



Lex Talionis

R.S.A. Garcia

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Silver Medal for Best Science Fiction/Fantasy/Horror Ebook from the Independent Publishers Book Awards 2015 (IPPY Award)

Vengeance is only the beginning...

On one of Earth's planetary outposts, a young woman dies—and is brought back to life by a mysterious alien.

Inside a military starship, a wounded soldier is stalked by an unseen enemy.

When Lex reawakens in a clinic, she doesn't remember who she is, or who killed her. All she remembers is a phrase she does not understand. Lex Talionis. The law of revenge. Stripped of her past, Lex focuses on the only thing she can. Retribution. She will find the people who murdered her and she will make them pay.

What Lex doesn't know is that she's being hunted. The alien who saved her and the soldier fighting for survival are the keys to her past...and her future. She must discover what they know before the hunter finds her. Every clue brings her closer to powerful enemies. Everything she learns draws her nearer to the person who almost destroyed her.

The only man she has ever loved.

Starred Review at Publishers Weekly: <http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-1...>

Available at Amazon.com: <http://www.amazon.com/Lex-Talionis-R-...>

Lex Talionis Details

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From Reader Review Lex Talionis for online ebook

Hannah says

Lex Talionis by R. S. A. Garcia is a great sci-fi story. In a futuristic setting space travel is possible, geneticist have been band from altering and manipulating the human genome but that didn't stop them.

A mystery of a young woman found beaten, gang raped and on the verge of death dies in the ER and brought back to life by a strange alien creature. A young doctor obsessed with his patient who can't remember who she is. A forensic pathologist with more secrets and guilt then his shoulders can handle. Two detectives bound and determined to find out what happened to the young woman and how she ties to a crashed transport. A man stuck on a transport surrounded by blood and carnage that use to be his crew mates.

The first half of this book is Lex with amnesia, plagued by strange dreams and an unusual companion that communicates through telepathy. Colin the young obsessed doctor tries to help Lex trigger her memory and asks the help of an old friend and professor Anton the Forensic pathologist to look into her case. It is obvious she is a N-gene, a genetically modified human who was created in-vitro and modifications that went far beyond what was available to the general public. Meanwhile throughout the first half we follow a man who has narrowly escaped death and is trying to get to helm to send out a mayday and set autopilot. The first half ends when the strange alien life form does something to Lex that jogs her memories.

The second half of the book alternates between flashbacks and the present. We are introduced to more characters and yet even more betrayal and action. Without revealing to much, because the mystery is what makes the book, you journey with Lex two months prior to when the book started, meeting her foster parents, friends and the love of her life. In the present Lex is on the run and planning her intricate and in depth plan to take down the first of all the people who betrayed her. We also pick up the story line from her flashbacks and find out what happened afterward on her home planet as well as what happened after she left on the run.

This is a very complex book with many different aspects and if you can follow along without getting lost it is very much worth the read. The story ends, yes, but it does leave it open for more and I hope their are more books coming.

Online Eccentric Librarian says

More reviews (and no fluff) on the blog <http://surrealtalvi.wordpress.com/>

Lex Talionis is a well written sci fi novel featuring a strong female protagonist in a harsh, gritty story. The author successfully uses different POVs and even time periods, to create a mystery worth reading. Although there are aliens and metahumans, they aren't used as a deus ex machina and add to the story in very simple but effective ways. The book is a dense read but a mature protagonist and well built world keep the plot moving at an engaging pace.

Story: A badly beaten and sexually assaulted woman is saved from the streets and ends up in a hospital. She has no memory of how she was abused or who she is. As she spends time in the hospital recovering, a large cast of characters will become involved in her case - from the doctor treating her, hackers, police, government officials, even a circus performer and an alien. The more Lex comes to remember, the more she realizes just how much danger she is in.

The structure of the book is quite unique: the first half deals with Lex recuperating and the reader slowly gaining clues as to who she is and how she ended up in that situation. By the midpoint, her memories are restored and we are thrust into the past, and another life, to see the events and how they led up to that point. Finally, a small section at the end continues with how she deals with the memories and their repercussions.

