



The Protector's War

S.M. Stirling

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Ten years after **The Change** rendered technology inoperable throughout the world, two brave leaders built two thriving communities in Oregon's Willamette Valley. But now the armies of the totalitarian Protectorate are preparing to wage war over the priceless farmland.

The Protector's War Details

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From Reader Review The Protector's War for online ebook

Isaac says

I like this series and am still reading them. This one really got tedious with all the laborious emphasis on the phonetic spellings of the way people spoke, the details given each and every time someone used a weapon or saddled a horse or killed someone..... and all the ellipses and semicolons. Still a great idea and some interesting characters- but all those details distracted me from the story. It also got repetitive to have certain ideas reiterated word-for-word from several characters, for example, having many different characters think of or speak of Astrid as 'barking mad'. I got that the first few times and why would they all think of her the same way in the exact same words? Research to your heart's content, but only share what is needed for the story.

Thee_ron_clark says

Blessed be. All the engines stopped working and Wiccans and Ren Faire people have inherited the earth.

OK. Sounds silly and I am poking some fun at it, but I did like it.

First of all, I purchased both the first and second book in this series and read the second one first by accident. Hey. I never claimed to be the sharpest tool in the shed. Not on this site anyway.

The basic concept is that something happened to the planet and now explosions cannot happen. This includes firearms and combustion engines of all sorts. This drives humanity into a second dark age. Governments fall, people die, vegetation and animal life gets out of hand, and other things happen.

The majority of this story takes place in the northwest portion of what used to be the United States nine years after this change takes place. People are banding together. Some want to simply survive and hold what they have been working for while others want to conquer and rule. A conqueror has his eyes on the territory to the south of his lands and the people of those lands are trying to ally themselves with one another to stop this from happening or to fight them off if it does.

Now, the premise and the action are pretty cool. It also contains a number of rich and unique characters.

The book lost me in the idea that nine years after this world-changing event, not only would people begin worshiping old gods and going Wiccan but they would begin dressing in medieval apparel as well. I mean, who decides that pants are no longer a good idea and we need to revert to kilts in our day to day lives?

Take it for what it is. Beyond the parts that I felt were silly, I was left wanting to read the next book in the series..... After I read the first one of course.

Erik Hansen says

I love good post-apocalyptic science fiction. What I do not love is a story that is so unbelievable that it would

make me stop reading a series after the first two books. I loved the initial premise of the Emberverse series and really enjoyed the first part of the first book, "Dies the Fire". However, when everyone West of Portland (the McKenzies?) becomes Wiccans, (not a bad thing mind you) wears kilts and speaks with a brogue, I realized that Mr Stirling had lost me. Throwing in the Englishmen was just plain stupid and thus, I was gone. I would also hazard a guess that more than just a handful of readers were gone as well.

If your vision of the world to come after the apocalypse is one filled with people from the Society of Creative Anachronism, then be my guest, pick-up the Emberverse Series by S.M. Stirling and dive in my good man! Or Maiden. It was just not my cup of tea.

Linda Isakson says

Another fabulous chapter to the Emberverse I, or commonly referred to as the "Dies the Fire", Trilogy. Hilarious, at times, sad, clever, thrilling and un-put-downable. I've become so addicted to the character's stories, that I never want the story to end. Additionally, I really like the way Stirling composes the story with flashbacks of incidences interjected into the present.

The MacKenzie's and the BearKillers are still trying to deal with the increasing ferocity of the Lord Protectors advances into unclaimed territories and his bands of minions that continue to terrorize travelers. Juniper and Mike's son is now 9 years old and promises to be a most formidable man. Sir Nigel, his son and friend are now brought into the fray; old SES friends of Sam that prove their weight in gold in information and combat prowess. While most of the story revolves around Sir Nigel's escape from England to Oregon, MacKenzie and Bearkiller skirmishes with the Lord Protector's men, Mike and Signe's small marital strife's, and Astrid's and Eilir's continuing relationship and the establishment of their Rangers group, it's what happens in the last hundred pages that really turn this book into such a compulsively addicting read as to make one call in sick to work so you can keep your nose glued to the pages. Excellent!

Ricky says

This sequel to Dies The Fire picks up the story about eight years later, in 2006. Actually, in-universe the calendar has been reset so it's now Change Year Eight, but the chapter headings show the dates by our system for clarity's sake.

