



Assail

Ian C. Esslemont

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This followup to Ian C. Esslemont's Blood and Bone is sure to delight Malazan fans.

Tens of thousands of years of ice is melting, and the land of Assail, long a byword for menace and inaccessibility, is at last yielding its secrets. Tales of gold discovered in the region's north circulate in every waterfront dive and sailor's tavern and now countless adventurers and fortune-seekers have set sail in search of riches. All these adventurers have to guide them are legends and garbled tales of the dangers that lie in wait -- hostile coasts, fields of ice, impassable barriers and strange, terrifying creatures. But all accounts concur that the people of the north meet all trespassers with the sword. And beyond are rumoured to lurk Elder monsters out of history's very beginnings. Into this turmoil ventures the mercenary company, the Crimson Guard. Not drawn by contract, but by the promise of answers: answers to mysteries that Shimmer, second in command, wonders should even be sought. Arriving also, part of an uneasy alliance of Malazan fortune-hunters and Letherii soldiery, comes the bard Fisher kel Tath. And with him is a Tiste Andii who was found washed ashore and who cannot remember his past life, yet who commands far more power than he really should. Also venturing north is said to be a mighty champion, a man who once fought for the Malazans, the bearer of a sword that slays gods: Whiteblade.

And lastly, far to the south, a woman guards the shore awaiting both her allies and her enemies. Silverfox, newly incarnated Summoner of the undying army of the T'lan Imass, will do anything to stop the renewal of an ages-old crusade that could lay waste to the entire continent and beyond.

Casting light on mysteries spanning the Malazan empire, and offering a glimpse of the storied and epic history that shaped it, "Assail" is the final chapter in the epic story of the Empire of Malaz.

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Assail Details

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Victor says

Largely disappointing, and a step back in many ways from Blood & Bone. Throughout the course of Erikson's books, Assail was built up to be a terrifying place with tons of crazy things happening constantly. Unfortunately, Esslemont fails to deliver on that promise. The land of Assail is instead thinly characterized as merely "a bad place" through various characters and set-pieces, none of which were terribly interesting. Particularly the ending, which I felt to be quite anticlimactic, especially in comparison to the conclusions of Erikson's novels and a handful of Esslemont's previous entries. After the big "convergence" is a decent conclusion to some of the plots from Memories of Ice. There were also a few resolutions to threads that really didn't need to be expounded on, namely the Crimson Guard's story. These characters have become boring as paste in Esslemont's series, and Assail does nothing to win me over to them.

Some things I did like: Esslemont finally made Kyle an interesting character. His sections were probably my favorite in the novel. He was one of the few characters that felt necessary throughout the entire text. Orman was also a nice addition. While not as plot relevant as Kyle, Orman had a nice arc that was enjoyable rather than tedious.

I'm glad this novel exists so that some plot lines from Memories of Ice can finally be put to bed, but I come away pretty unsatisfied with it as a novel. I believe Esslemont has 3 more books planned, so as always I am eager to see if he can redeem himself after the missteps present in Assail.

BooksInPhotos says

I really enjoyed this book and this series in general. I know ICE gets a little bit of hate after coming from Erikson but I think it's a great addition to the Malazan world.

Doug says

The final book in Esslemont's Novels of the Malazan Empire series was a disappointment.

Most of my problems revolve around the structure of the plot. Specifically, the reader is given no reason to care about anything. Much like was the case in the previous book, *Blood and Bone*, Esslemont seems to want to exploit the Malazan setting by writing books that do little beyond featuring events set in the world of Erikson's outstanding Malazan Book of the Fallen series.

Some of the character (e.g., Kyle) have been around since Esslemont's second book, *Return of the Crimson Guard*, and it's sad to see that the characters haven't really had much of a trajectory at all. It's possible that we'll encounter some of these characters in later Malazan books, so that would explain the lack of closure. Yet, inexcusably, the reader discovers that these characters have hardly had any quest or story arc to speak of.

