



Vicious Circle

Mike Carey

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Felix Castor has reluctantly returned to exorcism after a successful case convinces him that he really can do some good with his abilities---"good," of course, being a relative term when dealing with the undead. His friend Rafi is still possessed, the succubus Ajulutsikael (Juliet to her friends) still technically has a contract on him, and he's still dirt poor.

Doing some consulting for the local cops helps pay the bills, but Castor needs a big private job to really fill the hole in his bank account. That's what he *needs*. What he *gets* is a seemingly insignificant "missing ghost" case that inexorably drags him and his loved ones into the middle of a horrific plot to raise one of hell's fiercest demons.

When satanists, stolen spirits, sacrifice farms, and haunted churches all appear on the same police report, the name Felix Castor can't be too far behind...

Vicious Circle Details

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Author : Mike Carey

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From Reader Review Vicious Circle for online ebook

Reed says

I read Mike Carey's "The Devil You Know" last year, was thoroughly impressed, and immediately wanted to read the sequel. Unfortunately, it was only available in the UK--and I'm cheap--so I waited for it to be published in the States.

It was worth the wait. Carey writes urban fantasy (for lack of a better term), but it ain't your momma's urban chick lit. No hunky vamps making the protagonist swoon, magic exists, but it certainly isn't earth shaking, and overall the world feels very "real".

Nope. Carey writes something more akin to urban noir. Dark. Gritty. Tough. And loads of fun.

His protagonist Felix "Fix" Castor is hero thoroughly entrenched in the noir tradition, except for the fact that he's an exorcist. You see, spirits, ghosts, and so forth started appearing with increasing frequency in the 20th century. No one knows the cause, but it has happened. Werewolves, zombies, demons . . . they all exist, but with Carey's fun and creative twists.

I'm not going to give you a plot description, because you can snag that anywhere. Suffice it to say, if you like well-written urban fantasy with a realistic bent and a noir flair, then this book is for you.

Suzanne says

This wasn't as funny as the first book in the series (not that it was humorous, but he had a lot of dry humor in that one, and just not so much in this one). The mystery was good, it had a few twists that surprised me, and I like the world with its mix of ghosts, zombies, demons, and ordinary people.

Jamie Collins says

More of Felix Castor's adventures with ghosts in London, and a good read. I liked the plot of this second book more than the first, and I like Castor and most of the characters. Barring the occasional overwrought simile and a couple of repeated phrases that should have been edited out, the writing is very smooth.

The book does have some serious flaws. I figured out who the bad guy was almost immediately and had to endure Castor's seemingly foolish ignorance. The action scenes are highly implausible: for an out-of-shape, untrained fighter, Castor lands a lot of lucky punches and makes several improbable escapes. And while most of the exposition is handled quite well, there's another long confession-type scene towards the end.

Carly says

Something very bad is happening in London, and the rising of the dead is only the start of it. The ghost of a

child has been stolen from her parents' home. A man ridden by a demon has become even more disturbingly violent. A local church seems to have been invaded by a dark presence. Ordinary Londoners have suddenly succumbed to bouts of horrific violence.

The end is nigh and the demons have come out to play.

It isn't long before Felix Castor is right in the middle of the game.

Carey's books make for fantastic urban fantasy pulp: strong plots, vivid action, and an engaging narrator. But while this series may be hardboiled urban fantasy, but I would not necessarily recommend it to Dresden Files fans. Castor's world is significantly darker than the Dresdenverse. While Dresden tends towards lightly hardboiled, Castor is pure noir: isolation, moral greys, a cruel world, and a bleak future. While the plot involves demons, it mainly centres around man's inhumanity to man (and /women/children/ghosts) in sickeningly graphic and extremely disturbing detail. Neither the protagonist nor his associates have the sort of clear moral certainty that Dresden usually assumes, and while Butcher's books portray Christianity and the Catholic church positively, Castor's vitriolic hatred of religion fairly drips off the page. The writing is terse and wry and the wordplay is often humorous, but even considering that our dauntless hero is a Liverpudlian who looks like a used car salesman and whose weapon of choice is a bright green recorder, it's amazing how unfunny I find these books. That is absolutely not a complaint; I suspect I have difficulty seeing the funny side because I so quickly became absorbed in the world and plot.