The story gets a little more complicated - in a good way - for two reasons. One, there's now a sizable group of British and Icelandic military men who manage to find their way to the Willamette Valley (don't ask). Two, there's a more defined villainous presence, in the form of Norman Arminger, former medieval scholar and now the Lord Protector (or enslaver) of much of the Pacific Northwest. Just goes to show, not all RenFaire types are meant to be the good guys.

On my review of the previous book, I expressed my prediction that I would start to get bored of the Emberverse series the same way I did with The Dark Tower, and would quit after book 3 or so. This prediction is proving wrong so far, as I find The Protector's War no worse than its predecessor. But it's no better, either. Stirling's writing is still plagued with a few of the same distractions and flaws that irked me in Dies The Fire. Thankfully, he stops using "cum" (as in, "garage-cum-machine-shop"), and the gratuitous uses of Irish curses from Juniper Mackenzie and Finnish battle cries from Mike Havel are reduced (but not by

much). It's still not quite enough for me to really recommend it to anyone who wants a world-class reading experience.

Kathy Davie says

Second in the Emberverse science fiction dystopian series and revolving around three bands of good guys: the Bearkillers, the Mackenzies, and the English contingent. This story's locations encompass England and Oregon.

It's been nine years since the EMP hit the world and took out all technological advances.

My Take

What the *Protector's War* does is set us up. It describes the various parties' progress and alliances and introduces a new set of characters and starts out most unexpectedly in England. I must confess to checking the front cover and Goodreads to make sure I was reading a) S.M. Stirling and b) the second book in the Emberverse. It is Stirling, and he introducing a third "group" while providing us with information on how the EMP hit somewhere other than Oregon. Seems that most of Europe is gone except for England, some of the northern reaches of the Scandinavian countries, and parts of Greece, Sicily, and Italy. Tasmania made out all right as well as New Zealand's South Island. Australia wasn't as badly hit as Europe, but it was bad enough. The North Island, well, it's gone.

Oh, lord, it is a depressing tale of how England fell apart, what it's come to now, but it is funny when the escaping trio runs into Jamaica Farm and the *why* of their traditional English smocks. It's incredibly sad as well to read as Nigel remembers the history of Lorings in England. Their loyalty and vigilance for England, especially compared to how they are now rewarded.

Signe Havel is definitely NOT pleased that young Rudi is the spitting image of his father. Her husband. Nor does she care that his conception occurred before she and Mike hooked up. She's angry enough that she'll endanger his life and call down Mike's wrath on her while Ken points out what she may well be worried about.

Stirling goes on to describe the changes made in their lands in the past nine years. He also notes the development of the "knightly" class as Ken points out the distinctions between those parents/siblings who can afford for a child to gain the skills to become a A-lister. Just as in medieval days, it's the men willing to fight (and win) who will get the land. The more land you have, the more you have to pass out to followers who in turn work your land for you which gives you more time to practice weapon skills. Which means you can gain more land. And that land requires workers in this low-production economy.

It's terrifying when the trap Mike and Signe lay turns on them. Most battles are skirmishes between the allies and the Protectorate. Just as deadly, but smaller. But there's a change in these battles, for neither Mike nor Juniper are content to defend. As they are the good guys, most of their battles are successful, and yet every battle has its casualties. One in particular has a couple that make me cry, and it does yield one highly rated bonus. It'll be interesting to see how Matilda changes toward her father, or at least his methods, when she has to spend time with the Mckenzies.

I've read a few reviews who dislike Stirling's description of how the EMP affected our world, and I can see their point. However, I have no intention of learning physics, chemistry, or how mechanical things work, so I

don't have a problem with this.

It's a daring and terrifying escape for Sir Nigel, Alleyne, and Hordle. I don't envy that a'tall, a'tall. Sir Nigel will turn out to have some really good ideas. It'll be fun to see out they work out in the next story.

Mike does have an odd grasp of groveling.

I like Astrid and Eilir's Dúnedain Rangers, and I think they have a good idea going. It's practical, and I'm curious how it'll play out, especially since Eilir is starting to question her purpose and being with the Dúnedain Rangers. Shee's thinking about a family and children. *I'm wondering if this is a set-up for Astrid's death in a future story.* Another concern is the new and potentially dangerous competition arises between Astrid and Eilir over Alleyne. Stirling is quite pointed in Alleyne and Hordle voicing concerns about Astrid's sanity, and near as I can tell, Stirling hasn't provided us any action or emotional issues that would have me questioning how scary Astrid is in her obsession with the Lord of the Rings. He makes it sound as if she'll go off the deep end, violently. I agree she's too obsessed with it, almost embarrassingly so, but Stirling has only been *telling* us this; he hasn't done any *show* that would make me think it on my own. It sounds more as if Astrid has shoved all her fears and PTSD from that night the EMP hit into her fantasy world.