The vast majority of this book is set in Assail, a mysterious land that we have heard a lot about but have

never really seen before. Most of the characters are drawn to Assail due a gold rush in the region. However, I don't think this motivation is sustained throughout the book for very long, for anyone; there's practically nobody who wants gold when the book is even thirty-five percent done. It's easy at that point to ask 'OK, so, why, for instance, is Fisher here?'. He was someone who was never in Assail for gold, at all, it seems -- and there seems to be absolutely no reason why Fisher is in Assail. The same can be said for Kyle: why is he here? What's keeping him here?

The answer: there's no reason. There is nothing to motivate the characters, and there's no reason for a reader to want to see what they do.

There is one exception: the Crimson Guard, who are in Assail for the sake of learning something mysterious about the vow they've sworn. Still, that story falls flat for a variety of reasons. One is that the story is stretched out too long. Another is that some characters are already aware of the secret but don't want to disclose it, on the grounds that others characters should 'see it for themselves'. (This makes the [very] long wait for the reveal seem contrived.) A third reason is that the reveal is not that exciting, when you learn it after around 750 pages. The very last and most damning reason is we're told basically nothing about this mystery other than that is a mysterious mystery. Esslemont makes no effort to make the reader care about it; instead, he relies exclusively on the hope that since this is a mystery concerning some longtime players in the Malazan world, the Crimson Guard, the reader will care.

This is a motif in Esslemont's writing: he makes no effort to make the reader care.

I do not recommend **Assail**.

Stefan Bach says

Almost nothing in this Malazan world is infinite. Neither a life, nor seemingly neither a death.

When characters die, their spiritual manifestation aptly goes through ***Hood's*** gate.

(*Hood being a Lord of Death and patron god of dead.*)

Others – because this is a big world and Hood is not a god of death everywhere – maybe even get cursed and they never get to die, they just move on, trapped in their dead bodies. Others elusively manage to stay above the ground for some time, and of course, there are Ascendants and gods with unnaturally long life.

But, the rule is: everyone at some point will die and their spirit continues its existence somewhere else.

Yes, for the sake of the story, here and there, someone slips under the fence, escapes the realm of death and gets back to life. And that's OK. That I understand. It worked for the story.

Until we were introduced with a possibility that spirits, which moved on, can meet a far more definitive end. With ferocious finality.

You see, everyone in this world is inside a dream. Be they living or be they dead, they exist inside a ***Burn's sleep***. Outside of hers sleep there's a chaos. Nonexistence. Oblivion.

So, when a character in his living flesh and blood, or as a dead spirit, gets out of this dream and into the chaos – that's it. A true end.

Those are the rules that we have learned at the middle of the series and rules that were applied on numerous occasions.

So, if I ever wrote a book (*I won't. Hence this nonchalant bravado in criticizing Ian and Steven here, I*

guess.), that's a part of the thirty inter-connected book series, and if we build a world and I followed the rules that we set in it – I definitely wouldn't change them so abruptly and cheaply in the final page of the epilogue of my last book in the series!

I understand. Both authors are alive and well. They need to provide source of income. There are many spinoffs, sequels and prequels more to write.

But please, if you took upon yourself to write tie-ins and answer questions we've been waiting for, could you please, first bring us to necessary closure – before you start raising new questions?

Assail, sixth and final book in **Ian C. Esslemont's Malazan Empire** series is set on the most dangerous continent in Malazan world. All books and mysteries within lead up to this moment. Ice is melted and Assail is open for business.

Overall, while I did enjoy parts of the book, enjoyed some of the much beloved characters from the main series – but not necessarily their stories – I got myself many answers and somewhat satisfying conclusion.

Lady*M says

4.5 stars

Oh, yeah, I did it. All sixteen books. There is still the Kharkanas Trilogy, but, at this point, I decided to wait and not turn my brain into a mush.

To paraphrase Robert Jordan, this is not the ending, but *an* ending. So, if you expected every thread neatly tied up, I've got to ask - have you paid attention at all?! Yet, Esslemont does surprisingly well. The pace, storytelling, characters are superb. He answers several big questions and, sometimes, offers resolutions far, far in the future. Some readers won't like it but I thought it was very nicely done.