Perhaps the most depressing aspect of the book for me was Fix's isolation. Considering that his closest confidant is the demonic succubus who owns his soul, Castor won't be winning any popularity contests. He goes out of his way to antagonise everyone he encounters, from his supposed friend Nicky to potential information sources to the suspicious policewoman investigating him. He even has the potential to alienate the reader--I found his tendency to boast about his own ignorance while scorning the beliefs of others to be grating, and I suspect it is even more trying for readers of faith. Although I find his actions frustrating, I think Fix's pugnacious attitude can be seen as a masochistic, guilt-ridden attempt to punish himself and keep himself isolated from people that he fears he will fail. For him, hell is indeed himself, always alone, with "nothing to escape from and nothing to escape to."

But even if Fix made an abrupt personality shift into placating cooperation, his world would hardly be less dismal: there are simply too few decent human beings in it. I love that all of Carey's characters are complex mixtures of selfishness, altruism, bravery, and cowardice, but I feel that all of them veer far closer to the monster than the angel. I can count only two human characters who are significant enough to be faced with difficult choices and still seem to make reasonably humane decisions--and that's if you let me use the technically undead Nicky and you let me discount Matthew Castor's hard, unfeeling, holier-than-thou actions from the last book. Castor's (human and still living) "friends" are especially problematic. Fix's cop acquaintance simultaneously calls him "friend" and spinelessly betrays him. I never liked Rafi, Castor's demon-ridden friend, but in this book, we learn more about how he ended up sharing headspace with Asmodeous, and his actions do not reflect well on him. I also revised my opinion of Pen, Castor's (unrequited) love interest: she's not just a vapid, shallow, bimbo; it turns out she's also a selfish, self-righteous, myopic [expletive] as well. All of this goes to create a very dark world; while this was obviously Carey's intention, I tend to shy away from books where the characters are so flawed that they are difficult to empathise with.

Despite my reservations about the characters, I quickly found myself engrossed in the story. Carey's writing is incredibly visual. Maybe his ability to create such vivid scenes stems from his experiences writing for comics and graphic novels, but all of it, especially the demon scenes, go to create a story that is simply crying for someone to take on the movie rights. Carey also shows considerable skill in creating a mystery--I guarantee that you will figure out two parts of it about 100-200 pages before Fix does, which is admittedly

frustrating, but there are some marvellous twists and turns at the end that will certainly surprise you.

Carey's worldbuilding continues to delight me; his particular supernatural setup is both incredibly creative and solidly thought out.

Overall, the book is a fine example of dark, gritty, urban fantasy pulp: it is imaginative, suspenseful, often heart-wrenching. If you're in the mood for a world of moral greys, vivid action, and a page-turning plot, Felix Castor is the protagonist for you.

Excerpted from my review on BookLikes, which contains additional quotes, spoilers, and comments that I was too lazy to copy over.

Carol. says

Mixed feelings about the book overall. Fix gets interested in a missing person case which opens up into a multi-pronged mystery. The mystery had a couple of twists which I enjoyed. I did think there was improvement on the pacing of the book, but there was a point mid-book where it bogged and I started to skim.

My trouble with Fix's emotional state continues. He often realizes he could cooperate or play along, but obstinately decides not to--even when it's usually to his detriment. Often, he antagonizes a source, which makes getting information more difficult, and in this book, he goes so far as to antagonize the police. I still don't understand why the zombie Nikki has anything to do with Fix at all, as they mostly seem to fight, and I don't mean in a jocular, kidding way. The most compassion he shows is for Abbie, the missing girl, and those he has let into his inner circle. A circle which does not seem to include his brother. He does go through another bout of induced Rafi-guilt, and it just feels forced,. Luckily, Rafi tells Fix (view spoiler)

Luckily, I read the third book before I started on this one. I enjoyed it much more than this, so I'll be looking for the fourth.

