



Crown of Shadows

C.S. Friedman

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More than a millennium after the human race forges an uneasy stalemate against the demonic human-psyche feeders known as the *fae*, a pain-hungry demon called Calesta declares war on all living beings. Reprint.

Crown of Shadows Details

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From Reader Review Crown of Shadows for online ebook

Stephen says

4.5 to 5.0 stars. Very satisfying conclusion to the Coldfire Trilogy after the excellent Black Sun Rising and When True Night Falls. I am a big fan of C. S. Friedman and this trilogy is a big reason why.

Chy says

Quick! Gut reaction: Well, I like the cover art.

Short Summation

This is third in a trilogy. My reviews for the first two are around here somewhere.

We have to stop the Iezu, Calesta. That's kinda like a demon. The Church is heavily involved, working separately from our main characters, Gerald and Damien. Also, we get to meet Gerald's descendant, Andrys.

Rah.

Why this book?

I read the first two. I was hoping for more entertaining exchanges between Damien and Gerald. I wanted to see Damien help Gerald save his own soul.

How'd it go?

Okay, Friedman did this in the second book as well, but I forgave it enough not to mention it in my review. This time, I'm ruffled beyond forgetting. At the beginning of the second and the third books, Damien writes a letter to his Patriarch that goes over everything that happened in the book before. It's the laziest "catch new readers up" ploy I've seen in a long, long time. She tries to break this one up by having Damien go through a few drafts, letting some things slip he doesn't actually want to tell his Patriarch.

It wasn't clever. It drew it out. It sucked. Maybe it wouldn't have been so horrible if more time had passed since I'd read the previous book, but I hated this ploy in the second book, too, and it had been a while since I'd read the first one at that point.

Still, I was going to move on and enjoy the book anyway, the way I tried to do with the second book. That didn't work this time. Because I hated this book.

Now, that's not completely fair. I see in this book a thread of a story I could like very much. That's probably why I have such ire for it, instead of simple indifference.

It's horribly told, badly written, and comes from points-of-view I just don't care about. Like the Patriarch. I never got to the point where I cared about the Patriarch or his thoughts. Sorry. He was in the first book, and he was mentioned in the second, but most of his sections were just more of the same: He has dreams that are true. And he has one continuous dream about this battle in the Hunter's Forrest.

Other than that, I was happy to see Andrys, but man was he a big whiney brat. His past was not an excuse.

And then we get to see the chick from the first book, the one Calesta used to mess with Gerald at the end, thus goading Gerald to go with Damien across the ocean for the second book. I think it's cool, who she ended up with, I just hope Friedman didn't expect me to believe they had a true love going on there. But I do think it was the truest kind of love those two are capable of. So it entertained me. It just wasn't that fun to read about. I like that it exists, though.

Friedman went back to a problem I thought she got over in the second book. I'm talking about her love of pronouns. You knew, when you start a new section, that you were going to be in someone's limited POV, but you had no freaking idea whose---for paragraphs and paragraphs sometimes. Sometimes, there wasn't even a pronoun; just scenery with no one in it. It was weird. It was bad.

There were also some POV problems with Gerald and Damien. I would like to stand up and say this was because of their channel, the link they have. I think, maybe, that is what was supposed to be going on, but it wasn't done well at all. I had to struggle to convince myself that was the explanation. Because I didn't trust the writer, mainly.

There were a lot of things I wanted to skip because I just didn't care, but I read them because I thought there might be something in them that would magically explain something else I had a problem with in some other POV. So I read them. And you know what? They still sucked. And there was nothing in them I needed.

All the throwing up and almost throwing up got to me, too. I've never seen so much of that in one book. Everybody reacts to everything by either throwing up or wanting to throw up. Geez.

Now, when Gerald's wife "showed up," it made me wish she'd been in more of the trilogy than just the prologue of Book One. Because she didn't make me roll my eyes, though that was a possibility. I actually thought it was cool.

I couldn't make myself believe that Damien would really go through all he does to convince Karril to help him get Gerald out of...one set of big trouble he gets into. There's the flimsy excuse he's got to have Gerald to defeat the novel's plot, but it's thin, people. It's very thin. I think maybe Friedman was trying to hint that Damien and Gerald had become close enough friends that Damien'd go through hell to save him.

