

SPECULATIVE FICTION REVIEW by Stephanie Young

TITLE *In the Garden of Iden*
AUTHOR Kage Baker
PUBLISHER Tor
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COVER ART Paul Youll

Précis The first novel in the “Company” series, it introduces us to Mendoza who is drafted by the Company to become an immortal. Founded by Dr. Zeus who discovered a way to travel through time, it finds people from all periods in history, and then after physical changes and special training they go back in the past and perform duties, mostly preserving priceless treasures of all types. The company is not completely altruistic though, these treasures bring in a huge amount of wealth to the good doctor and the Company.

In this story, Mendoza is rescued from the Inquisition, made immortal, trained in botany, then sent back to 16th century England to gather samples of plants that are extinct in the far future. These samples are part of a very large garden owned by Sir Walter Iden. Sir Walter’s generosity is given in exchange for a youth treatment by Mendoza’s control Joseph, who is the same Joseph that rescued from the jail as a child.

She falls in love with a Nicholas Harpole the mortal who is Sir Walter’s secretary (A definite no-no, falling in love with mortals) which threatens to expose them and leads to the tragic ending.

Protagonist Mendoza
Antagonist Nicholas Harpole

What I liked Baker writes terrific prose, the descriptions of life in an English manor are terrific and it is obvious she knows her history. She has a way with sarcasm that, while it seems out of place, reveals much of who Mendoza is. The first person POV works well and the pacing is good. The ending was totally unexpected.

What I didn’t like I had to pull a dictionary out to look up the old usages of words that she uses frequently. If you don’t have a good dictionary, get one before you read this. As to the story itself it tended to drift a bit losing focus.

Final comment The story was simple but the characters were terrific. The wonderful prose and wit of Baker makes this a very good read. I am glad Tor released these earlier “Company” novels in trade paperback so we could fill in our collection. The next book will tell if I find the series enjoyable.

Rating  Five gold stars and one silver star, indicating a 5-star rating.

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