Amanda says

Kudos to Mike Carey for his cleverly-written and highly original urban noir novel Vicious Circle. Set in alternate London where the dead coexist with the living, exorcism is no longer the sole province of the Catholic church, and pesky ghosts (and the occasional demon) require the services of men like Felix "Fix" Castor--a likeable bloke who's slightly down-on-his luck after suffering a few professional and personal hits--to eradicate them.

For those like me who missed the first Felix Castor novel, your understanding of Vicious Circle will by no means be compromised. The book is an independent albeit slightly complicated story that requires no introduction with its predecessor (The Devil You Know).

Think of the title as a metaphor for the three-fold plot, a Vicious Circle that keeps Castor guessing about who the real villains are. When the book opens, Castor is making ends meet by assisting the police to interrogate the ghosts of murder victims, but an unexpected commission comes his way when a well-to-do couple visit

Castor's office to request his help in locating their missing daughter Abbie Torrington, who just-so-happens to be a ghost. This intriguing premise sets the scene for a suspenseful journey through London's darker dens as Castor attempts to locate a fellow exorcist who may or may not be Abbie's kidnapper, her father, and/or her murderer. The trail leads him to a group of satanic worshippers and the Anathemata--a fanatical and militant organization excommunicated from the Catholic church bent on exorcising any and all threat to God's will. Agents of this organization include two particularly nasty loup-garous (humans spirits who possess animal bodies) with violent propensities who trail Castor around town and always seem to turn up at the worst possible moments. Meanwhile, succubus-turned-exorcist Ajulutsikael (Juliet for short) requests Castor's professional opinion about exorcising a church that appears to be possessed by a malevolent presence who infects an entire congregation.

As these investigations begin to overlap, Castor's friend Rafi--long possessed by the demon Asmodeus--displays a spontaneous recovery of sorts, prompting the mental institution where he's been housed to petition for his release. Pamela "Pen" Elizabeth Bruckner, Castor's landlady and Rafi's old flame, are thrilled about this development, though Castor is uneasy over the sudden silence of Asmodeus whose spirit has been irrevocably entwined with Rafi's due to Castor's ill-fated mistake in attempting to exorcise the demon. The pacing of the story, while suspenseful, stalls occasionally as plot threads are juggled just when progress is made regarding one of the three primary storylines: the missing ghost, the possessed church, and Rafi's lucidity. The payoff occurs as these events overlap each other, but the steady shift in focus makes it somewhat challenging to follow Castor's revelations throughout his investigation. During the suspenseful dénouement, Castor is faced with the difficult choice of saving thousands of innocent lives at the expense of sacrificing his friends.

Readers of noir fiction will appreciate Felix Castor's clever and often creative use of dialogue. Some of the Britishisms occasionally threw me, but overall, the narrative language of the first-person novel adds to the story's originality. Though the author can be a bit verbose when describing insignificant details (i.e. using blueprint-specific descriptions of buildings he's exploring) Castor's droll and often witty observations serve double duty as colorful metaphors. The author's painstaking construction of London is abundant with many scenes taking place at notable London locales, but the primary appeal of the story lies with Felix Castor himself--a somewhat sarcastic yet ethical private exorcist who uses a tin whistle to "banish" ghosts through the use of music. Castor is not above manipulation, lies, and even illegal breaking and entering to get what he wants, but his loyalty to his friends and his willingness to sacrifice himself rather than place them in danger is sure to win legions of fans. I look forward to reading the rest of this series.

Lindsay says

Felix needs to find a kidnapped ghost while dealing with werewolves, demons, a Catholic secret society and the police.