The news of discovered gold on Assail spreads through the world and, naturally, every adventurer rushes to the cursed island. And it is cursed: from inhospitable shores, residues of old magic to very hostile natives, Assail will do everything to kill you. However, there are those among outsiders that have different motives. The Crimson Guard seeks its lost members and answers. Malazans (who else) have hidden agenda. We encounter some old friends here. T'lan Imass are divided between those who seek genocide of every human with even a drop of Jughut blood (which is pretty much everyone on Assail) and those who seek ending of hostilities and redemption. Letherii, of course, seek riches and they are still assholes in spite of Tehol's attempts to change them.

I enjoyed almost every POV character. Kyle was great; he has certainly grown from unfortunate *Return of the Crimson Guard*. His battles with the Silent People were awesome, yet, he is human and not every battle is going to go his way in spite of Osserc's sword. I like how he in the end embraces his title. On his side of the story, it was also great to learn more about Fisher. I also liked Orman, the Reddin brothers and Old Bear. The best human face was given by Jute, his wife and crew.

Some spoilers ahead, click at your own peril.

The best story line is, of course, about Crimson Guard. We finally have the truth about the Vow. Them turning to be a new (view spoiler) who have to wait for their own (view spoiler) was a great touch. I suspected something similar, but the way Esslemont does it gives them a nice conclusion in the series.

The biggest mystery is this: is Jethiss - Anomander Rake reborn? Spinnock Durav who lost all his memories? Some other, completely new Tiste Andii? It really doesn't matter, in my opinion, though, while I adore Anomander Rake, I feel his ending in *Toll the Hounds* was perfect and the reset is not needed. But, sword (view spoiler) was awesome and drove the point about Forkrul Assail home once again. I would like to know more about his, Fisher's and Kyle's further adventures though.

All in all, this is Esslemont's best novel and great addition to the Malazan world. It might not have an emotional punch of *The Crippled God*, but dealt a punch or two and gave us certain conclusion to this era in the Malazan history. I am happy to hear Esslemont is writing a pre-Empire trilogy and the title of the first book (*Dancer's Lament*) made me very, very happy (just think about all the things he and old Emperor were up to). I cannot wait. I am glad both him and Erikson are staying in this world, possibly one of the best in all the fantasy.

I am now taking a break from the world. I earned it. It's your turn, fantasy-loving friends. :D

Patrick St-Denis says

The continent of Assail. . . Most dangerous and mysterious place in the Malazan universe, or so we've been led to believe. Ever since Steven Erikson's *Memories of Ice*, the mere mention of Assail and its secrets has gotten Malazan fans giddy with excitement. And now, finally, Assail's mysteries would be revealed in what is dubbed "the final novel of the Malazan Empire." Problem is, could Ian Cameron Esslemont pull it off?

Esslemont's writing has been divisive from the very beginning, when *Night of Knives* was first released as a limited edition. From then on, a number of Erikson fans wrote him off and turned their backs on the Malazan co-creator. Others elected to stick with him and were rewarded by two thrilling and fascinating additions to the Malazan canon, *Return of the Crimson Guard* and *Stonewielder*. Unfortunately, two major letdowns in a row, *Orb Sceptre Throne and Blood and Bone*, made even some die-hard fans lose hope in Ian Cameron Esslemont. So much so that even on malazanempire.com, the emperor's own palace, so to speak, the biggest Malazan aficionados appear to be split into two camps. On the one hand, you have those who are happy with whatever helps further flesh out Steven Erikson's storylines. And on the other, you have those, like me, who have pretty much lost faith with Esslemont and bemoan the fact that the author seems to be unable to make his Malazan novels live up to the lofty expectations generated by his friend and fellow co-creator.

Understandably, my expectations were as low as humanly possible when I set out to read *Assail*. For some reason, it appears that the epilogue novel(s) is/are no longer scheduled to be published. Hence, *Assail*, to all ends and purposes, will likely be the last Malazan installment covering the main story arcs introduced by Steven Erikson. Early on, when the novel was slow-moving and focused on extraneous plotlines, it was obvious that *Assail* would fail to wrap everything up in true Malazan fashion. And in the end, this book

miserably failed to meet even my oh-so low expectations. . .

Assail is Ian Cameron Esslemont's The Crippled God. The culmination of a variety of far-reaching storylines spread through his last four novels. Some of them first explored by Erikson in the original sequence, years ago. And although many fans doubted that Esslemont could close the show the way Erikson did in the last volume of The Malazan Book of the Fallen, I would never have expected that Assail would be such a disheartening disappointment. . .