Although flashbacks, especially one that takes nearly half the book, ordinarily would drag the story down, here this conceit works beautifully. There were many characters in the first half and we get to see how they ended up in the position they are in - not just Lex but quite a few others. At the heart of the story is a megaconglomeration, the ruthless woman running it, and meta humans who escaped laboratories in order to free themselves from enslavement. At the center of all that is Lex - not a metahuman herself but possessing traits beyond an ordinary human.

The story is quite gritty and the rape scenes were tough to read but well written so as not to have shock value. Lex is quite a grounded and strong character; it is during the flashback section that we find out exactly why she has such great skills. Interwoven with Lex's story in the first half of the book is the saga of a ship operator escaping from some horror stalking his ship and killing the crew. The true origin of the horror and its connection to Lex becomes obvious by the second part.

In all, this is very layered and nuanced sci fi - gritty in a Bladerunner sort of way but with interesting and distinct characters. This is a solid 4 stars for me - to make it 5 stars, I think some of the side characters could have been trimmed to make this leaner.

Reviewed from an ARC.

Karen says

Really enjoyed this one. It caught me by surprise, and I must say it is NOT a simple sci fi novel. There are moral themes and a complex storyline. Highly recommend.

Edwina Harvey says

Lex Talionis by R.S.A Garcia, Dragonwell Publishing, 2014

Caveat: I edited this book.

A bruised, battered unconscious young woman is found in a laneway on an alien planet. Her rescuer takes her to the nearest medical centre where she captures the heart and imagination of the doctor treating her. She has no ID to say who she is or what planet she comes from, and for all intents and purposes she should be dead, yet with the help of an alien creature with which she seems to have an inexplicable link, she not only

revives but survives. But she has amnesia – so she can't tell her doctor or the local police who she is. She names herself Lex Talionis, the old Roman principle for justice – an eye for an eye. Her past life comes back to her in a series of flashbacks, and she realises why she's called herself this name: she wants revenge for what has befallen her.

The dark overtones and subplot of espionage reminded me a little of the Bladerunner movie. Garcia's heroine, Lex, is at once tough but vulnerable, worldly-wise yet naive as she not only rediscovers who she was but uncovers her future. Garcia has written a dark, expertly woven, and well-paced futuristic first novel. I look forward to reading more of her work.

Danielle says

(Title courtesy of Dragonwell Publishing and NetGalley)

If you enjoy books with perspective changes with each new chapter and are a fan of sci-fi futuristic space fantasy, this is definitely the book for you!

The story is very well written and you can tell right off the bat that this storyline was planned and deeply thought through before it was written. The first 20% of the book basically set the tone and introduced the main characters. I usually have a really big problem with books that start out like this because I feel as though the story isn't progressing and all this introduction is just filler to make the novel longer. However, this style of storytelling totally worked in this novel. I was completely intrigued with all the mysteries and I couldn't wait to find out what happens.

This book presents an interesting look into the complexities of human nature without being over the top. I really enjoy Lex's character because she represents a strong female who is totally badass and doesn't whine or complain about her situation. If you can follow the constant changing narrative, then this is definitely a book to read.

Good read!

Tony Peak says

In Lex Talionis, a woman who's been nearly beaten to death wakes up in a clinic, with no memory of what happened, or who she is. What she does know is that she wants to find those responsible for her pain—not only physical damage, but psychological tragedies that span the stars. As memories trickle into her mind, she focuses on a rule taught in her youth: that of Lex Talionis, the law of retaliation. Armed with an unbreakable will, she takes the name Lex, just as galactic forces act to prevent her recovery. A doctor develops feelings for Lex, an alien bonds with her mind and heals her battered body, an empath is stunned by her telepathic abilities--and that's just the beginning of Rhonda Garcia's unflinching, wonderful novel.