Lots of plot here and I can't really describe much of it beyond the blurb above without spoiling it. There's quite a bit more on Juliet and Nickie which is great and a little more on Pen and Rafi. We meet Rosie Crucis and the nasty Professor J-J Mulbridge, both of whom were briefly mentioned in the first book, and look to be ongoing in the next one at least. Relationships with the police are established as well as a little more on Felix's interesting relationship with the Catholic church.

I liked this well enough, but I found myself getting distracted very easily while reading it and having trouble

going back to it. It's not reading in general: what was distracting me was typically other reading. So I've been analyzing what the issue is and I suspect it's a lack of stakes. We know nothing is going to happen to Castor, the three more books after this one are a dead giveaway. And he doesn't care enough about anyone else in his life for threats to other people to be an issue.

I think I'll give it one more; so far I'm not really engaging in anything other than the mysteries.

Bradley says

A ghostly whodunit turned into a "Hey, didn't you do it?"

Some of the storylines were slightly meandering until we got into the meat, but they served to remind us and explore a bit of what makes Fix a tortured soul.

Of course, this is pretty standard fare when it comes to the Noir genre, and it hardly makes a difference whether the main character wields a gun and a whistle to work his magic, (both figuratively and literally.)

While it doesn't really stand out too far ahead in the UF field, it is an entertaining read. Having a Succubus on the team certainly helps, and diving into the nitty gritty of hell and plucky satanists while working with and running from the cops does seem to maintain a certain nice tension level.

Some of the text is a bit clunky, but overall, I enjoyed it very much.

Stephanie says

I really like the the blend of mystery/noir and paranormal/occult in the Felix (Fix) Castor series. The mystery element is the real meat of the story, not just a sub-plot to carry the paranormal elements along. In some ways Felix reminds of my favorite P.I. Jack Taylor who is the lead in a series by Ken Bruen. Although his backstory is a lot less tragic than Jack's, Felix regularly gets his ass kicked and somehow manages to get himself strapped up with enough bandages, booze, prescription drugs to get back on the case.

In this story, Fix is hired by a couple looking to get their kidnapped daughter back. The twist to this missing person's case (not giving anything away) is that the missing girl is already dead. It's her ghost that was kidnapped. What ensues is a story that is quite interesting and complex, with demons and satanists and a secret religious order that is ready to defend the world from evil. This was definitely a good read for those of us who don't need to "believe" and just want to be entertained.

I read the first in the series and liked it enough to read this one. I am not a fan of graphic novels so I'd had no previous exposure to Mr. Carey's work. I liked this one very much and hope that there is a third in the series as I would like to know how Fix is doing now that he is homeless.

Amyiw says

This was good. 3 1/2 but I won't bump it up because there were just too many histories and descriptive sides that took me out of the story and I had to think, 'what does this have to do with the whole'. In the first book, I let this go and thought of it a world building but he seemed to have more of it in this second book. More drift points, where you want to put down the book as the plot line has gone off on a tangent and you just don't want to have to wade through the history again, or laws of the magic, or his abilities/mistakes. So the book is a bit longer but feels a lot longer this time to me. It took me 5 days to get through a book that should take 1 or 2.

So now I have to question whether I want to go on in the series. I like Felix and company for the most part but find that the stories are a little dark (view spoiler) and the friendships a little too superficial. It seems the cop he works with can stop trusting him on a moments notice, his friends can kick him to the way side/curb, and others in the community can punish him for protecting himself. I don't think so far, that there is anyone that watches his back. He lives in a sad state and it is kind of depressing, couple that with with the very dark plot lines and these just don't have the touch of connection in relations or the fun at some points that that would make me like to come back to to read. They are definitely good in the Noir UF plots and the characters are complex and interesting. Just maybe not for me. I'll have to decide if I want to go on.

Chris says

3.5 stars.

For real it took me a *month* to read this book?

Well, it's mostly my fault. I've been slapped with a pretty severe reading slump, and that had nothing to do with this.

That said, my rounded-down rating does reflect some on that situation. While this book didn't cause my reading slump, it didn't really help me pull out of it. The story was excellent, and on par with the first book in the series. I really enjoyed the plot and the characters, and everything tied together nicely.