Here's the blurb:

Tens of thousands of years of ice is melting, and the land of Assail, long a byword for menace and inaccessibility, is at last yielding its secrets. Tales of gold discovered in the region's north circulate in every waterfront dive and sailor's tavern and now countless adventurers and fortune-seekers have set sail in search of riches. All these adventurers have to guide them are legends and garbled tales of the dangers that lie in wait - hostile coasts, fields of ice, impassable barriers and strange, terrifying creatures. But all accounts concur that the people of the north meet all trespassers with the sword. And beyond are rumoured to lurk Elder monsters out of history's very beginnings.

Into this turmoil ventures the mercenary company, the Crimson Guard. Not drawn by contract, but by the promise of answers: answers that Shimmer, second in command, feels should not be sought. Also heading north, as part of an uneasy alliance of Malazan fortune-hunters and Letherii soldiery, comes the bard Fisher kel Tath. With him is a Tiste Andii who was found washed ashore and cannot remember his past and yet commands far more power than he really should. It is also rumoured that a warrior, bearer of a sword that slays gods and who once fought for the Malazans, is also journeying that way. But far to the south, a woman patiently guards the shore. She awaits both allies and enemies. She is Silverfox, newly incarnate Summoner of the undying army of the T'lan Imass, and she will do anything to stop the renewal of an ages-old crusade that could lay waste to the entire continent and beyond. Casting light on mysteries spanning the Malazan empire, and offering a glimpse of the storied and epic history that shaped it, Assail brings the epic story of the Empire of Malaz to a thrilling close.

The worldbuilding is always one of the key ingredients in every Malazan installment. And in this regard at least, Esslemont doesn't usually disappoint. Almost nothing is known with certainty about Assail, and like all fans I relished the idea of getting an opportunity to explore this mysterious corner of Wu. Sadly, unlike Blood and Bone, in which I felt the author captured the Southeast Asian jungle setting to perfection in his depiction of the Himatan jungle in Jacuruku, Assail feels more or less like Northern British Columbia or Alaska. And yet, it's not the imagery that's the problem. Esslemont's descriptive narrative is probably as good as in any of his other novels. It's the essence of Assail, its mysteries, its aura, its dangers; all of these the author failed to convey. We are talking about a continent which the Emperor and Dancer steered clear of, for it was deemed too dangerous. A place where human rulers supposedly not only stood up against legions of T'lan Imass, but destroyed thousands of them in the process. But for all that, there is nothing in the narrative that conveys that aura of utmost danger. Frankly, Erikson's depiction of Seven Cities felt a hundred times more perilous. Readers looking forward to revelations about Assail's numerous secrets will also be disappointed. The book offers very little in that regard, which makes me wonder how/why Assail could ever be the final volume of the Malazan Empire.

The characterization is by far the weakest aspect of this work. How the hell it could once again be that bad, I'll never know. While the plotlines don't necessarily lack any sense of direction the way they did in Blood and Bone, they are nevertheless uninvolved for the most part, and most of the protagonists remain flat, generic, cardboard cutout characters. Especially anything involving the members of the Crimson Guard,

which is reminiscent of inane Forgotten Realms-like crap. How unimpressive, boring, and pathetic have they all become. . . And the dialogue? As was the case in Blood and Bone, too often is the back-and-forth between the protagonists adolescent and puerile. In addition, the unexpected romance between two members turned out to be a little lame. The plotline exploring Silverfox and the T'lan Imass is by far the least exploited. Which is odd, as I expected it to lie at the heart of the tale. One of Assail's biggest shortcomings is the inexplicably high number of points of view. With so little taking place throughout this book, one has to wonder why Esslemont felt the need for readers to witness events occur through the eyes of so many characters. Following several extraneous plotlines that often bring little or nothing to the overall story arc killed the flow of the novel and slowed the rhythm to a crawl in various portions of the story. I could have done without many of the sailors' POVs. Other than Cartheron Crust, who somehow stole the show in every scene in which he appeared. Still, way too much "air time" was devoted to Kyle and Orman. Fisher and Jethiss' storyline proved to be one of the most interesting, and kudos to Esslemont for the unanticipated surprise at the end!