We do get an inside look at the Protector and his "lovely" wife when Sir Nigel and Captain Nobbes arrive. It's a visit that begins with some hesitation and goes downhill. Words of the Protector that don't bear out what one sees.

Oh, lol, Liu is really losing it what with Lady Kat picking up the wrong book for Matilda! But I can't believe Juniper, Sir Nigel, or any of them didn't plan for an ambush.

A romance is brewing for Juniper, and that ending absolutely sucked!! I have got to know how it turned out, and I'm panting to read *A Meeting at Corvallis* , 3, after Stirling left me wondering about the results of that ambush and that ceremony for the dead. I can't tell if anyone died or if it's a general ceremony for those who have died in this story or if it's ????

The Story

Seems Queen Hallgerda doesn't like the questions Sir Nigel is asking about Parliament and elections, about lifting the Emergency Powers Act. Too bad Charles doesn't care to remember who saved his royal ass when that EMP hit.

In Oregon, the Bearkillers and Mckenzies decide to go on the offensive against the Protector. They're tired of simply fighting back. And they manage to acquire one small "bomb", hopefully it will be handy against the Protector's chemical weapons!

The Characters

Seems I had too many characters and GR cut me off, so I've removed the minor characters. If you want them, see my review on my blog.

Oregon

Larsdalens and the Bearkillers are...

...a mercenary band, a.k.a., the **Outfit**, which settled on Ken's farm. Their people support a dedicated military group. **Michael Havel**, a.k.a., Lord Bear, is former Special Forces and was a pilot in the pre-EMP world. Now he's the leader of the **Bearkillers** and married to **Signe Larsson**, one of Ken's daughters. Mike and Signe have twin daughters, **Mary** and **Ritva**, and a son, young **Mike**. **Astrid Larsson** is Signe's sister

and still completely caught up in the world of the Lord of the Rings. A world that has caught on with many of the young people. She also wrote the *Red Book of Larsdalen*, which doesn't half embarrass Mike. **Louhi** is Mike's dog while **Charger** is his horse.

The one-eyed, one-handed **Ken Larsson** is their father, a former CEO, who now advises Mike and tinkers with machinery, seeing what he can make work in this new world. He's married to **Pam Arnstein**, their swordmistress and vet. **Vicki** is his assistant.

Ken's son and Signe's twin, **Eric**, is Mike's right-hand man. **Luanne**, Will's daughter, is Eric's wife. **Will Hutton** began the Change as a horse wrangler, and now he's Mike's left-hand man. **Angelica** is his wife.

The Dúnedain Rangers are...

...a troop of young people led by Astrid (she rides **Asfaloth**) and Eilir (she rides **Celebroch**). **Reuben Hutton** is a member and Will's adopted son. Others include **Marcie**, **Donnal**, and **Kevin Lewis**, their best medic. **Mithrilwood** will become their base camp.

The Mackenzies are...

...**Wiccans** who escaped to Juniper's farm — now **Dun Juniper** — and have taken to the wearing of kilts and renaming themselves **Mckenzies**. The fortified farms they've established are referred to as **Duns**. They've grown so much that they have separated into septs: **Raven**, **Wolf**, **Bear**, **Coyote**, and **Elk**. (Laurel Wilson and her people are being referred to as the **Fluffy Bunnies**, F-Bs for short.) The Mckenzies are strong in handcrafts.

Juniper Mckenzie is the Chief of the Mckenzies. **Rudi** is her son — and the unacknowledged son of Lord Bear; his spirit name is **Artos**. **Eilir** is her twenty-three-year-old deaf daughter and Astrid's best friend and blood-sister. **Cuchlain**, Juney's dog, is still alive. **Andy and Diana Trethar** ran the organic restaurant and food store in Eugene pre-EMP, now they handle the food and cooking for all Dun Juniper.