For me it was the pacing that was an issue. It wasn't enough to be a deal-breaker, but it did get in the way of my enjoyment. It seems that whenever the action really started to heat up, Carey has this habit of describe describe that completely takes me out of the sequence. If you have a fast paced scene, your narrative should match it. Just sayin'.

All in all, I am enjoying this series. I will likely pick back up with Book 3 soon, but for the nonce I'm going to take a break and find something that will help me get back on my personal reading track.

Abigail says

Book two in the Felix Castor series - another 3.5 stars. These stories are a lot of fun! I'm noticing that each time I think the story is tying up, I look at Audible and see there are several hours left - Carey can weave a story and keep you guessing...for the most part. Some aspects of the story are predictable, while others creep

up on you and surprise you. Plenty of ghosts and werewolves and various other undead, big helpings of mindless violence, and a few good doses of stark beauty. Bring on book three!

Mike (the Paladin) says

Okay I gave it 2 novels in the series. I have liked several urban fantasies, and fallen into this trap before. I wanted these to be books I'd like...but I don't. I hoped the second book would appeal to me more, it didn't.

Mostly I find the books too negative (I'm not saying dark...a lot of urban fantasy can be called dark, without being negative.) I largely find "Fix" annoying and really don't care for him a great deal of the time. I get tired of his going on about what he doesn't know while rejecting out of hand anything he doesn't want to agree with. Being self righteous about your ignorance can be annoying.

These books are pure brain candy, I'm not reading them for information, counsel, or a deeper insight into the human condition. So, I won't be pursuing the series any further. I am second to no one in my admiration of good brain candy. Most urban fantasy is, but some of us like chocolate while others like licorice. I'm more of a chocolate man while these books are apparently licorice.

If their for you...enjoy.

Lightreads says

Eh, you know, this is perfectly competent urban fantasy. Better than, in several respects. The writing, in particular, is several cuts above the pack. But it's doing that thing where the lone hero wanders around London alternately getting beat up and snarking at people. Which is entertaining enough, but when it comes right down to it that's all you've got because this guy is a *lone hero*, doncha know, so he has no real community or support system. And what he does have will be stripped away by the story, because that's drama or whatever.

Lone heroes bore me. Tell me a story about an embedded hero. Tell me about the one who talks to his mother about his problems – tell me the story about the one who fucking *has* a mother. Tell me about the one who has someone to call at three in the morning, and maybe it's a complicated, difficult call – hell, I like it better when it is – but when the phone rings, it'll get picked up. Doing the obligatory hero self-sacrifice-drama thing is *so much* more interesting when every move tugs a web of deep social connection that I care about.

That book will get more than tepid 'huh, I guess it passes the time' from me, even if it isn't as creative or well-written as this one.

Sarah says

I ended up enjoying this one more than I remembered :) This was my first time listening to the audio, and that I wasn't crazy about. The narrator's voice was way too cultured for such a disreputable character, and if

memory serves, Felix is from Liverpool. If my memory of watching too many Beatles movies serves, this was most definitely not a Liverpoolian accent. I missed my Fix. He's a lot more shady.

William Thomas says

I'm tired of trying to draw hard lines around what is considered hardboiled or noir fiction and what isn't. But this isn't it. At all.

This book, although comparable to Jim Butcher's Harry Dresden, is like the Miss Marples of urban fantasy. (Note: Harry Dresden is also not noir fiction with magic, but is a pulp book more likened to softboiled pulp like Ed McBain). Mike Carey is the Agatha Christie of urban fantasy.

Carey used to write for Vertigo comics on the series Hellblazer, and was, in my opinion, was the weakest writer of the Constantine character that the series had ever seen. And that's saying something because the current writer, Peter Milligan, has plunged the book into a mediocrity from which it may never return. So Carey decides to ride the urban fantasy craze and throw in his two-cents with his very British take on the supernatural thriller with an exorcist named Felix Castor.