Set in a far future where corporations and independent enclaves rule the galaxy, Lex Talionis keeps the science fiction in the background and its compelling, life-like characters in the foreground. I immediately liked Lex, with her no-nonsense curtness, coupled with a touching vulnerability. Rhonda writes her

characters with such reality that I easily envisioned them as real people. I wanted them to succeed, to win, or to receive justice, based on their deeds in the plot. Dialogue is top notch, given in outbursts, spurts, and intelligent musings comparable to Frank Herbert's Dune. Physical sensations and emotions are handled with expert delivery. But best of all, these are complex personalities. Even the villains have feelings, and Lex, the heroine, possesses a cold morality, born of her hardships, desires, and angst. Like some of the characters in the story, I fell in love with Lex myself. Others I found compelling are the empath/psychoanalyst Anton, his mutant underworld contact, Troi, and a small green alien called Oux. But there isn't a weak link in this cast.

The novel is divided into three parts, and once Lex regains her memories, there is a sizable section detailing who she was, what happened—but the why doesn't come until the third act. These aren't annoying flashback sequences, at least for me, because at that point, I was so invested in Lex's plight that I would have read through pages of infodumps just to discover what happens. The story is gritty, even brutal at times, but this is strong material, not fluff. There is a heavy level of suspense throughout. The action scenes are well done, and the sensual, erotic ones left me wanting more. The ending demands a sequel, which I will certainly read when it comes out.

I know I'm gushing over this novel, but I really enjoyed it. Rhonda Garcia is definitely on my literary radar. Read Lex Talionis, and she'll be on yours, too.

Kate says

I received a free copy of this book from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

In the interest of full disclosure, the author and I became casual online buddies AFTER the book was made available on NetGalley, but that had absolutely no influence on my review.

Wow. WOW.

I don't normally read sci-fi, but I would gladly pay money for any sequel...with an ending like that, there MUST be a sequel! But not in a HA HA, HERE'S YOUR CLIFFIE, GIMME MONEY kind of way, thank goodness! This is also a very good example of world-building done RIGHT...so many authors, when faced with the daunting task of truly creating a world (or in this case, worlds) from the ground up, it's a case of crash and burn. Here, I never had a problem following along and picturing these worlds, yet the author never resorts to rampant exposition or infodumps. Instead, we learn about the worlds by living in them with the characters.

"Lex" was absolutely amazing, a strong female character who could kick some serious a** but still be capable of tenderness and compassion. The minor characters were equally well-rounded, and I was extremely impressed with the creativity the author showed in making each of them unique in every aspect.

As I mentioned above, I am PRAYING that there is a sequel, not just so we'll have the pleasure of reading more from Ms. Garcia, but because there's so much we don't know about! (view spoiler)

There is a rape scene in the book, however the reader is warned about it in advance via the narrative. Although it's painful to read, I didn't feel that it was exploitative or "over the top" for shock value in terms of readability. It made the violent bloodbath on board that ship much more understandable, especially when we find out the "parties" that carried it out.

I could keep writing and writing, but I would wear out the spoiler tag, so I just urge you to enjoy this book on your own. It's not all sunshine, rainbows, and cute alien kittens, but it is an incredibly solid readable book, and I recommend it, without reservation.

Allan Dyen-Shapiro says

Were this book written in strict chronological order, it would have felt like a pulp thriller set in a space opera type world. Lots of fight scenes (I especially liked one in which two completely different scenes are dovetailed mid-fight), lots of intrigue.

But it wasn't. And that seems to have been its key strength. The first section has at least four different narratives running simultaneously, and as the author doesn't tell you what led to what, each stands on its own. The reader wonders--is this a medical thriller about an alien with healing powers that seem like something Octavia Butler might have dreamed up? Is this a story about a massacre on a spaceship? Or is it space opera political intrigue?

In the second section of the book, the action drops backward and follows a continuous plot line, ultimately explaining all that came before. However, it isn't until the third section that all aspects of the book come together.

So, it was a thriller with science fiction "what's going on" puzzle to it. And that made it an enjoyable read.

Several of the characters and their emotions seemed very real to me. Lex, Colin, and Lex's father, at least. They were well drawn.