Dennis Martin has become the clan's best brewer as well as their best woodworker, carver, and leatherworker. He also runs the honey-wine operation while his mead is much sought after. From being a genial skeptic, Dennis has also become the High Priest of the Singing Moon. **Terry** is his stepson and following in his stepfather's footsteps. **Jill** and **Maeve** are their other children. **Sally** is Dennis' wife and the principal for the Dun Juniper high school and Lore-Mistress for the clan as a whole, overseeing the schools and Moon Schools. *Juniper reckons it's a good role for Sally as she has all the patience that Judy lacks.*

Chuck and Judy Barstow were also part of the original core group. He was a gardener and a member of the SCA pre-EMP. He was also High Priest of the Craft. Today he's Lord of the Harvest, a.k.a., Minister of Agriculture and Second Armsman. Judy is the High Priestess of her own Wolf-Star; in her civilian life, she was a nurse and midwife. Their children include **Aoife**, **Daniel**, and **Sanjay** are their adopted children while **Tamsin** and **Chuck, Jr** are their children born since the Change. **Pywackett** is Judy's ancient cat. **Alex** is Chuck's younger brother and a building contractor.

Dun Fairfax was...

...the Fairfaxes' farm where the couple were found dead in *Dies the Fire* , 1. Now **Sam Aylward**, a former SAS soldier from England whom they rescued in *Dies the Fire*, and who is now First Armsman, is its lord. Seems he's making a reputation as *Aylward the Archer*. The Mckenzies were lucky since Sam's pre-EMP pastime was the making of bows and arrows. Sam is married to **Melissa**, who is accounted a good cook. She's also the High Priestess of Dun Fairfax. I think **Edain**, the eldest, **Tamar**, and **Richard**, a toddler, are Melissa's and **Fand** is their newborn daughter. **Garm** and **Grip** are the dogs. **Eleanor** is Melissa's mother

and a bit bonkers. Her fully functional sister, **Aunt Joan**, has two children: **Harry** and **Jeanette**. Sounds like **Billy Hickock** may be a good match for Tamar. The former bookseller, **Larry Smith**, is a shepherd now, and **Lurp** is his collie. Others at Dun Fairfax include **Bob**, **Alice Dennison**, **Steve**, **Jerry**, **Carl** is a former architecture student, **Wally**, **Shane**, **Deirdre**, **Allison**, and **Nancy**.

Dun Carson

Cynthia Carson Mckenzie is one of those who joined later; she commands the escort. Her children include **Sean** and **Niamh** with **Jack** as her husband. Her brother **Rowan** changed his name to Raymond and is a Dedicant in Wicca who is highly skilled with his ax. The pregnant **Joanna** is his wife. **Morianna** is their daughter.

Sutterdown is...

...a new town the Mckenzies are raising, and it has a vineyard. **Tom and Moira Brannigan** are the High Priest and Priestess of Sutterdown. Brannigan serves as mayor and does a special ale Dennis thinks is spiked with magic mushrooms.

Allies include:

University of Corvallis

Luther Finney, an old friend of Juniper's, and **Captain Jones** of the university's militia are from the **Corvallis Faculty Senate**. **Councilor Edward Finney** is Luther's son, a logistics specialist in the air force (back in the day) and now a farmer. **Pete Jones** was a history teaching assistant with an interest in the SCA. Too many with the university group want to placate Arminger and includes **Turner** and **Agnes Kowalski**. These last two have some, um, "proposals" for Sutterdown on which Sir Nigel coaches Juniper ahead of time, lol.

The Lord Protector is...

...a former history professor. **Norman Arminger** is a vicious dictator who is much too interested in returning to a brutal era of serfs and conquering. His **Portland Protective Association** is his army. **Sandra** is his equally vicious wife. **Princess Matilda** is their young and precious daughter, and only child. **Lady Katrina Georges**, the princess' physical education tutor, is sent as a "nanny" for Matilda.

Salazar and **Johnson** are Arminger's sparring partners; **Conrad Renfrew** seems to be a sparring manager(?).

Eddie Liu is now Marchwarden Liu and Baron Gervais, serving Arminger. **Mack** is his giant friend. **Jabar Jones** was a Blood before the Change, now he's an adherent of Arminger's and Baron of Molalla. **Chaka** is his young son. **Alexei Stavrov** had been one of Arminger's original backers; pre-EMP, he'd been a KGB agent, drug smuggler, extortionist, and loan shark. **Lord Piotr** is his son.

