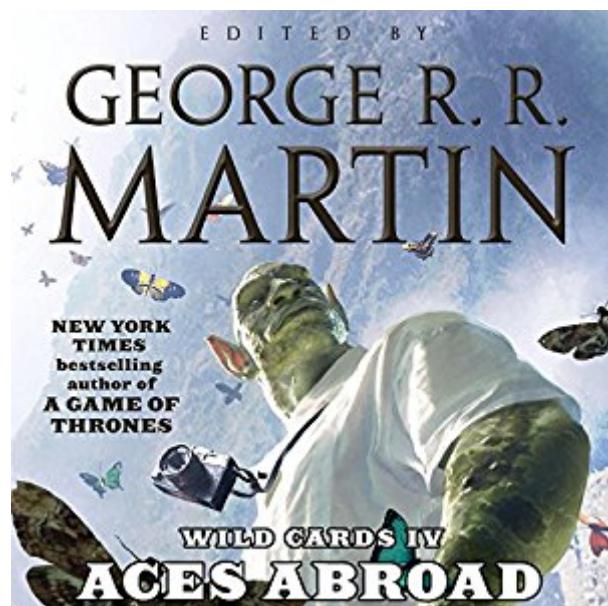


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Aces Abroad: Wild Cards IV



Synopsis

The action-packed alternate fantasy returns for a new generation, featuring fiction from number-one New York Times best-selling author George R. R. Martin, Michael Cassutt, Melinda M. Snodgrass, Lewis Shiner, and more - plus two completely new stories from Kevin Andrew Murphy and best-selling author Carrie Vaughn. Forty years after the Wild Card Virus' release, the World Health Organization decides it's time to take a delegation of Aces, Jokers, politicians, and journalists on a fact-finding mission to learn how other countries are dealing with the virus that reshaped humanity. Leading the team is Gregg Hartmann, a senator with presidential aspirations and a dangerous ace up his sleeve. Joining him is a menagerie of some of the series' best and most popular Wild Cards, including Dr. Tachyon; aces Peregrine and Golden Boy; and jokers Chrysalis, Troll, and Father Squid. From the jungles of Haiti and Peru to the tumultuous political climate of Egypt, from a monastery in Japan to the streets of the most glamorous cities of Europe, the Wild Cards are in for an eye-opening trip. While some are worshiped as actual gods, those possessing the most extreme mutations are treated with a contempt that's all too familiar to the delegates from Jokertown. New alliances will be formed, new enemies will be made, and some actions will fulfill centuries-old prophecies that make ripples throughout the future of the Wild Cards universe. Various Roles Read by a Full Cast of Narrators: Peregrine read by Kathleen Turner ("Down by the Nile") Chrysalis read by Selma Blair Sen. Gregg Hartmann/Puppetman read by Clancy Brown Yeoman Brennan read by Adrian Paul Xavier Desmond read by Armin Shimerman ("From the Journal of Xavier Desmond") Dr. Tachyon read by Raphael Sbarge ("Mirrors of the Soul") Cordelia Chaisson read by Kasey Lansdale ("Down in the Dreamtime") Ti Malice read by Nicholas Guy Smith Jayewardene read by Sanjit de Silva ("The Teardrop of India") Troll read by Richard Moll ("Warts and All") Sara Morgenstern read by Emily Rankin Joann Jefferson read by Donnabella Mortel ("Always Spring in Prague") Xbalanque read by Noel Bearheart Wilfried Molniya read by Stefan Rudnicki ("Legends") Hunapu read by Ozzie Rodriguez Mackie Messer read by PJ Ochlan Misha/Kahina read by Yasmine Barghouty Fortunato read by Prentice Onayemi ("Zero Hour")

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I LOVED this book in the series, because it explores (for the first time) how Wild Cards affected the rest of the world. We get to travel along with a World Health Organization Fact-Finding Mission, charged with documenting the global affect of Wild Cards. And through their eyes, we get to see how cultures around the world changed and evolved as a result of the virus; I found that was really the final detail I needed to flesh out the Wild Cards universe in my head as a complete alternate reality. The Wild Cards were alive for me after the first three books, but after this one, they were talking to me. =;>