It ended on a lead-up to the sequel. Moreover, the big idea the author seemed to be developing--a contrast between revenge and justice--also seemed to be saved for the second novel, as there's lots of layered revenges in this novel, but only a statement of how the main protagonist felt bad about the revenge and moved toward justice. This movement wasn't dramatized or enacted--probably in the sequel.

So in some ways, as a reader, I suspend judgment, waiting to see how things play out in Volume II of this series (when it comes out). The biggest issue on which I felt I as a reader had to suspend judgment on, for these reasons, was the treatment of the protagonist's gang rape--a major plot point in the book. The clinical description, in real-time, from the point-of-view of the victim was disturbing, as it was intended to be. The scenes of shame and anger were certainly justified. And the revenge that wasn't really satisfying made sense. However, the book started with the protagonist as a fully developed character, but post-rape, it never got to the point where she went on to do other things with her life. She had revenge against those directly responsible and had not yet exacted revenge/justice on those responsible on a higher level. She's changed, and romance/sex scenes late in the book indicate that she'd recovered to some extent, but she hadn't yet evolved into a person who could love or trust or live independent of revenge by the time the book ended.

Were this a stand-alone with no sequel planned, I'd consider that a flaw. Instead, it's a prompt to read the sequel when it appears.

Fast moving with clean prose, hooks that kept you turning pages, and tricks that raised it above the level of pulp adventure: a recommended read.

Alex West says

Intense, beautifully written space opera with believable characters.

This debut novel demonstrates talent from the author in pretty much every aspect of crafting fiction: prose style, characterisation, plot, suspense, setting, and ideas. Lex Talionis succeeded in putting me right into the mind and body of the main characters. The basic plot is ultimately a typical thriller, but it is told with a great deal of control and literary flair. Stylistically, I find that most scifi stories tend to play out like an elaborate puzzle observed at arms length, but reading this book, I felt like I was there.

Garcia is economical with her descriptions, but her words are beautifully chosen and the images and atmosphere will remain with you long after you put the book down. The worldbuilding is original but so down-to-earth you almost don't notice it—it reminded me of District 9.

The dialogue is sassy and fun:

“Hell no,” Sonja replied, speeding up as she hit a straightway, brightly lit buildings and the flash of passing headlights going by them in a blur. “I think your instincts are right. There’s something else going on here. I just don’t think the victim is to blame. Not yet, anyway.”

“But it feels wrong, and you didn’t meet her. She’s no push-over. She’s plenty dangerous herself.”

Sonja barked a short laugh. “So she had a couple of nightmares and she threw a tray at you. Don’t take this the wrong way, Linkow, but you’re an asshole. Lots of people would like to throw a tray at you.”

But Garcia is poetic when she wants to be:

She is bent over, looking into the glistening heart of a bead of water, studying the hues and the dance of light it projects. Everything around her is damp. Water drips in soothing rhythms somewhere in the distance. The grass beneath her feet is dew-slick. The air smells of earth, vegetation and moisture; it is a heavy thing. It pushes against her nostrils like the wet, welcoming tongue of a pet.

The opening is a classic amnesia story: a young woman is found, beaten almost to death, apparently raped, with no memory of who or what she is. She remembers the phrase ‘Lex Talionis’, literally ‘the law of revenge’, and so takes the name ‘Lex’ until she can discover who she is. Garcia uses this device to sustain tension and reveal information at a rate a reader can enjoy, a steady trickle that you almost don’t notice, but which gradually builds up an important picture of the society. It is a galactic society with aliens and some imaginative flourishes, but the city where we spend most of the story feels pretty similar to a modern, Western city, with some minor tweaks in technology. There is space travel and genetic engineering, but for the most part, changes in technology don’t seem to have wrought significant changes in society. Rather, the scifi aspect of the story is used to play out a story of cultural conflict and multinational corporations in a way that avoids being a commentary on any particular real-world situation.

Lex in this first third has an intensity and a similarity of purpose to Uma Thurman’s character in Kill Bill, except that she doesn’t know who betrayed her or why. This need is powerful and compels you to turn the page.

