Nevada desert, or a casino, or a cheap hotel. The descriptions of strategy in a card game Powers apparently invented are especially impressive. And when a male character, forced to disguise himself as a cross-dresser, notices the feel of his heavy makeup in the creases of his face when he smiles, you begin to wonder if there's anything Powers won't do to research his novels.

My one caveat is that the magic in this novel is so inventive and bizarre, it's hard for the reader to anticipate what will come, or to judge characters' acts of magic. That's okay; one should simply relax and enjoy the show. The ending, despite the unpredictable rules, delivers a good dollop of suspense, and we get a satisfying Gothic ending where the Evil Wizard is destroyed by the very power he has unleashed. My favorite author comes through again.

Jason Pettus says

Now that I'm no longer professionally obligated to review 200 contemporary novels each year as part of running the CCLaP website, I've been using 2018 to indulgently make my way through the complete works of a number of authors who I've always wanted to be completists of; and one of those authors is Tim Powers, who has gotten famous over the years for blending multiple types of genres into "New Weird" tales about secret histories that are taking place around us in plain sight. I started with his 1983 Philip K. Dick Award-winning *The Anubis Gates*, where he combines time travel, the birth of Romanticism in the early 1800s, and the occult elements of ancient Egypt; then next I jumped back to his very first novel, 1976's *The Skies Discrowned*, a straightforward space opera that's disappointing precisely because of its lack of originality, okay on its own but prophetically plodding when you realize what kinds of startling work was to come from him a few decades later.

But the whole reason I decided to read Powers in the first place, and the books that garnered him such a passionate fan base to begin with, is his "Fault Lines" trilogy from the 1990s, starting with 1992's *Last Call* which I just finished a few days ago. And wow, it's easy to tell with this one why people started calling him a master of a new genre that he and only he is writing in; ostensibly an "urban fantasy" novel from those '90s years when that genre first became so immensely popular, he somehow managed here to weave together the history of tarot cards, the Christian myth of the Fisher King, Bugsy Siegel and the birth of modern Las Vegas, body-swapping, astral projection, and the seedy underbelly of contemporary Los Angeles, into a unified narrative that not only *isn't* an incoherent mess, but is actually a dazzling, mesmerizing thriller that keeps you on the edge of your seat for over 500 pages.

That's really the thing that's so exciting about this book, and why people get so hooked on Powers; because he's essentially making up his own unique mythos and magical history as he goes here, in a way like you've never heard another writer ever describe a secret magical history, but that contains a kind of inherent in-universe sense to it; a world where people perform ad-hoc contemporary rituals using found pop-culture detritus that hearken back to ancient rituals using much more primal material, substituting things like kazoo and cigarette smoke in order to replicate arcane rites from thousands of years previously. It's an infinitely clever way to tell a contemporary urban fantasy story, not least of which is because you have no prior frame of reference to the universe he is unfolding in front of you, making every turn of events a new surprise that goes in directions you could've never guessed beforehand.

An unforgettable book, *Last Call* this week joins that small list in my head of Favorite Novels I've Ever Read In My Life, and I'm excited now about tackling the next book in this series soon, 1996's *Expiration Date*.

Pete Williams says

Like this one nearly as much as Powers's "On Stranger Tides" and more than Neil Gaiman's "American

Gods" (similar subject matter).

Powers does a lot of research. Obsessively immerses himself in whatever is available on a time and/or place that interests him, and then goes looking for the gaps in the facts. He runs screaming from Occam's razor and fills the void with the most complicated and far-fetched "possibilities". I love it.

Here, he looks at Vegas, from the early days to the early 90s (when the book was written). It stumbles with some rather silly mathematical conceits and T.S. Eliot falling casually from the mouths of poker hustlers, but I found it to be a very entertaining read. A body-stealing card game played with Tarot, Vegas legend and Arthurian gods, an Elvis impersonator who kills his best friend in hopes of marrying his Chinese sister... OH yeah.

The Pirate Ghost (Formerly known as the Curmudgeon) says

Another twist on the Arthur Legend from Tim Powers. This one is uniquely unusual (yes, imagine the song in the background, "People are strange, when you're a stranger...") It deserves a longer review than this, so I'll update it later.

For now, this is a fun book in the spirit of Declare, with a unique blend of the unusual woven through actual historical events. The story is set in the near past but reaches back as far as "Bugsy Malone" and the gangsters who hatched Las Vegas. In this story, Tim Powers weaves the complex Tarot mythology, mixing it with an almost Texas Hold 'em-like obsession with poker and the Arthur Legend Theme is reminiscent of "The Drawing of the Dark," another favorite of mine.

