



First Family

Patrick Tilley

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After escaping from the clan M'Call in his handmade glider, wingman Steve Brickman expects a hero's welcome from his fellow Trackers. Kidnapped on his first mission above ground by the Mutes, he has spent the last five months under the enforced tutelage of Mr Snow, clan M'Call's wise and magically gifted wordsmith. The months have also garnered a friendship with Cadillac, Mr Snow's protégé, a dawning love of the beautiful Clearwater, and a realisation that the Mutes are not the sub-humans that his masters would have him believe.

But instead of a happy homecoming, he receives suspicion and interrogation. Still officially 'dead' until he receives the proper clearance, Brickman must face long hours of speculation and questioning at the hands of the First Family. Only the chance of seeing his kin-sister Roz – with whom he shares a psychic connection – offers any comfort.

First Family Details

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From Reader Review First Family for online ebook

Tim says

A reimagined apocalyptic future, strikes true in the 21st century

Although the language belies its age at times, the Amtrak Wars holds an interesting view of the post-apocalyptic America. The politics, brainwashing, fights and cultural observations are interesting. The exploration of the power of racism and the lies that empower it are thoughtful and deep. A multi-layered onion of lies, fear and necessity drive this book.

Marc says

This book really gets into the nitty-gritty of the universe. That's the great thing about this series; it's one thing to say, "The Amtrak Federation is a strictly regulated underground society," Patrick takes it to the next question. "How does the AmEx run things?" "How do they keep control?" "What happens to people who buck the system?" This is a great book for explaining the underside of a great premise.

Wayne says

Great continuation from the first book, barely felt like I'd moved onto another novel! You meet new characters, visit different settings and experience different feelings from "cloud warrior" but you remain firmly seated in the universe.

Ensure you read this series in order, starting it halfway through will not make sense. But do ensure you read this series.

Onto the next...

Andrew says

And so the story of the Amtrak Wars continues - it's very difficult to speak of a book in isolation especially when I do not want to give away the storyline to the first installation.

However the challenges faced by Brickman are far from over. His anticipated triumph turns out to lead to a far worse form of incarceration.

Obviously this is a series of books (6 in total) which forms the story arc and as such like all stories that go for the long game you have to develop the story, gradually gathering momentum until the final climactic confrontation, be it for better or worse.

This book is no different - if the first book sets the scene, introducing the characters and the environment they live in. This second book starts to add depth to the various factions, strengthening those feelings of who you can trust and who you cannot.

To some degree this is a predictable book, the "Muties" are far from the savages Brickman is led to believe while all those clean cut honest servants of the first family just reek of corruption and betrayal. We see it and want to scream it at the characters caught up in the middle of it, however we (okay I) am still drawn on reading what happens next.

And that is where this book closes with another epic journey on the horizon on we turn now to book 3 in the series - the Iron Master.

Joseph M. O'Connor says

Kind of fun...

Fun in a simple, almost juvenile way. Mr. Tilley has constructed a rather odd post-apocalyptic world in which various cadres of the human race have survived and evolved along vastly different lines. No explanation is provided as to how the survivors survived. No explanation is given as to why the different lines evolved vastly different skills. And it's really confusing as to why any of the groups, given almost 1,000 years post-holocaust, would be so incredibly backward in technology.

I mean, really... look back 1,000 years from the present and we're in the days of William the Conqueror, and these survivors started out with a good idea of technology, if not the means to achieve it. How did they just forget all that?

But somehow you buy into it, and you buy into the "1,000-year Reich" of the First Family. And the appearance of magic among the Mutes. And the Iron Masters' failure to remember what electricity is or how to make it. And the appearance among the Mutes of "Straights" who, after tens of generations just happen to "show up" in the gene pool.

Amidst all of this is Steve Brickman. Just recently post-adolescent. A pilot, or Wingman. Curiously mature for his age, yet obviously suffering from the typical teenager's affliction of being almost uncontrollably impetuous. An undeveloped pre-frontal dorso-lateral cerebral cortex. Steve does everything without regard to consequence; fighting, talking too much, acting on his horniness. Kinda like Luke Skywalker; Luke's entire story line consisted of him going through doors he should have stayed out of.

Anyway... despite all this Tilley managed to keep my interest although toward the end of this (too) long book I had to struggle to stay interested. It was a toss-up; read Amtrak or play my slot machine app.

I finished it.

I am not sure I will bother with the next one.

Brian says

[Full Review to Follow]

Re-reading this book (and series) for review purposes.