I'm sorry. I've read *What Dreams May Come*. I have a preconceived idea of how deep a love has to be in order for someone to be able to save someone else from hell. And Damien wasn't nearly there. Not nearly. I felt like this part of Friedman's book was a slap in Matheson's face. Pissed me off, it did.

I didn't have the heart to go into the technical problems this time, but just know that they were a little better than the second book. A little. I dunno, though, really. The choppy POV switches and sloppy POV portrayals distracted me from the smaller, technical problems. Sadly enough.

In the end, I'm just sad. Because I really think it could have been good. There were just too many things that were forced and a method of storytelling that didn't get the "good" parts across well at all.

Very disappointing.

But I still love the cover.

Molly Amory says

The final book in this trilogy is a kind of mixed bag. The bits of Tarrant's history that are revealed, the Church lore, everything about Vryce and Tarrant's interactions, the revelations about the fae, the resolution of the plot - it was all great pay-off and I loved it. But it was interspersed with bits about one of Tarrant's descendants and about the Church's Patriarch that bored me to tears and that I now skip every time I re-read it. The key there is "every time I re-read it," which is many, many many times. Because as I said, I loved it.

That said, the very ending - while it makes an inescapable kind of sense given the events of the series and definitely works as a well-written conclusion - was kind of emotionally unsatisfying, in that it separates Vryce and Tarrant permanently just as they've come to truly trust and understand each other. My love for this book, and therefore the entire series, kind of depends on my ability to pretend that doesn't happen. Luckily, my denial-fu is strong.

Laura Fraser says

Yawwwwwwnnnn.

I enjoyed the first book in the series, thought it had lots of potential. The second also kept my attention, though I was getting tired of the endless journeying that serves as plot in these novels.

Unfortunately, the third failed to ignite. I've been slogging through it for weeks without finishing it, and ultimately I've lost interest. The bromance sort of fun, but it's not enough to keep this one afloat.

Kat Hooper says

3.5 stars

Crown of Shadows brings C.S. Friedman's COLDFIRE trilogy to a close. (This review may contain spoilers for the previous books, which you really must read before beginning Crown of Shadows.)

In the previous book, When True Night Falls, the unlikely allies Reverend Damien Vryce and undead vampire Gerald Tarrant battled their way across hostile foreign countries to combat the evil force that was threatening humanity. Just when they thought they were finished, they were essentially told: "But wait! There's more!" Now they're on their way back home where they will — they hope — finally really combat the actual final real ultimate source of evil ... which turns out to be Calesta the demon.

Eric Allen says

Crown of Shadows
Book 3 of The Coldfire Trilogy
By C.S. Friedman

A Retroview by Eric Allen

I still can't believe that I had never heard of this trilogy until recently. It has been around for twenty years and I only just discovered it. Although, I do have to admit, that my younger self would probably not have been wise enough to pick up on a lot of the themes and subtlety involved, and may have come away bored by them.

Crown of Shadows picks up several months after the previous book. Damien and Terrant have returned home to find that the demon Calesta has already been at work for some time in their homelands, working the people up toward an eventual apocalypse that could forever destroy human civilization. Damien, without the backing of the church, and Terrant, without the backing of his dark masters, are two men alone against a demon with absolute power over illusion, and is as close to immortal as is possible to be. And to make matters worse, Terrant's dark masters have withdrawn their contract with him, giving him thirty days to find a new patron or he will die. They have one month to save the world, or darkness and destruction will befall everything that they know and love.

Meanwhile, the Patriarch of the church has seen the social upheaval and believes that the Hunter and the Forest are to blame for it, despite having been given evidence to the contrary by Damien. He sets out on a crusade to destroy the center of Terrant's power by amassing a holy army and using Terrant's only living descendant to move past the Forest's defenses.

The Good? Again, the worldbuilding is spectacular. Erna is very well put together, the magic is very well thought out, and the people and places are interesting. Friedman has done a spectacular job of creating a very vivid and realistic world.

The characters are very well developed and interesting, and Friedman is one of the few writers I have ever read that completely nails how members of the opposite gender think, speak, and act.

I have read several reviews about this book, and the biggest problem that people seem to have is that they think the ending is anti-climactic. It is true that the end isn't a huge all-out war like some people might be led to believe by the buildup, and I can see how others might find that disappointing. I, however, thought it was a great ending to the trilogy. It wasn't a huge, epic climax, but it was the APPROPRIATE climax, and that, to me, is more important. Characters remained true to themselves, and used what they had in order to triumph. That, to me, is far more important than having a huge, epic action scene to finish things off, and it is, unfortunately, something that a lot of people in this day and age have come to expect, whether it fits the story or not.