What we get in Castor is a boring character with a dismally bland back story. A man devoid of punchy dialogue and weak comebacks, who claims to walk a fine line between the light and the darkness but in reality is nothing if not a ray of sunshine. The closest he comes to being the amoral type is hanging around with a succubus, but stands firmly on the side of the angels in each and every decision he makes. There is no moral dilemma. There is no quandry here. All of the decisions are very straightforward and there is absolutely no mystery involved in the book whatsoever.

Normally, I don't complain about plot. Plot is always something secondary to me. Unless there isn't anything else to hold my interest. With *Visious Circle*, we get very little to sink our teeth into, an anorexic cast of characters with little redeeming value, and flat expository dialogue. It gets points for not making Castor a wizard or a vampire or a vampire hunter.

Grade: D+

Kelly H. (Maybedog) says

Better than the first book with more action, more characters, and a more intense plot. This time the protagonist isn't quite as alone, he has a couple of friends but he still needs more. He needs someone giving him encouragement when he's feeling guilty about his friend. (Which I don't even get--he tried to save him and the friend was just a narcissistic asshole who thought the normal rules didn't apply to him.) I was never really enamored of his friend/landlady and now I don't like her at all.

I like the main character more and more. I think the writing in this one was smoother and again I learned a few words I didn't know. It's humbling which is good.

Robyn says

The second instalment in this series really picks up the pace. It's a little bit of a 'kitchen sink' plot at first but when it comes together, it does so in a fascinating way. Felix has to make some very hard decisions - I'm curious to see how the repercussions play out.

Sara says

I was sort of luke warm about the first in this Fix Castor Series. I enjoyed this book more.

This plot is definitely tighter than the first, but its not overly clean in that it contains quite a few gaps as regards police technique and some faulty logic in the mystery itself. But I don't let those details bother me too much if I'm enjoying the story. And normally, I don't notice them, so since I did, they're gonna be glaring to those of you who are sticklers about that sort of thing.

Somewhat disappointing to me, it has a lot less "British" English and is more generic than the first and therefore easier to read. This is probably a big plus for most people. I'm weird about learning new words.

Fix is getting a bit more developed. But there are some inconsistencies between the first and second book. Which is natural, I suppose. And Carey certainly isn't the first person to alter a persona to fit in better with what he envisions for his world. I only had one issue with the changes. Juliet.

She returns as a good guy. It would be far better if she was not quite so suddenly good, if she was edgier and more complicated. If he had allowed more room for her to evolve over a series of books. It would also be good if Fix was not so willing to forget the part where he was nearly sucked up her vagina for soul food. There is no tension now in Fix's interest in Juliet. It seems more like harmless lust, despite his watered down references to her dangerous side, you don't really think of her sexuality as dangerous anymore.

On the positive side is the action is fairly fast. Fix's constant state of being embattled and dogged is endearing.

Monti says

Again, this was a five-star book. If you are a fan of the Dresden Files, so far this is the closest thing to that flavor of book I've found. If you are going through withdrawal you should check this series out.

I can't really find much wrong overall with this book. I enjoyed it immensely. Felix Castor has that sort of smarmy attitude that I find highly entertaining.

The plot, like the first book, starts off as a typical urban paranormal type story that quickly turns into a mystery with plenty of plot twists and turns that makes the book a great read.

The few things a might point out that are "wrong" with the book are highly nit-picky. I've noticed the author sometimes uses certain phrases multiple times, like, "held my hands up in a placating manner" This isn't a horrible thing at all, but it is just something that stood out to me, a minor thing.

Another thing I've noticed, which is common to this type of book (even my beloved Dresden Files) every single plot thread is all interconnected to the point of almost hard to believe that it all works out that perfectly. This is quite a common thing though, and not really a bad thing.

I love this series so far, and I plan on reading all of them. I've been spacing them out though to make it last. I also plan on checking out some of Carey's comic writing in the near future.