I think it's pretty safe to say that any fictional work involving super-powered beings will, of necessity, be one that dabbles in alternate versions of reality. Comic books have long traded in such bending and distortion of truth and history - in some instances, readers are presented with a completely unrecognisable fantasy world fuelled by untrammelled imagination; in others, human nature and events remain broadly (and far too often depressingly) the same even after the definition of 'human' has been stretched far beyond anything we have come to accept as typical. *Aces Abroad* (Wild Cards #4) is very much in the latter vein, as have the preceding novels in this series (particularly the inaugural installment). Following on the alien invasion (WC #2) and super villain (WC #3) novels, this fourth book returns to explaining how the unleashing of the wild card virus affects history and mankind - but with a far greater scope that spans the entire globe. Here, the reader is a stowaway passenger on The Stacked Deck, a Boeing 747 bearing several of the aces and a handful of jokers we've already met in the series. This motley group of clashing personalities and powers is on a goodwill world tour, led by the deceptively genial Senator Gregg Hartmann and perpetually guilt-ridden alien progenitor of the aforementioned virus Tachyon. Again, the novel comprises a host of stories written by authors from the Wild Cards stable, with an interstitial narrative written by series editor George RR Martin to link everything together. The story that takes centre stage this time (and for the foreseeable future actually) belongs to Hartmann - a troubling, polarising figure whether in

his fictional incarnation or as a character in his own right. Anyone familiar with the first novel would know of Hartmann's own power, and his creator Stephen Leigh is given far greater rein now to explore Hartmann's ambition, motives and power. The character that emerges at the end of this novel exists in (more than fifty) shades of grey, which might disorientate the reader a bit since Hartmann and his alter ego were rather less sympathetic (and thus all the more creepily intriguing) in his first appearance. Fortunately, the relative humanisation of Senator Hartmann does not make him any less compelling a character, and one of the thrills of reading *Aces Abroad* is watching his disturbing relationship with driven, haunted reporter Sara unfold. His presence on board *The Stacked Deck* also serves as a great focal point for the disparate personalities travelling the world with him - it's fascinating to observe them interacting with Hartmann without that crucial bit of knowledge in the audience's possession about his own turn of the wild card. With Hartmann the unofficial star of this fourth book, the ambition for *Aces Abroad* is again pretty staggering - as the plane carrying New York's finest aces and jokers circumnavigates the globe, characters and readers alike encounter new cultures and new ideas, and new ways in which the virus plays into social and cultural mores. The way aces manifest across the globe - and the ways in which jokers are almost uniformly (mis)treated - makes for great, pacy material: whether it takes a turn for the radically religious in Syria (*The Tint Of Hatred*) or plays out amidst the tumultuous revolutionary politics of Guatemala (*Blood Rights*). The aces we know meet the aces we don't, and change the course of history as they know it. Some might argue that the book plays too easily into geopolitical stereotypes - and certainly it does tend to go for the easily recognisable cultural prejudices and preconceptions in exploring locales outside of America e.g., by relocating some old characters to Australia where they promptly encounter aboriginal dream-walkers in the Outback (*Down In The Dreamtime*). Even so, I found most of the stories fascinating and the overall arc of the story (touching on Cold War espionage as well as domestic and Islamic terrorism that goes beyond mere geographical boundaries) a smart, effective reimagining of the political issues of the 1980s for a world forever changed by the wild card. Martin's skill as head story honcho and editor extraordinaire are again on full display, as characters cross over into one another's stories and Hartmann's relationship with Sara morphs and changes throughout. Unfortunately, for a book whose ostensible goal is to expand the *Wild Cards* universe into previously unexplored terrain, it was the tales of familiar faces that had the most emotional resonance for me. I enjoyed (and was utterly thrilled by the climactic twists in) the stories of self-proclaimed prophet Nur-Al-Allah and Guatemalan psychic ace brothers Hunapu and XBalanque, but delighted more in the personal observations of joker activist Xavier Desmond and the way in which *Aces High* proprietor Hiram Winchester was - shall