The character development, in Terrant especially, is very well done. He has always had two sides to him, the hunter, and the prophet. He comes to a point where he really must choose one or the other. Will he find a

new dark master to serve, or will he seek redemption and death? Will he choose to save his own life, or will he choose to save the things that he has created? With him, you never really know what he will choose, and that's most of the fun with him. You never really know if he's a good guy or a bad guy, and now, he finally has to choose and put himself firmly on one side or the other.

The Bad? Friedman had a little trouble staying focused. There are a few scenes that, while relevant to the plot, were placed awkwardly, breaking up the flow of the narrative. I think this book could have done with, perhaps, another draft or two to smooth things out in that regard. She flips between the two separate storylines at awkward moments, giving a bit of literary whiplash, and does a little to break up the tension she is building.

This is not so much something that I find wrong with the book, but I do know that there are many people who dislike the idea of religion playing a large part in the lives of characters, and in the story. Faith, religion, sacrifice and redemption are all themes that are very heavy in this series. I highly enjoyed it, being that I am a religious person and even spent a year of my life working as a full time preacher. I, however, do understand that this is not for everyone. If you do not care for such things, this series is not for you. If writers tried to write books to please everyone, you'd get a horrific mess like *The Phantom Menace*, that pleases no one. I found the religious elements of this series to be rather intriguing and well meshed into the story and characters, but I can see how other people who are not very patient with religion might have a hard time getting through it all.

In conclusion, despite a few patches of questionable choices in pacing, this book is highly entertaining, and extremely well written. The world is extremely detailed and extraordinarily vivid. The magic system is pretty believable and well thought out. The characters are well written, well developed, and highly entertaining as well. It's an excellent ending to an excellent trilogy, and I highly recommend it to anyone who enjoys Epic Fantasy.

Check out my other reviews.

Rial says

I could not put this book down. All the work established in the second of the series culminated here (though book 2 can definitely stand on its own), and thoroughly engaged me. There were less world building reveals here, as befits a wrap-up, but plenty of pay-offs on things we've come to understand and appreciate. I will add that the reveals shown were very interesting in their overall impact, and served to show a side of the characters not fully exposed in previous entries.

All in all, a fantastic close to an intriguing series!

Laurie says

Finally, I'm on the last book of this C.S. Friedman series, although now I'll be sad to leave this world and all of its compelling characters. Gerald Tarrent is one of the best and one of the more complex villains I've yet

to encounter, even more so than the Shrike (from Dan Simmon's brilliant hyperion series). The Shrike was ultimately servile to a mysterious evil force and not necessarily autonomous, unlike Tarrent who is completely in charge of his awful destiny. The choices he makes are so horrific yet so understandable that you can't help but root for him. I used to think Friedman's books were dark, but now I just think they are very realistic. Her books are definitely not intended for the tween market, perhaps not anyone under 40 as well.

Nathan Gelineau says

Clearly the best of the trilogy. Pretty much no filler, and engaging from beginning to end.

Ivan says

4.5 stars for this book but I'm reducing rating of previous books from 5 to 4 stars.

More detailed impressions to come.

mark monday says

Crown of Shadows; Or: Sorry, Priest, He's Just Not That Into You (Because He's an Undead Vampire and also Heterosexual.)

all the standards established by the prior two novels are in place for the grand finale of this fitfully entertaining trilogy.

at times amazing ideas and a compellingly realized world? check!

fascinating 200 page novel filled with those amazing ideas but force-fed nonsense until it bloats into a 500+ page novel? check!

all the things a goth teenager would love in a genre novel: romantic despair, romantic nihilism, an actual romance that is probably doomed, dark forests, an evil albino, devious godlings, heavy-breathing religiosity, warped obsessions, and a super-sized amount of melancholy? check!

eye-rolling and clichéd lines like "he could get lost in her eyes forever" delivered on an upsettingly regular basis? check!

a tedious pair of lovers who moon about their doomed love and their terrible pasts but don't end up doing a lot besides whining? check!

okay, this pair was new to this novel. but they sure fit right in.

supposedly heterosexual male protagonist who is, uncomfortably, the female author's stand-in... which gives his over-the-top obsession with the novel's Dangerous Undead Vampire Stud a decidedly strange, inexplicably homoerotic vibe? check!

a disturbing and eventually offensive authorial obsession with the Dangerous Undead Vampire Stud, one that romanticizes the character and one that simply must give him some kind of happy ending, despite this also being a character who has tortured and killed perhaps thousands of women and who in the opening pages slaughters an entire family for the stupidest of reasons? check!

perhaps the author's next project can be about that sexy bad boy Ted Bundy and the whiny priest who loves him against all odds. she already has the template ready to go.