In the past, we have often overlooked Esslemont's occasional shortcomings, maintaining that he was "fleshing out" Erikson's storylines, providing answers and raising more questions. No matter from what angle you look at it, Assail remains a somewhat poor and uninspired work. As was the case with its two predecessors, with Assail it is evident that Ian Cameron Esslemont didn't have what it takes as an author to truly do justice to the storylines that were his. Though the quality of both Return of the Crimson Guard and Stonewielder argues against such a statement. Now that his arcs are done, it is obvious that, unlike Steven Erikson, his skills were not necessarily up to the task. Which is a shame, as he had some awesome plotlines to work with, chief among those the Crimson Guard, the T'lan Imass, and the mysteries of Assail.

The only positive facet of Assail would be its ending. It was a good ending. Not great, but good. In no way a fitting end to the Malazan saga, however. Truth to tell, it wasn't even an ending per se. Hence, without the epilogue book(s), it makes very little sense for the saga to end this way. There was no major convergence, no mindfuck, no proverbial shit hitting the fan. It is decidedly anticlimactic, but it does tie up all the Ian Cameron Esslemont books. So does the ending save the entire book? No way. Not by a long shot. Assail is 80% filler material, bloating up the book between the scenes that actually matters.

So in the end, Assail is not a total loss. No matter how anticlimactic the endgame proved to be, Esslemont closed the show on a high note. But for the most part, Assail can be nothing but another major disappointment. . .

For more reviews: www.fantasyhotlist.blogspot.com

Maggie K says

Dang...what a convergence!

This is Book 6 in a series. If you don't read the other books you wont get this. (Duh, but there is a reviewer who apparently does not)

Appearing in time after Blood and Bone, this book wraps up the storyline of the Crimson Guard and the Imaas war on the Jaghut, The story behind Stalker, Badlands and Coot, and also what happened to all those stolen munitions! I loved the re-appearance of Crust....

At the end, there is a twist involving an unexpected returning character (although I don't know why I was surprised...Malazan is teeming with the back-from-the-dead types)

I really think Esslemont has improved with every book. He isn't Steven Erikson, and it doesn't make sense to expect him to write the same way.

C.S. Woolley says

The book sounds like it will be really interesting to read from the title and description but the writing style is hard to engage with and the story doesn't really go anywhere, there is a slight build to a climax but it is lacking in suspense. This is underlined by a huge number of characters that are thrown at the reader with very little time given for characterization meaning that it is hard to keep track of who is who and their importance within the story.

José says

(Comentario en español más abajo)

"What was he like?"

"Who?"

"The old Emperor."

Cartheron pulled a hand down his greying jowls, nodded his understanding of Jute's interest. "I could never make up my mind if he was the biggest fool I'd ever met, or the most cunning bastard."

Another Malazan book added to my all-time favourite books! *Assail* was amazing and an awesome ending for the Crimson Guard plot.

I can't believe I've already read all 16 main books of the Malazan universe! This is by far the longest fantasy series I've ever read, and probably the best I'll ever read; nothing can compare to the epic scope of this series. Any fantasy fan should read these books.

Assail es la épica conclusión del segundo arco argumental de Malaz. Me pareció el mejor libro de Esslemont por lejos, lleno de acción y respuestas a muchos de los misterios ancestrales que se plantean en los 10 libros de Steven Erikson.

Al estar ambientado después de los eventos de *The Crippled God*, este libro sirve de epílogo para la saga principal. Me encantó cómo Esslemont exploró las diferentes facciones existentes en *Assail*, el único continente del mundo de Malaz que quedaba por explorar. Muchos personajes nuevos y viejos convergen para una última batalla y para revelar el misterio de los Jaghut.

La saga de Malaz es la más extensa que he leído y me fascinó, cada uno de los 16 libros que componen esta obra maestra de la fantasía es brutal y abarca un montón de cuestiones como el destino, el poder de los dioses y cómo las diferentes razas están condenadas a enfrentarse entre sí hasta el fin de los tiempos. Considero que todo fanático de la fantasía debería leerla.

Subiré una reseña completa de estos 6 libros próximamente =)

Captain Sir Roddy, R.N. (Ret.) says

Oh, dear god, and it all comes to an end...