That said, looking back on the book with a bit of distance, I would have preferred if Lex had done more to earn the return of her memory. Despite her inner strength and complexity, and some satisfying fight scenes, when you actually think back over the book, Lex is a fairly passive character who mostly suffers things done to her rather than driving the plot with her own actions. Her most interesting self-initiated activities happen in flashback or ‘off-camera’.

This is not so apparent at the time of reading, because she is intense and intriguing, and because she is not the only POV character. We also follow the stories of a compassionate doctor, two hard-boiled detectives trying to solve a probably related murder, and a number of other characters whose mysterious agendas are gradually revealed. There are a couple of good twists and turns in how the plot plays out, and at least one caught me completely by surprise.

With respect to the rape, be warned that Lex does finally remember the incident in a pretty graphic flashback. However, it is worth commenting on the place of the rape in the story. Despite that the plot is almost a ‘rape and revenge’, the rape itself is not a manifestation of some kind of misogyny and not a comment on misogyny; rather, you get the strong impression that events would have taken a similar course had Lex been male. It arises out of a complex interplay of class politics and a history of cultural oppression. Lex’s story is a struggle to be accepted in this world when she does not quite belong anywhere.

In fact, the book presents a society that seems free of gender inequality. Women are simply there alongside the men, commanding armies or corporate empires, or investigating brutal murders. No one bats an eyelid when they are as tough and aggressive as the men. It’s situation normal. In this sense, *Lex Talionis* is a refreshing and empowering book, and a feminist revision of classic scifi. On the other hand, it presents a story almost completely devoid of domestic spaces, child rearing, or anything other than traditionally male-dominated spheres. This is not a criticism of the book so much as an observation of what it is and what to expect.

Lex Talionis is a gripping page turner, but one where you nevertheless have to pay quite close attention. The narrative is not entirely linear, and there are quite a few characters and names to keep track of. Also, be aware that this is book 1 of an as-yet-unwritten series, and ends on a note which is not a cliffhanger but could easily be described as ‘stay tuned for the next exciting installment’.

Christopher Gerrib says

One of the authors I follow, Tobias Buckell, recommended *Lex Talionis* on his blog. The author, R. S. A. Garcia, is, like Buckell, from the Caribbean. In her case, she still lives in the region on the island of Trinidad. I decided to take Toby’s recommendation, and I’m glad I did. The book opens on a spaceship where a badly wounded man is desperately trying to get to the bridge, and has to avoid the thing that’s killed all of his fellow crewmembers. We then cut to an alien city where a human merchant discovers another human in the gutter being attacked by a local alien.

The story then races off from there, and becomes a mystery. The human in the gutter is a woman, a soldier, genetically engineered and suffering from amnesia. The man on the spaceship reveals his secrets more slowly, but he proves to be less than sympathetic. The world created by Garcia is less than friendly, and has many problems. It’s also a place where humans are by no means the top species in the universe.

I have to say I found *Lex Talionis* an engrossing read. Figuring out who did what and why was interesting. I found the characters well-developed and believable. I did have a bit of a problem with the structure of the novel, in that there were multiple flashbacks and other jumps in time, but I was able to sort out where and when with no real problem. In short, I found *Lex Talionis* a great read.

Kelly says

A young woman is brutally beaten and assaulted and left for dead. She is taken to the nearest clinic where she does flirt with death, only to be revived by an odd alien, much to the surprise of the attending doctor. The creature stays by her bedside throughout her recovery, which is remarkably swift. It does not communicate with the doctors, nor does it eat. The alien's existence is one of the least mysterious aspects of the story, however. The young woman, herself, is a conundrum. She is genetically enhanced, possibly bred to be a soldier. She is highly intelligent and testing reveals she has command of some seventy languages. Her genetic code has some markers that cannot be identified. Most puzzling of all is the fact she cannot remember who she is.

In the beginning, that almost seems a blessing, especially considering what she suffered before she was found. But as her recovery progresses, finding out who she is becomes more important because people are looking for her and they're not nice people.