Sophie A. says

*****Spoiler Alert*****The first book was good, the next not bad, and the last was horrible and filled with information that had no business being there. Not to mention the timeline at the end of the book was off.

My first issue with the book was the romance between Andrys and Narilka. The book could have done without it. This author sucks at making the romance between characters natural and believable. She did a bad job with Damian and Ciani and worse with Andrys and Narilka. The romance between the last two read more like a really bad, and super cheesy romance novel. This book was fine without the over the top romance.

Second issue is, why did we need Andrys? I assumed the role Andrys played would be reserved for Toshida, a character from the previous chapter. Author does poorly tying all three books together. In book 2, the author hints that Tarrant left a surviving heir but that's not enough to explain Andrys.

I also don't understand who the Patriarch comes to realize that all his visions where calesta's doing but yet he still clings to the vision of Andrys as the only means to enter and destroy the forest? He should have rejected this vision also.

I think Damian was secretly in love with the elder Tarrant. He lost his focus and himself. No matter the sacrifice Gerald made and how much I liked him, the man was evil and did not deserve a second chance. For Damian to mourn the way he did was unthinkable! And always with the flowery, mushy talk.

Next, bringing Tarrant's wife back in ghost form. Why? I'm all about shock and the unexpected but not when it does not fit or when it leaves you at a lost for words b/c it's so ridiculous.

What made me livid was when Tarrant should have died after binding Calesta but did not and the fact that Damian helped so he did not die. How can you let Hesseth and Jenseny die in the second book and keep Tarrant alive? These two were more deserving of a second chance. When I thought that Tarrant finally died by Andrys' hand, I thought how fitting, but then to find out he did not die. Sort of defeats the purpose of having Andrys in this book. No matter how you look at it, Tarrant was EVIL. He did one good deed in his nine centuries and all of a sudden, clean plate. Does not cut it. I really liked his character, but the author did not make a good enough case for giving him a second chance at life.

Last, someone please explain to me the purpose of the last three sections. Andrys getting married... Who cares? Riven Forest and the Hunt Shoppe and the last scene in that same chapter? why, why, why? And all this is happening in a matter of weeks?

This book was so frustrating.

Dawn says

++SPOILERS++

5 stars.

This is the third, last and best book of the series.

There were aspects that I didn't like due to personal preference of content and not writing, but I cannot in good faith, lower the stars because of that.

The writing:

Technically speaking was excellent. The beginning drew me right in and kept me on the edge of my seat throughout the entire 500+ pages. There was good conflict from start to finish which kept the pace steady. I did not skim. I felt connected to all the characters this time (as opposed to the other two) which put me through a series of emotional roller coasters. The world building was, as always, top notch, and thankfully didn't seem overly descriptive, redundant or boring as it had in the previous two. To be honest, the second book could have been eliminated entirely because I felt it was the worst of the three and added little to the series.

I do wish the author did more with Ciani and brought her back into the story. We never get to see what happened to her after the fae changes or see what happens to the rakah who were so important in the second book. This again strengthens my opinion of the uselessness of book 2.

The characters:

As usual, I loved Damien and Gerald and truly feel a loss at the end of their story, which is neither happy or sad. The ending, quite frankly was out of the ordinary being neither happy or sad for me. Happy because humanity as a whole survives as well as Tarrant, but both are forever changed. I suppose the change both humanity and Gerald Tarrant go through should be considered for the best, but I personally don't care for it. I wanted Gerald to remain as he was. I wanted him and Damien to be able to go on as friends and found it painful that they could not. As for humanity, I guess I love chaos, because the thought of there no longer being any more sorcerors or adepts who can work the fae was just so depressing to me. Maybe I'm the odd one.