It's a recommended read. I enjoyed it very much. Tim Powers attention to detail is very reminiscent of James Carpenter's Oscar winning movie "Titanic" (which, in my opinion won the Oscar because of attention to detail and respect to historical events and facts, not because of the chick-lit love story he wove around them.)

Warning, it's weird in an almost 1960s counter culture movie sort of way weird. It's also worth the read.

Santiago says

8/10

Se antoja todo un acierto por parte de Gigamesh el recuperar esta novela, publicada por primera vez en España con el título de "La última partida" en 1993 por Martínez Roca, y hacerlo con una nueva traducción que —sin desmerecer la previa— mejora la experiencia lectora, y el renovado título de "Última ronda". Es cierto que veinticinco años dan para cambiar muchas perspectivas, pero esta parece ser una de esas novelas que han mejorado con el paso del tiempo o con la adquisición de un mayor número de referentes por parte del lector que esto suscribe. Y es que el bagaje cultural del que hace gala Powers para ofrecer su particular recreación del mito del Rey Pescador puede llegar a resultar incluso apabullante por momentos. Desde los arquetipos jungianos sobre el inconsciente colectivo a los mitos artúricos, pasando por las figuras del tarot, la historia compartida de la mafia y Las Vegas, el poker en sus muchas variantes y los juegos de probabilidad en general, la teoría del caos, la geometría fractal, mitologías diversas —griega, egipcia...— que terminan mostrando sus similitudes, y una peculiar revisión de La tierra baldía de T.S. Elliot. Y todo ello en el

magnífico y sórdido escenario de una Ciudad del Pecado en pleno crecimiento y apogeo, repletas de jugadores y de misterio, en la que va a desarrollarse una partida muy especial. Una partida en la que un grupo de aspirantes van a jugarse el destino a una mano de cartas esperando que les conceda el mayor de los premios que puedan concebir. Y si hay que hacer trampas, ¿acaso no se han hecho desde el primer momento en que se repartieron las cartas? "Última ronda" se desvela así como un thriller de intriga entre lo mundano y lo esotérico con mucho, mucho fondo simbólico.

Reseña completa en Sagacomic:

<http://sagacomic.blogspot.com.es/2018...>

? Sh3lly - Grumpy Name-Changing Wanderer ? says

\$0.99 on Amazon: August 9, 2016.

Ben Babcock says

I was avoiding this book, and then I decided to read it during my busiest weeks of the term, which in retrospect was a mistake, since it took me two weeks to read! In Ben's reading world, that is an eternity.

This book comes to me courtesy of an ARC of the Subterranean Express edition, which I received when they shipped me *The God Engines*. I was pleasantly surprised, and I shelved this book to read it when I could get to it. Every time I took it off the shelf and glanced at the back cover, however, I ended up giving it a pass.

Last Call is set in Las Vegas and deals with Tarot, Grail symbolism, ritualistic magic, and manipulation of statistics. None of this stuff really interests me. I lack the ability to get excited about the myths and legends that have arisen out of the culture of mid-twentieth-century America. So I started reading this book with the attitude that I didn't want to like it, probably wouldn't like it, but I should get it over with and read it anyway.

At first, this attitude was mostly vindicated. But then Powers began tossing out little tidbits that piqued my mathematician's curiosity. He presented the poker powers in terms of probability, statistics, and of course, Mandelbrot. That was kind of cool. And for a bit, it was almost enough to make me forget why this book is difficult for me—almost.

But let me say some good things about *Last Call* now. The dialogue is often good, and many of the characters—random though they seem—are fascinating in their own way. Despite his understandable use of archetypes, Powers never quite succumbs to stock characters and one-dimensional villains. Deep down inside, this is a father-son conflict, and all of the myriad plots and players dance around this central idea.

Most of the characters I *liked* happen to be on the side of the good guys. I liked Scott, most of the time, and Archie and Ozzie and, of course, Diana, who is kind of badass toward the end there. I didn't like Georges Leon (or Ricky, or whomever you care to call him), nor did Trumbull do much for me. And Al Funo *annoyed me* in a way that few characters in fewer books have managed to do.