‘*Lex Talionis*’ is an ambitious debut. The writing is tight and the plot is taut and gritty. Dark themes swirl through the pages as the action jumps forward and back, from the girl with no memory to an injured man, Michael, crawling through a bloodied spaceship, seeking to escape a terrible death. At the end of part one, these two meet and, though they are obviously connected by more than a gruesome ordeal, the circumstances remain part of the mystery for the reader. But not for the girl who finally remembers her name: Shalon Conway, the meaning of which gains weight as the story progresses. More importantly, she remembers who she is and why she was removed from her home.

Part two takes us back two months to set up Shalon’s betrayal and subsequent assault. We then follow the course of her revenge, according to the old law: *lex talionis*, often interpreted as ‘eye for an eye’.

The world-building in this novel is astounding. I had a clear picture of people and places from beginning to end. The plot is interesting and intriguing, meaning the story is not only attention-worthy, but has enough hooks to keep the pages turning. Author R.S.A. Garcia employs some interesting writing techniques, most of which suit the futuristic setting. Where the book failed to absolutely capture me was in the characterisation. Despite her ordeal, I never felt more than passing sympathy for Shalon. She didn’t invite it. I actually felt more sorry for both Michael and Andor, two men I should have rightfully despised. I think the reverse order of the story is responsible. When we meet Shalon, she has no idea who she is and so neither does the reader. By the time we do properly meet her, half the book is done and the dip into the past does little to flesh out her character. She’s already focused and purposeful. Her feelings for Andor feel like an inconvenience or an afterthought.

Despite this failing for me, ‘*Lex Talionis*’ is a remarkable book. I recommend it without hesitation for readers of darker, grittier science fiction and I look forward to seeing what else R.S.A Garcia comes up with, in this world, or another of her devise.

Written for SFCrowsnest.

Mike Douton says

Lex takes one of my favorite sci-fi tropes and runs with it blending the whole thing with mystery-thriller aspects. Protagos with amnesia that are trying to learn who they are right along with the reader are an underutilized trope in the genre. Other than this book, I can think of four in all of my bookshelves that deal with it. One of them happens to be my all time favorite book, *Nine Princes in Amber*. I guess that meant I started reading Lex with the bar set pretty high. That was alright, 'cause Garcia nailed it.

I mentioned above how Garcia blended some mystery-thriller tropes into her book. I felt that a lot of them were in the storytelling itself. There are two very distinct parts of the story corresponding with how much memory Lex has. Because of this, the timeline and the POVs bounce around a lot. It's not sometime I often see done to the extent Garcia does it. I found it different, but never distracting or confusing. The book also starts with a slow burn rather than huge bang. Garcia takes the time to set things up in the first quarterish of the book. She's setting us up for a marathon, not a sprint. I only dabble in mystery books, but I got a sense that the pacing came from the influence of that genre.

Holy shit, the payoff is worth it.

Excerpt from <http://stuffandorjunk.wordpress.com/2...>

Angela Street says

This is an unusual book that caused me to have numerous emotional responses as I read it. It is a boldly written books that refuses to follow a predictable run of the mill story line. There is some violence with a rape scene that was quite emotionally challenging for me to work my way through. I have never seen this issue approached in this manner. The build up to the actual event made it even more emotionally charged. There were some sections in the early part of the book that had more detail than I needed (i.e. when a character survived a massacre) but there were also other sections where I could not put the book down and stayed up all hours reading. I even took the book to work to read at lunch and found myself still reading as I was standing in line to pay for my lunch and walking to my car. There were a couple of potential love interests involved that I felt were not right (at least at this point) for the character and I am glad the writer did not try to force this. The ending was intriguing and I suspect that the best is yet to come in future books.

Andrew says

“You’ve remembered everything then?”

The laugh that escaped her was both soft and bitter and he saw a muscle tic in her jaw. “Everything, yes. And you know what they say. Be careful what you wish for, you just might get it.” Her breath caught for a moment, as if in the wake of a sharp pain. When she spoke again, for the first time, she sounded her age. “I had just turned eighteen when they took me. My birthday was three nights earlier. I was still a virgin when they raped me.”

Shocked, Colin could only look at her. Oh, God. How could they do that? What kind of beasts could do that? He wanted to go to her, hold her and tell her that she was safe now, but something stopped him. Something in the way she held herself.