Crusher's gang is...

...encouraged by Armitrage. **Crusher Bailey**, a.k.a., Carl Grettir, forces people in the area to spy for him. **Arvand Sarian** and his family keep the **Crossing Tavern**. **Aram** is one of Arvand's sons. **Baron Emiliano** is buying horses.

England

The prison of Woburn Abbey

Sir Colonel Nigel Loring was once deep in His Majesty's confidence and very popular with the troops. **Maude Loring** is his beloved wife. **Pommers** is the horse Loring will have to leave behind. **Alleyne Loring** (he has a passion for Tolkien) is Sir Nigel's son and was a childhood companion of **Sergeant John Hordle**'s

(a.k.a., Little John), whose father ran a pub close to Tilford Manor, the Lorings' home. The **Special Iceland Detachment** (SID), Varangians, are irregular troops for Charles and guarding Sir Nigel Loring.

The Pride of St. Helens is the last step in the escape **Nobbes** is the captain, a Tasmanian, who turns out to be a bit too credulous.

The British government has...

...gone mad with **King Charles III** as the new ruler of England too greatly influenced by **Hallgerda** for whom he threw out **Camilla**.

The Cover and Title

The cover is a range of browns and oranges into yellow with a man wearing a quiver and clutching a bow who stands atop an abandoned SUV in a glowing orange field of grasses, looking into a smoky fog of yellows and murky browns. The author's name is in a dark, embossed brown while the title is embossed and blue just below it in a smaller font.

The title is something of a misnomer. I picked it up expecting it would address the evil antagonist, provide his perspective, since it is the *Protector's War*. It's not. I'm guessing that Stirling meant this as the good guys being protectors.

Scott says

3.5*s knocked up to 4 because the last 100 pages. I liked this second installment better than the first as here we get more in the way of inter tribal / clan disputes and confrontation. Characters are also now starting to become a bit more fleshed out, and it's fun seeing the children start to be introduced into the story as they obviously become a great part of everything later down the road. Plus, we start to see newly formed romantic relationships develop which is well needed here.

My complaints would be that Stirling's writing is often very wooden, like reading a SAS Survival Manual. But, when describing environmental settings he can be wonderfully lyrical:

'Within it light vanished save for a few lanterns hooked over spearheads, casting flickering illumination upward into the branches, and once glinting suddenly from eyes beside the trail - a fox or coyote, from their green flash and swift flight.'

I wish he'd carry more of that throughout the rest of his writing.

Also, it is oddly evident that the set up to these first two books is all cherry picked to suit the Celtic theme Stirling wishes to drive home into our skull. Which is cool to read about, since I love Juniper's storyline, but how this band of pagans all just happen upon each other is pretty ridiculous. All of this story is centralized around the rural communities, and I find myself continually hoping to hear more about how the larger cities fared after The Change, and what is going on there (we do get a brief notion, but it is quickly abandoned).

All in all, I'd say as much as I kept laying this book aside and coming back to it, when I did, it kept me interested enough to keep going again. I'm indeed looking forward to what happens next.

Nathan Miller says

The story picks up roughly ten years after the phenomenon that everyone has come to call "the Change." Things have more or less settled down in western Oregon. Tension continues, however, between the Protectorate and the other groups of the Willamette Valley. While the title suggests a war, the book deals mainly with events and developments leading up to such.

We meet new friends and foes. Some of the old ones die. We see several types of communities rise up out of the ashes of the Digital Age, which is one of the things I find most fascinating about the series. The contrast between the new traditions, as well as the ways in which the new clashes with the old, as well as the new interpretations of what we today consider "the old" is interesting and sometimes entertaining. (Picture, for example, the Oregon State University football stadium, but with soldiers instead of football players, and with cheerleaders calling chants dealing with ACTUAL fighting, rather than the surrogate warfare that's typically the role of sports in the modern world.) The characters and the world have grown into themselves, as it were. But the struggle for long-term survival persists. There's a good balance between tastes of the duldrums of everyday life, the tension and headache of politics, and the excitement, terror, and horror of pre-gunpowder warfare--the latter of which were more or less skirmishes, but still brutal enough.

