

HATER

Fear and loathing

Author: **David Moody**
 Publisher: **Gollancz** • £18.99
 ISBN: **978-0-575-08466-7** • 19 February
 Also available in paperback (£9.99)

★★★★

Originally self-published a couple of years back, David Moody's horror tale is getting a "proper" release now that Guillermo del Toro's producing a movie version. Juan Antonia Bayona (*The Orphanage*) is the name being stencilled on the back of the director's chair.

You can see why Del Toro snapped up the rights. This *28 Days Later*-esque tale of a mysterious epidemic of violence, which sees ordinary people suddenly killing their friends and family, is ripe for adaptation into a low-budget horror flick. It won't take much effort - Moody clearly thinks in pictures, so much so that at times the reading experience is like having storyboards flashed in front of your face.

Whether it's a great novel is another question. For the most part, *Hater* is told from the first-person perspective of everyman office drone Danny McCoyne. When in "say what you see" mode, it succeeds as a brisk, efficient page-turner. Danny's life is so typical, his frustrations so universal (a line manager who's a bitch, petty arguments with his wife, squabbling kids) that it's easy to empathise with him, especially since - unlike your conventional hero - he's not unusually capable.

However, whenever characters step back to try and get a grip of the situation, or express their emotions, the novel flounders in banality.

Moody's prose style is very unsophisticated (deliberately so?) which makes this an accessible read, but a frustratingly shallow one at times. That's not to say it doesn't inspire thought: *Hater's* focus on the fear and hatred of the Other may send your mind spinning off onto everything from knife crime to the situation in Gaza - but the reader's doing the work there, not the author.

Yet this is a story that lingers in the mind long after the three hours or so that it takes to read it. Not because of its vignettes of vicious violence (a commuter stabs a little

The story lingers in the mind after reading

old lady to death with his umbrella; a schoolgirl beats her best friend to death with a rock), but because of the unnerving twist Moody gives to a frayed concept. The "Haters" don't lose their intelligence or feelings when they turn, and they don't think they're the bad guys - they're convinced we are. By the end, you wonder if they've got a point.

There's a chance *Hater* is just a clumsy piece of pulp that, as it barrels along in its hobnail boots, manages to stamp on a nerve quite accidentally. But you might want to read it a second time, just to make sure. **Calvin Baxter**

ⓘ A movie version of another Moody book, viral-apocalypse thriller *Autumn*, has already been shot; it stars Dexter Fletcher.

THE MAGICIAN'S APPRENTICE

Master and servant

Author: **Trudi Canavan**
 Publisher: **Orbit** • 593 pages • £7.99
 ISBN: **978-1-841-49597-2** • OUT NOW!

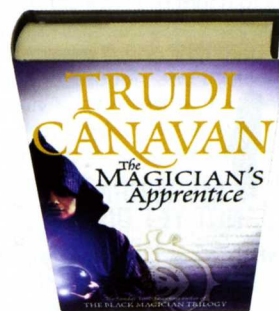
★★★★

What is it about Australian fantasy authors and strong female leads? Karen Miller's dour *Empress* charted the rise of a feral Boudica-esque ruler while *Eon: Rise Of The Dragoneye* - reviewed on page 121 - revolves around a student sage. Now here comes Trudi Canavan's *The Magician's Apprentice*, a prequel to the author's Black Magician trilogy.

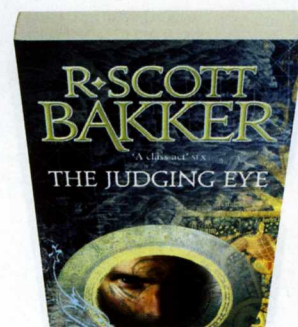
Mousy protagonist Tessia is a healer's daughter, who unexpectedly discovers that she has magical abilities after an unpleasant scene in which she's nearly raped by Lord Takado, a malevolent sorcerer from the belligerent state of Sachaka. A rare "natural", Tessia is taken under the wing of the local head magician Lord Dakon - much to the chagrin of his chosen apprentice Jayan, whose powers don't come quite so naturally.

Magic is perceived as a strictly male profession in Mandryn, the remote village in the peaceful land of Kyrallia where much of the story takes place. However, Canavan's agenda isn't exactly feminist as Tessia wonders whether she will marry Lord Dakon or Malia, Takado's slave, who's set free in Mandryn after being badly beaten by his owner.

Canavan draws some intriguing parallels between the rival cultures, particularly concerning how Sachakan apprentices are enslaved, with their masters leaching power from them like batteries, while the relationship between their Kyrallian equivalents is more symbiotic. But the examples she chooses are too trite - such as when Tessia's father scolds two boys for playing master and slave, with one leading the other around by a rope tied around his neck. And the overarching plot, which involves the encroachment of Sachakan troops into Kyrallia, crawls along, leaving you longing for things to happen. **Stephen Jewell**



ⓘ Canavan draws her own maps for her books, as her first full-time job was working as a cartographer for Lonely Planet.



THE JUDGING EYE

Wizard seeks the truth about wife-stealing God wannabe

Author: **R Scott Bakker**
 Publisher: **Orbit** • 435 pages • £12.99
 ISBN: **978-1-84149-573-8** • OUT NOW!

★★★★

This is the first book in a new series following on from Bakker's Prince Of Nothing trilogy. Anasurimbor Kellhus has risen from being a nobody to Aspect-Emperor, conquerer and ruler of many nations. Now he's crusading north with an enormous army to prevent the No-God from rising again, leaving his empress, Esmenet, overseeing the Empire - in which cracks are rapidly appearing. Various religious factions are vying for prominence and, unknown to Esmenet, her son Kelmomas has a talent for murder. In the wastes, Achamian the wizard (the empress's ex-hubby) seeks a ruined city and the truth of the Aspect-Emperor's origins, helped by a band of mercenaries and Esmenet's daughter from her days as a prostitute.

The plot can be summed up fairly briefly, but the major characters and the history of the setting give it real richness and depth. Sorweel, Prince of Sakarpus (a kingdom Kellhus's armies conquer in their drive north) is especially interesting, torn between wanting to survive and feeling he ought to fight on. Some of the minor characters are a little clichéd, but not to the point of being stock fantasy figures.

Two other books spring to mind on reading this: Frank Herbert's *Dune* and *A Game Of Thrones* by George RR Martin. The narrative dips between fewer characters than Martin's book, but it has the fantasy, pre-industrial setting in common, as well as a broad array of different races and environments. The similarity with *Dune* is mainly in the notion of a political war disguised as a religious one. Here's hoping that Bakker manages to maintain his standards over subsequent entries - in that respect, we'd like it to be more like the *A Song Of Ice And Fire* series than the *Dune* novels... **Miriam McDonald**

ⓘ Bakker spent 15 years on his first novel, so the deadlines for writing the follow-ups came as rather a shock...