In addition to the characters and the dialogue, I can also praise Powers' writing in general. He knows how to keep the action going, how to advance the story, and how to whet your appetite for more exposition. I can sort of see what other people admire and appreciate about *Last Call*, even if it does not enchant me in the same way. Owing to my disinterest in the subject matter, reading this book was more of a chore than an enjoyable diversion. I had to tell myself to turn the page, and the story just seemed to *keep on going* for hundreds of pages more than it needed.

The plot is convoluted and confusing, and I never really get a chance to care about it all that much. This is a story about the fight for survival, but so much of it is spent not knowing what the hell Scott is fighting. I had to force myself to pay attention and try to figure out what was happening; even then, I found myself skimming through some chapters, just sort of hoping it would all work out in the end.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that my reading of this book was far less involved than most books I read, to the point where I did consider putting it aside more than once. I didn't, and maybe that was the wrong decision, or the right decision—I don't very much know. But I doubt this review was very helpful to you, as ambivalent and vacillating as it sounds to me. *Last Call* registers on my radar as static, just random background noise with very little in the way of intelligible signal.

Cat Rambo says

One of my favorite, favorite books of all time. I love the way the Tarot and the Arthurian stuff is used, as well as the Las Vegas setting and its ghosts. This is a book I reread once a decade or so. The best of Power's (many) good books.

Dan Schwent says

Former professional poker player Scott Crane's life is falling apart, having just lost his wife and been on a beer binge, when aspects of his past have come back to haunt him. Specifically, a bizarre card game twenty years before where he may have lost his soul. But what do his foster father and foster sister have to do with it? And why is everyone trying to kill him?

Last Call is really hard to summarize accurately. You could say it was about a man who lost his soul and tried to win it back. Or you could say it was a modern retelling of the Fisher King legend. Or a story about Bugsy Siegel and the rise of Las Vegas. Or you could say it was all of those things and more.

The story started slow, establishing what had happened before and giving the reader hints at the magic Powers was working. That portion reminded me of Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* and Roger Zelazny's *Lord of Light*, both books about ancient gods or archetypes in the modern world. Once the two thirds mark was passed, the book kicked into high gear and the suspense level sky-rocketed. The last one hundred pages flew past. The characters were well developed, even the villains and supporting characters.

While I didn't think it was as good as *The Anubis Gates*, it was at least as good as *Three Days to Never*. Tim Powers fans and fans of Gaiman and Zelazny should give this one a read.

Wealththeow says

Twenty years ago, the main character lost his soul in a game of cards. To prevent his foster sister from suffering as well, he enters into a battle for godlike power—literally. He and many others race across the country trying to become the new embodiment of the legendary personas that guide humanity unseen. The writing is taut and the pacing is great; the detailed descriptions and various characters' introspection serve the plot rather than hinder it. The basis for the novel is twisty and complicated, yet at its heart very believable. This is modern fantasy at its best.

Stephen says

In a word...

(roughly translated, it means your naughty bits are fired up, tingly, and ready to rumble.)

In more than a word...

Last Call is my new **favoritest** book by Tim Powers. From a brain stimulating perspective, this produced a significant amount of tingle by skillfully stroking a number of literary pleasure points. You know what I mean?

First, I love the way the magical elements are woven credibly into the fabric of the story. They are, simultaneously, both elusive and omnipresent throughout the narrative. The magic saturates the story and blankets the characters, but it's just outside the vision of "the rest of the world." Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*, one of my favorite fantasy novels, does this very well, as do books like *Moonheart* and *Memory and Dream* by Charles de Lint.

Last Call pokes the bull squarely in its eye as well.

Second, the magic system itself was smart, suave and tethered extremely well to the story. It also felt unique and internally credible, which is always important for this kind of story. Powers employs an elaborate, complex system of magic based on **TAROT** cards, with each of the tarot figure representing powerful, mythical "archetypes" through whom magical abilities can be channeled by those with the requisite skill.

Third, the tie-in between the tarot-based magic system and professional poker was brilliant and made wild, wonderful sense within the context of the story. The standard **52 card poker deck** is a derivation of the larger tarot deck minus some 22 cards known as the Major Arcana. Thus, all of the hopes, dreams, fears and other intense emotions invested by people while playing cards, even with these "diluted, reflections" of the more powerful tarot, create magical energies that can be drawn upon by those with magical ability.

Again...brilliant.

Finally, setting the book in my hometown of Vegas was a real treat for me, and likely added a bit to my overall happy. Plus, I gotta toss props to Timmy because he got every single geographical reference in the

book correct. I know that may seem like a “lil bitty” thing, but it shows that he was conscious about getting the details right, and as a reader I really appreciated that.