Melissa says

I did not enjoy this book as much as the first one. The Protector's War is the second in the series and I highly recommend reading Dies the Fire before moving on to this book. A little background, the world has been through a Change. This Change meant the end of civilization as most know it. Guns, Electricity and other modern implements no longer work and the world has been thrown back in time to where Bow and Arrow, Sword, and Armor have a place in society. Among the survivors, are Juniper McKenzie and her clan. They are great archers and Wiccans in practice and kind to all they meet. Mike Havel is Lord Bear of the Bearkillers and his outfit act almost like mercenaries. Together, these two groups form an alliance against the Evil Protector and his slaves and barons.

This book takes us eight and nine years into the future. Mostly everything has settled down and people are surviving better, but are always on the hunt for more power. This can't be more true of the Protector who wants the Bearkiller's and McKenzie's land for his own. Between going about their lives and fighting little battles here and there, Juniper and Mike must keep everyone together and well. At least Mike has help, Signe his warrior wife and Juniper has her daughter Eilir and precious son Rudi although she longs for her own lover.

Across the seas are Nigel Loring, his son, and a friend who have to escape England and its crazy king or be killed. Through fate they end up in the Willamette and view the Protector as just as big a foe as the other's do. They will have to join up if they have any hope of living a peaceful life. Not to mention, Alleyne Loring has caught the eye of both Eilir and Astrid (Havel's sister-in-law).

The characters in this novel are a joy to read about. They might be a little unbelievable but I think it makes them interesting. And I can suspend reality for awhile when it comes to Juniper and Mike. I also like Eilir who comes into her own in this book. Astrid on the other hand I don't really care for, she's just annoying to me. Stirling's a good descriptive writer. But that gets him into trouble with this novel. Its titled about a war but there is no war, only small battles and a very long, somewhat boring lead up to the war that is supposedly

in the next book. There is also the element of the religion in this book. While I personally don't have a problem with it, it could be disconcerting for some readers. A good way to think of this novel is that instead of Christian fiction, this book could probably be placed square in a genre of Wiccan fiction. I enjoyed reading about the different rites but it may not be to everyone's taste.

This is probably an important book for information, but for excitement of reading it is merely average. I look forward to reading more of the series to see if they improve and bring back what I liked in *Dies the Fire*.

The Protector's War

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591 pages

Review by M. Reynard 2011

Matt says

I want badly to like this series, but unfortunately I can't. It reminds me a lot of *The Years of Rice and Salt* in a way - a grand epic idea, that could be absolutely terrific but fails miserably in the actual story telling. It's really too bad.

First, the actual writing is extremely awkward. There's a weird series of flashbacks and forwards, with a nonsensical dream sequence tossed in the middle somewhere. One of my criticisms of the first book in the series was that Stirling did a terrible job of describing battle scenes. I do think he was improved in this area for this book. The Wicca stuff is even more over the top than the previous book, or maybe I just got tired of it. I enjoy learning a bit about religions I knew nothing about. But the constant, "Oh Lord....", "By The Horned Lord....", "Lady be good!", etc, just wore me out. I just skipped the long passages focusing on the religion. I'm sure not much was missed, since the passages I did read I rarely had any idea what they were talking about. Much of the terminology was never explained.

Stirling's writing, and this is a criticism for nearly all fantasy writers, lacks subtlety. I don't know why these writers feel the need to bludgeon their readers over the head with the same developments. We get it - those two are flirting (awkwardly), that guy doesn't like being called Lord, that guy is really evil, etc, etc.

He does cover some interesting societal changes in the first couple books. The ensuing chaos was well done. But the building of a new culture is completely ridiculous. I do agree that in a catastrophe, some fringe beliefs may become more popular. But are we really to believe that thousands of people are going to stop wearing pants and start wearing kilts because guns stop working? That Elvish will become a used language? That people will abandon their prior religion and embrace something as different as Wicca so easily? I realize that this is Science Fiction, and the book develops from the idea of "What if guns and electricity no longer work?" But an explosion in Kilts doesn't seem to me to be a viable answer - pants have proven to be a pretty solid idea.

One additional small criticism. The title is the *Protector's War*. There's no war in this book.

I may read the final book in the trilogy, I don't know. I'm a guy that once I've got time invested in something I like to see it through to the end. And like I said, I'm trying really hard to like this series. Stirling deserves credit for developing a wonderful, engaging idea. I'm really hoping he can develop a good book out of it at

some point.