I have avidly--and with great passion, joy, sadness, and grief--read every installment in the episodes of 'The Malazan Book of the Fallen' and the 'The Malazan Empire' by Steven Erikson and Ian C. Esslemont, respectively. This stuff is absolutely 'off-the-hook' good...the very best fantasy fiction that you'll ever encounter. It is a mythology for our time--something akin to what J.R.R. Tolkien intended with his crafting of *The Silmarillion*. These two Canadian authors have given us a tale of a world and its peoples and alternative belief systems just like the world we live in today.

Ian C. Esslemont's last installment in his 'Malazan Empire' series, *Assail* is, without a doubt, his very, very best novel. The convergence of characters and activities on the mysterious island continent of Assail are meant to be, I believe, somewhat contemporaneous in time with Erikson's tale's in *Dust of Dreams* and *The Crippled God*, and damned if it all doesn't make sense and shine new light on some unresolved issues in Erikson's novels.

Suffice it to say that if you're a Malazan junkie like me, I am not gonna breathe a word about the plot here; and if you have no knowledge of the world that Messrs. Erikson and Esslemont have created you could care less. If you are a 'newbie', all I can tell you is to start at the beginning and find yourself completely and unalterably ensorcelled by some of the very best fantasy fiction in the last several decades. Esslemont's *Assail* is a more than worthy exclamation point to this awesome series of novels.

Bcvs says

Must re-read the entire series.

Amanda says

Right, chaps - I'm sorry I went AWOL on this one for a while, but now back and ready to race into Forge of Darkness. I have my shiny copy sat right next to me and ready to go.

Which means revisiting my thoughts on *Assail*.

What's strange is that this is the first novel in the re-read that I came to with more of an editorial hat on, and recognised more of the problems with the balance of *Assail*.

Take, for instance, those first giddy chapters where we were offered a mysterious Tiste Andii, who suffered amnesia and had no idea who he might be. The wondering about which character it was. His determination to find out who he is. The scene on the bone bridge. All very exciting, very dramatic and part of my favourite scenes in the novel. However, towards the end of the novel, he suddenly vanished. Even in scenes where he was supposed to be (featuring Fisher and Kyle) he wasn't even mentioned. It was as though Esslemont thought "I need a Tiste Andii for the ending" and then got excited with the possibilities of a mystery as to

who it was, but then went too far down the Anomander Rake red herring route that he couldn't really write anything more and so dropped the character.

Speaking of the ending... When you are less than fifteen pages from the end, it is pointless having a character look to a huge mountain with Forkrul Assail at the top and wonder if they're going to get out alive. There is no tension. We know they're going to survive.

And there was a problem with balance at the end. We had read pages and pages of description at other points, but the ending gets wrapped up with dizzying speed. To the point where I wasn't **entirely** sure what had been achieved. Also, Kyle being the saviour of the novel? No, just no. The random necklace that had barely seen a mention in prior novels suddenly being the one thing that would save them all from Forkrul justice? Didn't work for me.

So what did work?

Well, I actually enjoyed the setting and the Jaghut magic wreathed through it. For me, it was such a contrast with Blood and Bone, and it was beautifully achieved. I could feel the cold making my teeth ache in some of those scenes.

I adored the Cartheron Crust sections. That scene in the camp where the Malazans are drawn together and then cause havoc? One of the finest scenes Esslemont has ever written. It did bring to mind something - these Crimson Guard books have not had the vigour and fun of the Malazan series, because the Guard generally seem more po-faced and serious. And then it occurred that perhaps it was a deliberate tonal shift by Esslemont because of the Vow they have taken and their ultimate destiny. Which would be just superb, in my eyes, and an excellent recognition by the author of what needed to be conveyed.

With the Vow - yes, it was long-drawn-out and most of us got there before the big "reveal", but consider the audacity of Esslemont and the vision that led him to realise what a wonderfully poetic resolution that would be. The execution was lacking a little, but the idea was breathtaking and did lead to some brilliant moments.

So, not my favourite novel, by any means, even of Esslemont's (I think I would list Blood and Bone as the favourite), but one that had some great sections and showed an author really developing into his own voice.

