



To Reign in Hell: A Novel

By Steven Brust

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The time is the Beginning. The place is Heaven. The story is the Revolt of the Angels? a war of magic, corruption and intrigue that could destroy the universe.

To Reign in Hell was Steven Brust's second novel, and it's a thrilling retelling of the revolt of the angels, through the lens of epic fantasy.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Consummate grace and genuine artistry” ?*Roger Zelazny*

“Steven Brust just might be America's best fantasy writer.” ?*Tad Williams*

About the Author

Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and raised in a family of Hungarian labor organizers, **Steven Brust** worked as a musician and a computer programmer before coming to prominence as a writer in 1983 with *Jherog*, the first of his novels about Vlad Taltos, a human professional assassin in a world dominated by long-lived, magically-empowered human-like "Dragaerans."

Over the next several years, several more "Taltos" novels followed, interspersed with other work, including *To Reign in Hell*, a fantasy re-working of Milton's war in Heaven; *The Sun, the Moon, and the Stars*, a contemporary fantasy based on Hungarian folktales; and a science fiction novel, *Cowboy Feng's Space Bar and Grille*. The most recent "Taltos" novels are *Dragon* and *Issola*. In 1991, with *The Phoenix Guards*, Brust began another series, set a thousand years earlier than the Taltos books; its sequels are *Five Hundred Years After* and the three volumes of "The Viscount of Adrilankha": *The Paths of the Dead*, *The Lord of Castle Black*, and *Sethra Lavode*.

While writing, Brust has continued to work as a musician, playing drums for the legendary band Cats Laughing and recording an album of his own work, *A Rose for Iconoclastes*. He lives in Las Vegas, Nevada where he pursues an ongoing interest in stochastics.

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ONE

Descend, then! I could also say: Ascend! 'Twere all the same. Escape from the Created To shapeless forms in liberated spaces! Enjoy what long ere this was dissipated!

—Goethe, *Faust*

Primordial ooze. Flux. Chaos. Cacoastrum.

The essential of the universe, in all its myriad forms and shapes. Essence.

Any and all combinations of form and shape exist within this essence. Eventually, of course, cacoastrum may deny itself. Order within chaos.

How many times is order created? The question has no meaning. A tree falls in the forest, and the universe hears it. Order doesn't last; cacoastrum will out.

The flux creates the essence of order, which is illiaster, which was the staff of life long before bread had the privilege. It can't last, however. Conscious? Sentient? Self-aware? Perhaps these things exist for a timeless instant, only to be lost again before they can begin to understand. They may have shape; they may have the seeds of thoughts—none of this matters. One of them may be a unicorn, another a greyish stone of unknown

properties, still another a girl-child with big brown eyes who vanishes before she really appears. It doesn't matter.

But let us give to one of these forms something new. Let us give it, for the sake of argument, an instinct to survive. Ah! Now the game is different, you see.

So this form resists, and strives to hold itself together. And as it strives, cacaostrum and illiaster produce more illiaster, and consciousness produces more consciousness, and now there are two.

The two of them strive; and then they find that they can communicate, and time means something now. And space, as well.

As they work together, to hold onto themselves, a third one appears. They find that they can bend the cacaostrum to their will, and force shape upon it, and command it to hold, for a while. They build walls at this place where the three of them are, and a top and a bottom.

Cacaostrum howls, almost as a living thing itself, and seeks entry. The three resist, and then there are four, then five, then six, then seven.

And the seven finish the walls, and the top, and the bottom and for a moment, at last, there is peace from the storm.

* * *

The Southern Wall of Heaven stretched long and stark. It spanned six hundred leagues and more, fading out of sight above, where it met with the azure ceiling. Its length was unmarked; its width unmeasured; its touch cool; its look foreboding and ageless.

The Regent had built it in the days of the Second Wave, and expanded it in the days of the Third. He had built his home into it, and out from it.