Baglady says

continues the story, predictable plot evolution but interesting enough to make me want to continue reading. I can see why this would have a cult following, but there isn't anything here that is really different from other similarly themed books. I'm waiting to find out that what I expect is not what happens.

Justine Dutch says

I'm loving this series, I can't wait for the next one to find out more about the Iron Masters and what intrigues will happen next.

Almustafa Couch says

A good development of the story

Nicole says

Interesting - I'm very curious as to why the Japanese landed on the east coast of America. And how this will all play out in the end. Must keep reading!

Lauren says

Steve Brickman's journey continues in First Family. A note to readers: this series is definitely meant to be read in order. It's less 6 books than one story told in six books, so please start from the beginning (Cloud Warrior). That said, since it really is one big story broken up into six parts, each book isn't strictly self-contained. The first book ended just as it got going and this one, while focusing mainly on Steve introduces us to the shadowy and secretive (and evil) Federation. There is still a whole lot of story to go and while Steve goes through some changes in this book, it feels like we're really just starting to get into the meat of the story. Onto book 3.

Lily Sharp says

First Family, the second book in the cult classic sci-fi series The Amtrak Wars by Patrick Tilley, is set in a dystopian, post-apocalyptic Earth.

? intense, thorough world-building using elements of Native American culture and Japanese Samurai culture

- ? on a micro level, it is VERY well-written
- ? action scenes have the reader glued to the book
- ? the characters: Mr Snow is amazing and Steve is a male sci-fi protagonist with real flaws
- ? the political intrigue, manipulation and two-faced games keep the reader guessing at character's motivations
- ✗ the first half of the book drags out
- ✗ an interesting plot is pushed aside to make room for endless explanations
- ✗ an uncomfortable-to-read twin sibling incest scene
- ✗ we hardly see or hear of anything about two of the main characters, Clearwater and Cadillac; all focus is on Steve
- ✗ unnecessary POVs added

Rating
3/5?

Verdict: Recommended for die-hard fans of sci-fi classics ?
Genre: sci-fi

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More reviews and writing tips here.

Wyktor Paul says

The second gripping episode in the Amtrak Wars series.

Adam Whitehead says

Having escaped from the clutches of the M'Call Mutes, Steve Brickman triumphantly returns to the Federation fully expecting to be congratulated on his exploits and his gathering of vital intelligence on the enemy. Instead he is arrested as a deserter and narrowly escapes death before being sent to menial, ball-busting work in the A-levels. According to the doctrines of the First Family, the rulers of the Amtrak Federation, Mutes do not take prisoners, and that 'truth' cannot be contradicted. But now Brickman knows something of the truth the Family has other plans for him, and for his Mute friends...

Picking up immediately after the events of Cloud Warrior, the second volume in The Amtrak Wars is a

slightly different beast. There's still a fair amount of action and the pace remains furious and at times page-turningly addictive, but after the straightforward plot of the first book things get murkier here. Conspiracies are revealed, deeper mysteries are alluded to and labyrinth plots are set in motion. Political intrigue also rears its head as we meet some key figures within the Family, such as the President-General and Karlstrom, the ruthless head of the clandestine intelligence agency AMEXICO. Tilley's grip of worldbuilding also remains strong, as we begin to learn more about the shadowy Iron Masters who live on the Eastern Seaboard and trade weapons with the Mutes through great steamships ploughing the Great Lakes.

As I mentioned in the first book, true-blue all-American hero Steve Brickman started off as a bit of a lemon, but in this second book he starts evolving into a more interesting protagonist. A key theme of the series is Brickman's torn loyalties between the Federation and his family, and the Mutes, his would-be mentor Mr. Snow and Steve's would-be lover, Clearwater. This results in Steve having to spin out some pretty spectacular lies, cover-stories and half-truths to keep either side from plugging him, and seeing Steve struggle through the mental gymnastics required to keep one step ahead of everyone else is fascinating (and it's all rather mild here, compared to the labyrinth of plots and counter-plots that have developed by the final volume).

The writing in this volume is also notably better, with Tilley restraining his more excited passages to convey the action in a slightly more thoughtful style. However, the refreshingly informal prose remains intact, as do the slightly confusing multiple POV switches in one chapter.

First Family (***½) steps up the pace, deepens the world and the story and the cliffhanger ending effectively hooks the reader into the third book in the series, Iron Master. Again, the book is out of print at the moment but copies seem to be available in the UK and USA.