Jasper says

originally posted at: <http://thebookplank.blogspot.com/2014...>

For many a fantasy reader the words Malazan Empire of the Fallen shouldn't come as an unknown. Steven Erikson is perhaps the best known for these books, well let me rephrase, EPIC works. But Steven Erikson wasn't the sole inventor of the universe of Malaz, together with Ian C. Esslemont this universe was created. A few years after Garden of the Moon, Ian C. Esslemont published his first book in his own series tightly linked to that of Steven Erikson, his debut Night of Knives focused on the Crimson Guard and has been followed intensively through all the other books. When I picked up Assail it was found out that it would wrap up the Malazan Empire series, I actually hadn't anticipated this and wanted to put it down again, having to once again say goodbye to a series, especially a Malazan series isn't something I like to do. Luckily there is still

the new prequel series of Steven Erikson and what is to be expected of any Malazan book, in the end there are always answers but many more questions are raised. I don't think this will be the last we have seen of Ian C. Esslemont.

From the beginning of his Malazan Empire series, Ian C. Esslemont has shown the story through different perspectives than those of the other series. Yes big names made appearance or reference in both, but he really put his own influence on the world and so far every book for me has been a terrific reading experience. I am a big fan of the Malaz universe and have found the further building on this universe by Ian C. Esslemont a true treat. There have been made many a comparison between the writing of Steven Erikson and that of Ian C. Esslemont and how they interpret the world of Malaz etc, for me they both do a great job. The books of Ian C. Esslemont read differently but well an apple isn't the same a pear now is it?

The world of Malaz has always intrigued me with the different continents like Genabakis, Quon Tali, Lether and many more. Now for a first time ever Ian C. Esslemont takes the reader to a place that have remained obscure for a very long time. Assail, which lies in between Genabakis and Lether. This place has been rumored to be one the most inhospitable and dangerous places to venture in. But one thing has always made people abandon even the most dangerous premises and that is the promise of riches and untold fortunes. The word is spreading the gold can be found amass on the lands of Assail and this draws with it many adventures willing to go beyond everything to claim their riches. Besides the occasional pirate and mercenary that has set out for his or her riches, there are also other travels that have set their course on the lands of Assail purely for their own reasons, where most of them are to finally find some answers or just to return.

In the beginning of the story of Assail you get (re)introduced to several different characters that each have their own motivation for being on, or venturing to Assail. This should come as a surprise as I think that if you are familiar with the Malaz universe you undoubtedly must know that the character cast is huge. One of the point of views that you follow is that of the Crimson Guard, to whom most of this series is more or less dedicated. Here you will find many characters that featured early on the the series: K'azz, Shimmer, Blues and Bars and lets not forget Kyle, who actually goes by a different name and inherited a new name after Korel, that of Whiteblade. A different point of view is offered by Silverfox, a T'lan Imass that carries with her more than one soul. Silverfox is the summoner of the undying T'lan Imass army and all she wants to do it put a final halt to an age long battle. A third perspective is added by one of my favourite characters Fisher kel That, the immortal bard and oft narrator of several important poems set in the Malaz universe. Fisher comes to the land of Assail with an Tiste Andii who suffers from loss of memory, vague references in the beginning and all throughout the story allow you to think about just who this "unknown" Tiste Andii is. These characters should need an introduction as they should be most familiar to everyone.

Next to these "old" players in the Malaz universe, Ian C. Esslemont also introduces completely new characters and writes about them with the same amount of determination and creativeness than the other more established ones. To be completely honest, perhaps even more so since they are characters of his own devising. These are the native inhabitants of the lands of Assail, tribesmen and shipmen. The most noteworthy characters here are Jute and Orman. Orman is a tribesman and now when I am writing this, his youthfully character and his quest closely reminds me of another warrior whom we got to meet in House of Chains. Karsa Orlong. Orman's inexperience and persistence drives him to do things that other would easily shy away from. Against the strong backdrop of established character Orman makes a very determined introduction and the way that Ian C. Esslemont builds his character, I am sure it wont be the last of him that we have seen. (I hope so).