The foundations of the Southern Hold were deep into the bedrock of Heaven, carved and scorched with the fires of Belial, made immutable by the sceptre of Yaweh. Plain and grey like the Wall, the Hold rose over grassland and stoney plain, even and unbroken until its northern wall ended abruptly and became a roof that sloped sharply up to the top. There it blended into the Wall, giving the impression that the entire affair was an accidental blister from the Wall and would soon sink back into it.

The only entrance was built into the northern wall of the Hold. Here were placed a pair of massive oak doors, with finely carved wooden handles.

A visitor to the Hold, no matter how often he had been there, would be moved by the stature of the hard grey edifice—lonely, cold, distant, and proud. Like the Regent of the South himself, some said. But once inside, the illusion was shattered.

The visitor, a medium-sized golden haired dog, padded through the hallway. Being a dog, and therefore colorblind, he didn't see the cheerful blue of the walls. But he noticed the brightness of the lamps of iron and glass, one every twenty dogpaces. The oil for the lamps, pressed from local vegetation and refined in the basement of the Hold, had been scented with lilac.

The dog continued until he came to an archway. There was a small chamber, with large green couches and overstuffed chairs. The north wall held a burgundy-colored buffet, with cups and bottles of cut glass and stoneware. The lamps were always low in this room, but the dog heard the sounds of breathing, and smelled a friend.

He leapt onto a couch, facing this friend across a table of glass. Neither spoke; the dog moved slightly toward the Regent, who was seated with one leg on the table, his left arm across the back of the couch, his right hand loosely holding a glass into which he was staring. The dog caught a strong, sweet smell from the glass.

"'Tis but cheap wine, milord," he said.

"It fits my mood, friend Beelzebub. I'm feeling cheap today."

"Hath thy mood a cause, Lord?"

"All things have a cause, my friend."

"Would'st care to speak on't?"

His answer was silence. Beelzebub studied his friend as best he could in the dim light. The Regent was

smooth shaven and somewhat dark of complexion. His hair was dark brown, almost black, perhaps a bit wavy, and curled over the ears. His brows were thick, his eyes narrow, yet wide-set, with shocking green irises and lines of humor or anger around the edges. His jaw was strong, his nose straight and pronounced; and he wore colors matching his eyes beneath a cloak that was full and gold. Brown boots covered his feet, and upon his chest was an emerald, as large as his fist, on a chain of gold.

Beelzebub studied him for a moment longer. "Perchance 'twould do thee good to speak, Lord Satan."

The Regent set down his wine glass, found a small bowl, and poured into it.

"Maybe. Drink."

The dog moved forward on the couch, sniffed, but kept his opinion to himself. He lapped up a bit and managed not to shudder.

"What do you, friend Beelzebub, think of Yaweh's plans regarding the Fourth Wave?"

"Milord? Then it draweth nigh?"

"Who can say? It'll come eventually."

"Soon?"

"Not that we know. But Yaweh wants to be ready this time. He wants to build a place that will be safe from the flux."

"Verily, have we not that now?"

"Not permanently. What he has in mind is a place that's complete by itself, and won't be subject to Waves at all."

"Hmmm. Ambitious, nay?"

Satan glanced at him sharply. "You sound skeptical."

"Thy pardon, milord—who is't shall build this place? They must deal with the outside, so they must needs risk the ultimate end. Who is't shall do this? Thyself and thy brethren? You are strong, but only seven. Those of us from the Second Wave? We're less than a score of scores; the task is beyond us. Those of the Third Wave? Aye, they can do't, milord. Will they? For they know naught of such things save the fear of them. They must needs see the danger ere they fight it, I fear."

"You have a way," said Satan, "of getting right to the heart of things."

* * *

"It cannot last, " says the first.

"We will make it last, " says the second.

"We will build walls that are yet stronger, " says the third.

They must be larger, " says the fourth, "for there will be more of us."

That is good, " says the second.

"Aye, " says the first. "Let us begin, then, for I see the walls crumble before me."

And the evening and the morning are the Second Wave.

* * *

"Milord?"

"Hmmm—yes?"

Thou seem'd befuddled."

"I was thinking. Sorry." He shook his head

Users Review

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Sharon Bufkin:

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Denise Barnhart:

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