Nathan says

More interesting than the first book but plotwise not as good. Where this book excels is in seeing various proto governments growing around The Change; organically and forced. The realization by one of the 'good' characters that he is inadvertently creating a landed gentry but can't really afford to change course is great. As is the faux feudal system by the main villain and how it is forcibly changed from history by a current reality.

Unfortunately the book itself has only one real happening in 600 pages; mostly it is built up for the conclusion.

Roberta says

The title is very misleading. It promises a war between the Protector of Portland and Clan MacKenzie and her allies including the Bearkillers, but it is merely a series of skirmishes leading me to a climactic cliffhanger of a skirmish.

Three new characters are introduced on this book Nigel and his Alleyne and their companion John Hordle fugitives from King Charles's England (yep the real life of Prince of Wales is king). These three men are former SAS and friends of Juniper MacKenzie's first armsman Sam Aylward. The scenes in England with these three characters fleeing Charlie's wrath, the flashbacks in Portland when they meet up with Arminger, and the potential romances between these three and others amongst the MacKenzie/Bearkiller crowd are the most interesting.

Sadly outside of the battles, the book is a bridge novel with some good character building but just drags too much with descriptions of meals, hunting, and alliance building. It took about 10 days to read it because I was struggling to press on through the less action oriented sections. I do hope the next book is faster paced and won't give up the series primarily because I like the characters.

Leah Lumsden says

Love love love this book. First one I read by this author. Now I have a bunch of his stuff. It takes place several years after the world went to sh*t (see my review of the first book for more details) The people who have survived in the cities are basically warlords who have survived off the hardwork and misery of others. They are expanding as all people with power are prone to do. There are several storylines (characters) that this book follows. Strong real female characters who aren't simpering, useless or oversexualized. Nice change for me to read about. The men are real too, they aren't all brave cowboys with no flaws and huge... assets. Or maybe they do.. it's not a picture book tho;) Anyway, the groups or 'clans' as they are aptly named have been living off the land for several years now. Made up of gunsmiths, historians (comes in handy), vetrinarians, midwives, pharmacists, farmers, etc. If you have a skill that's useful, great. If you don't you'll soon learn one. A lot of the stuff that survived from the world before is now running low or broken and not able to be repaired. People are slowly but surely (and in the case of two clans) are doing very well living off the land

and doing it the old fashioned way. The book ends on the cusp of war because the warlords from the neighboring cities are trying to expand their territory and the two large clans will have none of it. Great read! I was sad when the book ended and hungry for more. That doesn't often happen.

Gary says

Oh dear! I had a definite feeling of 'been there, done that' with this book. I don't know anything about the enigmatically named S.M. Stirling but this had promise for me when I started it but it just became dull, dull, dull. There was too much description of how the post-change people re-kindled a pseudo-mediaeval society, and an English/Scottish one at that, even in the USA and too much dialogue between characters with Tolkiennesque overtones.

There was some action but not enough compared to the descriptive sections and some nice ideas that just got subdued by the author's desire to expound on his/her knowledge of weaponry and armour. It even had songs in it for goodness sake! Mr. Tolkien can get away with that but not many others can and this was irritating, for me anyway.

This was the second in the series and maybe the first was better (the blurb certainly makes it appear so) but I can't really recommend anyone to buy it but if you can borrow the first one try that maybe and see how you get on.

Matthew says

The charm of the first book wears off a bit. While the basic story is quite good, I think, this novel suffers the same unfortunate problems of most science fiction. The book is simply flabby: there is a lot of unnecessary stuff, and it would be a tighter, better paced, more exciting story if 1/3 of it were cut out. Stirling has no ear for dialogue whatsoever (and I wish I could find all these writers that feel the need to write accents phonetically and punch them in the face), and his characterizations are generally clumsy. In addition to that, the cultural aspects of the post-Change world--on which he spends an incredible amount of time--are overwrought to the point of cliches. I doubt there are many Americans of Finnish ancestry (even the crazy ones from the depths of Michigan) who know ten words of the Finnish language, much less ones that would be inclined to shout medieval war-cries, recall the details of Gustavus Adolphus's military campaigns, or quote lengthy passages from the *Kalevala*. The whole wiccan thing gets really tiresome too, but the thing that rankled me the most is that the whole book comes off as a sort of paean to the pre-modern world, when everyone worked for their food and fought for their kin and blah blah blah, before those stupid useless citified folk came and mucked everything up. I don't think Stirling intends for it to come out that way, but the pervasively smug anti-modernism is irritating.