“God. I’m so sorry.”

“I know you mean well, Colin, but it’s my fault. I shouldn’t have trusted anyone. People like me can’t afford that. But I was stupid. I forgot. I wanted to forget.” She paused. “You won’t understand. You don’t know who I am. What I am.”

He said softly, “So tell me.”

The expression on her face when she turned to him grabbed at his chest like a fist. Her calmness was terrible to look at, difficult to comprehend.

“My name,” she said, in a voice that never wavered, “is Shalon Conway. I am the daughter of Jason and Falon Conway and heir to Conway Enterprises. Gilene Conway is my aunt—and the woman who murdered my parents.”

The debut novel from author R.S.A. Garcia tells the story of a young woman who is happened upon in an alley after having been brutally raped and left for dead. She is taken to a PortCity hospital on Serron, where thanks to the skill of physician Colin Mayfeld and an unexpected alien ally called Oux, she survives. However, she remembers little of who she was or how and why she was attacked—the answers to which form the crux of Lex Talionis’s narrative.

Lex, as she is dubbed (until such time as her memory returns), is an enigma: despite suffering multiple broken bones and lacerated organs—not to mention the revelation that it was not one man who raped her but five—it isn’t long before she summons the strength to get out of bed on her own. She also shows a warrior’s aptitude for combat and can speak a number of different languages; it soon becomes clear to Colin, and to those others helping and/or suspicious of Lex, that she is not entirely human.

Lex is an interesting character, though her DNA has definite shades of River Tam from Firefly. That being said, she’s a strong protagonist, and my interest in her fate is what kept me reading long after the story had lost its initial appeal—the mystery and investigation into what happened to her and why.

While I remained entertained throughout, Lex Talionis is not without its share of problems—some small, some glaring. I noted a number of minor grammatical hitches throughout—problems with hyphenation more than anything. The larger problems, however, have to do with character, tone, and structure.

I mentioned Lex was an intriguing character, but she’s also the only intriguing character. The rest? They’re cut-outs—two dimensional characters who exist to either propel the plot (Chris), to fall inexplicably and creepily in love with the just recently horribly raped and abused girl who looks only a little past eighteen (Colin), or to be moustache twirling caricatures of villainy (the troopers). A few of the characters seem interesting, but feel underutilized in the story—for example, I found myself wanting far more of Anton and his potentially troubled relationship with Troi. Most underutilized, though, is the villain, Gilene Conway, who we’re told is “the worst of a bad lot,” yet remains off the page and in the shadows and thus feels intangible and never that much of a threat—it’s all tell and no show.

With regards to tone, the book feels a bit at odds with its own identity. For example, it imagines a far-reaching set of worlds, some of which feel quite authentic (the detail of the Desolation in particular was excellent), but then resorts to boilerplate sci-fi language and nomenclature, with lots of vaguely named places like the Assembly, the Facility, the Program, the Outsiders, and phrases such as “Then I’ll be up the spacelanes without a hyperdrive.” None of it is offensive or anything like that, but the creativity that’s gone into the creation of the worlds is not matched in the book’s overall language or texture.

But none of these issues were as problematic for me as its structure—namely that there’s a rather large time jump in the middle of the book’s third part. It offers some fairly dramatic character changes and tosses a few unexpected wrinkles into the mix, but everything that’s been skipped feels like stuff I really want to see. It’s possible I will see that material at some point, in a sequel perhaps, but for this novel it felt more confusing than anything. I was left, in the end, feeling as if all the various story threads were merely set-ups for pay-offs still to come; the lack of any sort of closure was frustrating.

As I said above, I enjoyed *Lex Talionis* for what it was—an initially intriguing popcorn mystery with some excellent action scenes throughout (the author does have a feel for rhythm and motion when it comes to fight scenes). However, I don’t feel I can recommend it on its own, as it simply leaves too much what I feel is essential content for future stories.

Elizabeth Bear says

A tense, morally complex science fiction thriller that tackles hard questions of loyalty, exploitation, and human decency without compromising on plot.