Andrys. This is difficult for me since I am normally a romance reader. If this was a romance novel, I would have quit the book right at the beginning. Andrys was a total unlikeable character. He was a manwhore, a drunk, a drug addict, a rich spoiled arrogant playboy. He was also a coward. Yet I did find myself pitying him a few times, but that didn't last (the pity) because of the constant reminder of all the women he's had. The presence of all his ex lovers at his and Narilka's wedding totally ruined any happiness I could have had for him. I don't even know why Narilka loved him, there was nothing about him except his arrogance and good looks that could have attracted anyone to him and that certainly isn't a basis for love. He had no redeeming qualities. Yes he reminded her of the Hunter and yes she pitied him.. but love? That just made her look like a total ass IMHO.

Anyway, even though he was a total douchebag, his character made sense, was logical, and pivotal to the

story. I just didn't like him.

Narilka. It was nice to see her character become useful. In the first two books, she was only briefly mentioned, but it was clear she had a purpose. I'm glad to have finally seen it come to light in this book. Her character in and of itself was ok. Not too terribly weak yet not warrior strong either. Andrys clearly did not deserve her.

Damien. I always loved him. I was always hoping Cinai would return and that they would have a HEA. But the author decided to pretty much forget about her. I felt sad that not only did Damien lose the one woman he ever loved (not to death), and his vocation but also his best friend. He sacrificed so much yet gained nothing.

Tarrant. Perfect yet sad. He is clearly the best character of them all. I mourned his "death" and even though he lives, it still saddens me that he is no longer the kick ass adept he once was. I hated the change he had to make in himself, which forced him away from all those he cared about.

Overall I loved this book and was glad I continued.

Safety: Blood, gore, violence, cursing. Sex details not shown. Debatable HEA.

Dave says

The story of Damien Vryce, the knight/priest of the One God, and Gerald Tarrant, the founder of Vryce's church who sold his soul for immortality, comes to a satisfying ending. These companions, who have become friends (due to their working together in common interests in the previous books) despite the fact that they should be mortal enemies, along with the help of Karril work to stop Calesta from dooming humankind on Erna. While this is all happening, the Patriarch leads Tarrant's only surviving heir (many generations have passed) on an attack on Tarrant's base of power, The Forest.

One thing I really like about the book is how Tarrant, and Vryce, two very different individuals on the surface, strengthen their friendship and work together for the good of humankind. It's good seeing Tarrant making choices that could lead him to a second chance (to save his soul). Finally, C.S. Friedman did a great job wrapping up everything so that 1. it made sense and 2. I found myself missing the characters, like they are old friends that I am saying goodbye to.

Andi says

This is it, the final book. I read them all. I will admit, of all of them, this was the first book I wanted to give up on.

I have no idea what the hell was happening in this book half the time. I don't think I ever will. Apparently the huge reveal is that the fae and mankind from many years ago created (mankind unknowingly created, mind you) a sentient being that can create its own kind called Iszu which are half human half fae. Some Iszu have appeared throughout mankind and conversed with the characters in the book. Others have

decided to go off the deep-end and become monsters... hence, the crazy that has happened in the books from day one.

Gerald Tarrant is one interesting character. At times, he reminds me of a psychotic Victor Frankenstein (more or less the Hammer Horror version) and spends his time in this book trying to watch his strange experiments and observations of mankind and the fae go wack. Other times he is spending the book in 'Hell' because he apparently did one good-deed and the gods who turned him into a vampire decided to punish him for it. Guess who has to go into Hell and drag him out of hell? Damien. Yep. He's bitching and griping about it.

Damien and Gerald's friendship has developed over the book. How some readers have taken it, it's some strange love and hate (though stronger on the 'love' when it comes to Damien). I can't tell if he wanted to fuck Gerard or just be super close friends with him.

The ending was a little weird because Gerard apparently (after loosing his powers while Damien takes him back to the living) made some sorcery deal that allowed him a new, mortal body of a younger man and if he was to tell anyone or speak his old name to any-one, it would make the new contract void and he would die or... as he put it, return to the original state of his body. (His head gets cut off in the of the book by his descendant. Yes, that is another plot point that was sorta touched on in book two, but came out of nowhere in this one.)

All in all, for a three star trilogy, I give this final installment two stars. It's not as good as the previous two, but then again, they were never really that good of books to begin with.