When it comes down to the recurring characters, I do have to say I am a big fan of many of them and having

the chance to read again of their adventures really puts a smile on my face. Having followed their journey across many different books and even in both series, really fortifies their characters in the story, it is impossible to not feel connected with them. I really liked how Kyle evolved along the story and grew more into a resolute self. It's like a journey of rediscovery. One element in the storyline of Fisher was the unknown Tiste Andii, though you will undoubtedly find out just who this person is and many people say it is to obvious, frankly I liked this part as well, giving an obscure character reference really allowed me to think about it and revisit several of the scenes that might have led up to this.

And what would a Malaz story be without some solid swordfighting and Warren usage! There is a very powerful display of both of them in Assail. The fighting is mostly shown from Kyle and Orman's. Kyle is known as The White Blade and with the sword he wields he wrecks some havoc when push comes to shove. Though Kyle had to fight his way through most encounters, the amount of tension that Ian C. Esslemont brought to the forefront really got me to edge of my seat. Top notch stuff. The Warrens of the Malaz Empire have always been something of intrigue to me, they are so, so, so cool to read about and the whole concept is striking. On Assail there is one Warren that reigns supreme, for other mages and even high mages to break it and be able to access their own requires tremendous power and all but a few manage to fail, even several high mages find that it requires a strong exertion of power. This unavoidably led to much more dire and bleak future for several characters; when you have always been able to rely on your power and now all of a sudden you can't...

Last but definitely not least is the world building of the continent of Assail. It's a first time it is being visited in a book of the Malaz universe and all I can say is WOW. The way that Ian C. Esslemont writes about this new continent really inspires a many good feeling withing me. In his writing he manages to create very lush details surrounding the places visited and you also get the complete overview of the continent in the bigger picture. Also in building this world Ian C. Esslement tells much about the history of several events and explains them in reference to Assail, he goes in on many of the earlier proposed rumors surrounding it. Thereby only further letting the world come to life, once you finish the story you will be wishing that this visit to Assail won't be a one time thing.

Assail is a great finisher to the Malazan Empire series that started with Night of Knives. In Assail Ian C. Esslemont really pulls all the stops when it comes down to showing the ending. I think many readers, especially in the build up of the series might have come to expect a different kind of ending and for some it might come as a bit of an anti climax but with not proposing a full flashy sword and sorcery kind of display the ending does proposes some other things and might even be set for a point to pick up yet another series. Also by creating the ending Assail got it does answer many questions that were raised earlier on in the series which for me was the reason I read these books. I want answers and coinciding with answers there are always more questions... Luckily! The Malazan Empire series just as it's "Big Brother" the Malazan Empire of the Fallen, is obligatory reading material for every Epic Fantasy fan, don't let the page count be thing to shy you away, they are over in a heartbeat and offer a terrific reading experience. Give me more!

Fantasy Literature says

Once upon a time one could speak of the "upcoming conclusion" to the tales of the Malazan Empire, the

multi-volume shared world series by Steven Erikson and Ian C. Esslemont. But with Erikson currently writing the second book in his prequel trilogy, and both he and Esslemont contracted for more books set in this world, it's best nowadays to perhaps muse on "resting points" rather than "conclusions." And so it is with Esslemont's sixth book, *Assail*, billed as bringing to "a thrilling close" the "epic story of the Malazan Empire," but which also, even as it ties up some loose plot threads, raises entirely new questions. And that's fine; even with my admittedly mixed response to *Assail*, I... [Read More](#): <http://www.fantasyliterature.com/reviews/assail/>

Bryan Brown says

This is the concluding volume of the two author epic of the Malazan empire and this I will consider a placeholder review.

This book did answer a number of my lingering questions but I have about ... a bazillion other questions still. This series is quite wide ranging and with characters and arcs crossing back and forth between the two different authors I am afraid my way of reading it has caused a lot of these confusions. I read all the Steven Erikson books first in published order, and then all the Ian Esslemont books in published order. This is possibly not optimal since the books range over a huge time period, even centuries in some cases and in a few others millennia.

When I do the real review I will be reading all the Erikson, and Esslemont stories together in internal chronological order. I therefore reserve my right to change my rating after a re-read. That will probably not be for a while. I think I want to let the series settle for a bit before reading them all.

In the meantime there are lots of other books and both Erikson and Esslemont are both writing new trilogies in the same world.