we say - altered by his experiences on the trip. We finally got to meet the lovely winged ace celebrity Peregrine for a full story, a nice change from her cameos in the earlier novels. On top of revisiting (and revising) Hartmann, we got to see another aspect of family life for Tachyon and another side of the ape that periodically menaced Aces High and any nubile blonde female in grasping range. All in all, *Aces Abroad* is a solid, intelligent entry in the *Wild Cards* canon that effectively lays the groundwork for what is no doubt to come - Hartmann's continued attempts to march his way up the political ladder, aided and abetted (consciously or not) by the aces who saw the world with him and were themselves irrevocably changed as a result. Fasten your seatbelts, it's going to be a bumpy campaign...

We are often addicted to things that are not entirely good for us. Not that it can't be pleasurable, but usually there is a side effect that becomes more prominent than the actual pleasure. The addiction becomes stronger and the compulsion to keep doing what you're doing takes over any rational thoughts of stopping. That's pretty much how I feel about the *Wild Cards* series edited by George R. R. Martin. *Wild Cards* is a science fiction and superhero anthology series set in a shared universe. While most of the volumes are made up of individual short stories, written by different authors, they generally focus on a central theme or event. There are also several longer story lines which run through several of the books. Every third book uses the format of the mosaic novel. This involves several writers writing individual story lines, which are then edited by blending them together into one seamless novel-length story. *Wild Cards* is inspired by traditional superhero comics, and many of the authors play with the conventions of the medium, while some characters are based on existing heroes. The series began way back in 1987. It's still ongoing today with new novels periodically published. I remember first being exposed to the *Wild Cards* books back in the late 80's but never got around to reading them. About four years ago, TOR began republishing the earlier volumes that had fallen off the publishing wagon. Having grown up reading (and still continuing to read) comic books, I was drawn to these novels that explore an alternate universe with super heroes in more adult, realistic settings. Which brings me to *Wild Cards IV: Aces Abroad* originally published in 1988. I really do enjoy this series. I'm addicted to the characters and the stories, often holding my breath for the next volume to be re-released. The side-effect is the problem I have with different literary styles for each individual story contained in a single volume. One story can be fast-paced while the next is written by an author whose writing style is not enjoyable. You have to take the good with the bad. But it's not really bad per se, more like slow. The change in authors can throw you out of the

overall story. One author will keep you captivated while the next completely changes the tone and pace. I haven't told you anything about Aces Abroad yet have I? That's because I struggled how to review a book of short stories all centered around a common narrative thread written by various authors. So this review is simply setting up future ones. I feel the novel should be graded as a whole, but each story individually as well. As I progress through future installments in this series, I will take better notes on the individual chapters. Overall, this was one of the better Wild Cards novels. It starts a new arc that will take place over the next couple of novels. We say goodbye to a couple of characters and are introduced to new ones. Very important to note: you should really start with the first novel if you haven't read any Wild Cards novels. I gave this 3 out of 5 stars overall. Some of the short stories are real standouts including Mirrors of the Soul, Blood Rights, the Teardrop of India and Down In the Dreamtime? I really recommend this series. It's fun, often thought provoking and sometimes just simply weird. At the end of every novel I'm left thinking that I've had just enough of this universe, but eventually I get the tug to read on only if to find out what happens next. At last count there are more than 23 novels in this series, more than enough to keep feeding my addiction.

I enjoyed the books stories and different writers blend, which was harmonious. I look forward to reading some of the spin offs which I sense will result from this collaboration. Thank you all.

Read this series and follow ups when they were started in the '80s. Ordered large edition by accident, wanted regular paperback. Too excited by the reissue! "Real World" altered humans with oftentimes extraordinary abilities. Recommended for people who like character driven stories.

I loved the first 3, and while I am enjoying this one, I find that they introduce too many characters too fast, and while I am certainly not racist or xenophobic, I do have a much harder time following all the different individuals from so many different cultures.

Gotta love these for what they are, a mind vacation, and I do. I have most of these in paperback, and wish they'd release the whole series on Kindle. Wait, maybe not... \$\$\$. ^%

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