Tim cares about us and it shows.

PLOT SUMMARY:

As with most of Tim Powers’ books, *Last Call* is set up as a secret history, in which he uses real life historical figures and related events and creates an “alternative explanation” for such events being motivated by supernatural/magical considerations. Case in point: Benjamin “Bugsy” Siegel was not just a famous gangster. He was also a powerful magician and the avatar of the mythical archetype known as the **Fisher King**. Bugsy’s motivation for constructing the Flamingo Hotel and creating the foundation for today’s Sin City was to create a place of power where all of the energies created through gambling could be drawn upon to sustain him.

Enter Georges Leon, the current avatar of the Fisher King who assumed the role after defeating and destroying Bugsy through a clever and complicated series of actions which, FYI, I thought was handled incredibly well. Now Georges is obsessed with his own mortality and has devised a really **NEATtastic** skill to keep himself young and spry (not to mention safe). Georges has acquired that ability to instantaneously transfer his consciousness into another body, permanently destroying the personality of the inhabitee. The catch: the inhabitee has to be one of his children.

Enter Scott Crane (fka Scott Leon, Georges youngest son). When Scott was a tyke, Georges tried to pull the old “body snatcher” routine on Scott just as Georges had already done to Scott’s older brother. Well Mama Leon had had just about enough of that, thank you very much, and stopped the ceremony with a .44 magnum shot to Georges **potty pole** which completely ruined ALL of his luggage (the hanging bag and both carry ons).

Scott and his mom then disappeared themselves leaving Georges with no Scott and no ability to make himself any more babies. However, keep in mind that Georges is one smart hombre and I’m sure he’ll think of something.

Flash forward to 1989...and.....

That’s all the set up I want to give because I don’t want to spoilerfy any of the good stuff for you. Everything above takes place in the Prologue of the book (with a few contextual details filled in so they make sense). The rest of the book is a combination of: (1) a gathering of some amazing characters, both magical and not, as they converge on Vegas to try and seize power from the King; and (2) Georges trying to hunt down and dispose of his competition so he can remain in power with the help of mysterious and dangerous card game known as **ASSUMPTION**...I told you he would think of something.

THOUGHTS:

Uh...Sploosh!!

This was terrific and is one that I know I will read again at some point because the amount of information and detail that Powers pours into the story is substantial. The characters, including those representing “archetypes,” are interesting and well drawn. The dialogue is outstanding and the plot, though convoluted and very complex, is engaging as can be. It’s excellent.

But the real show stealing is the world-building and the tie-in between tarot lore, Arthurian legend and various mythologies. It was **FantastiGASMness** itself....

I only had two gripes with the book that kept me from giving it 5 stars. First, while the ending was satisfying and not exactly a letdown, it wasn't the earth-shattering, toe curling climax that I was expecting. Second, I was a little disappointed with how a few of the supporting characters had their plot lines tied up in a less than exciting way. I thought it was a bit rushed and it felt like Tim was doing little meatball surgery towards the end.

Upon a re-read, these gripes may go away but they do hold the book back just a tad.

Still, an amazing book and one that I HIGHLY RECOMMEND!! Definitely 4.5 stars!!

OR....again....in a word:

Wanda says

I wanted to like this book much more than I did—there was much in it that appealed to me, but as with Powers' *The Anubis Gates*, I found myself somewhat underwhelmed. Much of this reaction will be due to my lack of familiarity with both tarot and (especially) poker. I fooled around with tarot cards in my late 20s, but never really committed myself to learning the art. And I think the kids at the back of the school bus tried to teach me poker during my high school years, but that was many decades ago and my memories are hazy at best.

There is a lot going on in this book and it speaks to Tim Powers' skill as a writer that he managed to successfully weave it together into a cohesive story. Here are some of the elements he incorporates: archetypes & Jungian psychology, mythology of Egypt, Greece and Rome, the Arthur Legend and the Fisher King, T.S. Eliot, Bugsy Siegel, Las Vegas and Lake Mead.

As in *The Anubis Gates*, there is a body-snatching element to deal with as well. These are the only two books of Powers' repertoire that I've read, so I found it interesting that they both had this esoteric characteristic in common. Come to think of it, poetry featured prominently in TAG as well, so it is obviously a great interest to this author.

Book number 292 in my Science Fiction & Fantasy Reading Project.
