



Blightborn

Chuck Wendig

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Cael McAvoy is on the run. He's heading toward the Empyrean to rescue his sister, Merelda, and to find Gwennie before she's lost to Cael forever. With his pals, Lane and Rigo, Cael journeys across the Heartland to catch a ride into the sky. But with Boyland and others after them, Cael and his friends won't make it through unchanged.

Gwennie's living the life of a Lottery winner, but it's not what she expected. Separated from her family, Gwennie makes a bold move—one that catches the attention of the Empyrean and changes the course of an Empyrean man's life.

The crew from *Boxelder* aren't the only folks willing to sacrifice everything to see the Empyrean fall. The question is: Can the others be trusted?

They'd all better hurry. Because the Empyrean has plans that could ensure that the Heartland never fights back again.

Chuck Wendig's riveting sequel to *Under the Empyrean Sky* plunges readers into an unsettling world of inequality and destruction, and fleshes out a cast of ragtag characters all fighting for survival and, ultimately, change.

Blightborn Details

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From Reader Review Blightborn for online ebook

Sachin Dev says

Heartland trilogy chugs ahead full speed with Blightborn, the second book that follows the adventures of Cael McAvoy and his buddies set in a dystopian future where evil schemes of the greedy man has killed the soil – there is only corn that grows out here on earth – and the Heartland dwellers – the “have-nots” stuck in this sunny dustbowl of a wasteland are grubbing their way through lives suffering under the tyranny of the sky-dwellers or the Emphyreans. The title of the first book, *Under the Emphyrean Sky* was apt. Evocative and lush, as the title imagery suggests, much of book one happens on the ground hide and seek among the corn stalks in Heartland.

But with Book Two in this series, *Blightborn* – Chuck Wendig slams the pedal fully down. Both the world-building and characterization get a lot of detail as we are sucked deeper into this world of piss-blizzards, blood-thirsty corn-stalks and the deadly blight. While book one was predominantly from the viewpoint of the self-absorbed Cael set mostly in and around the town of Boxelder and the unending corn stalk fields of Heartland, this time we get a wider perspective of the world and the happenings or conspiracies that led to this dystopian setting.

In short, we take to the air.

And explore the myriad mysteries of the Emphyrean Empire aboard this flotilla- Mainly through Gwennie or Gwendolyn Shawcatch – Cael’s girlfriend, Obligated to Cael’s bitter rival, Barnes in the first book. Gwennie’s life changes after the “Lottery” – where her family is the “lucky” one to be taken aboard a flotilla. But to her horror, things go spiraling downwards pretty fast – the lottery turns out to be ticket to lifelong slavery – mucking horseshit and apprenticed to a quirky scientist in the sky with his own secrets and sob-stories at large. And of course, she runs into Cael’s sister, Merelda.

Meanwhile, Cael and his best buddies, Lane and Rigo are on the run. A chance encounter with a crazed hobo and the Raiders – a set of terrorists or anarchists trying to make the Emphyrean count for all their sins – turns their lives on its head. And Barnes, along with Wanda and Rigo’s father form a posse to hunt down Cael’s gang and now are hot on their trail.

If the first book in that series was one ripe with possibilities, then book two blossoms out. Then goes ahead and simply explodes. Chuck ensures that the horizons are widening. As we explore the Skies of the Emphyrean Empire, we understand that sky is not the limit. (pun intended) We get to see the world of Heartland outside of the Boxelder town. But the most interesting part for me – was of course the bizarre life aboard the Flotillas. The quirks of the sky-dwellers, the weapons, their obsessions with auto-bots, their whacky parties. (Mind boggling imagination, Mr.Wendig!) all makes for an engrossing read. But in typical Wendig style, the plot dives head long into twisty conspiracies – secrets come tumbling out and revelations leave you shocked and gasping for more. I found it to be one of the best ways to develop this trilogy – with the world expanding, characters evolving and the plot deepening. And fuck-a-duck, book two ends on a cliffhanger. I hated that but now the wait is desperate and restless.

So *Blightborn* is everything shiny and good that *Under the Emphyrean Sky* offered us and then takes it up a few notches towards “really good” territory. It’s a great second book in a series that truly rolls the overall plot forwards while opening it really wide. The teeming possibilities are exciting beyond measure. And with the ending of Book two, I am now waiting on a bed of nails raked over a bed of hot burning coals. Get back to writing, Chuck!!

Dan Schwent says

Cael, Lane, and Rigo head north through the Heartland, looking for the provisions depot, and stumble upon more than they bargain for in the form of a mysterious hobo and the Sleeping Dogs, raiders fighting against the Emphyreans. Meanwhile, Gwennie has found that winning the Lottery isn't all it's cracked up to be and wants to escape the flotilla...

I got this from Netgalley. Thank you, Netgalley!

Chuck Wendig is one of the few authors I've encountered that knows how to make the second book in a trilogy not suck. Blightborn takes what Chuck established in the first book and turns the knob up a few notches.

Blightborn picks up where Under the Emphyrean Sky left off. Cael and his pals are on the run. Gwennie is on the flotilla and sees Cael's sister. Rigo's father, Wanda, and Boyland Barnes Jr. are part of a posse looking for Cael and his pals. Things quickly spiral out of control from there.

I don't want to give away too many of the nuts and bolts of the plot or reveal too much of what happened in the last book. I will say that all the threads of the plot advance quite a bit. The new characters of The Sleeping Dogs, the peregrine, Harrington, Eben, and the Maize Witch are all pretty compelling. Not one of the characters emerged unscathed. Who would have thought Cael's father was so interesting back in the day?

I really like what Wendig seems to be building toward in the Heartland Trilogy. The series reminds me of Black Feathers at some times and The Court of the Air at others, with its ecological themes and cities in the clouds. With the full scope of what the Emphyrean is planning, I can't wait for the final book!

Four out of five stars. Get crackin' on the sequel, Chuck!

Connor says

[4.5 Stars] Woah, I read that so quickly once I started. Review to come shortly!

Edit: Okay, it's been a couple weeks so it's high time that I do my review for this book before I forget anything.

Holy mackerel! This was just as amazing as the first book, Under the Emphyrean Sky! There were just so many things that I loved that continued on from the first as well as adding more. I worried that this would suffer from middle book syndrome, but nope!

I think my favorite thing has to be the unpredictability of the plot. Most fiction novels can become stale as you guess everything that is going to happen beforehand, but Blightborn definitely kept me on my toes the entire time. I never knew which new direction Wendig would take his characters or what obstacle they'd have to face next. It made for a very exciting and fast paced novel as I continued to turn the page over and over to see what was next.

The world was definitely expanded which I thoroughly enjoyed. In the first we're introduced to the

characters and their immediate problems, but in this one we get to see parts of the rest of the world and the problems that inflict the society as a whole. The flotilla was so interesting, and I loved the dynamic of the characters that are on it together. Obviously with the title, we get to learn more about the blight and where it originates. Fantastic. The history of the creepy corn is also brought to light. I really think this novel did a great job of providing more world building without being info dumpy.

One of my issues with the first book was that I didn't feel attached to the characters. It definitely improves with this installment, but I still do feel a bit detached to them for some reason. I think I became glad for that because their lives, they are awful. I'm so glad I don't have to deal with what they have to endure.

I don't want to make this review overly long, so just know that this series is quickly becoming one of my favorites. I did receive a copy through NetGalley (Not affecting my review at all), but I now need to go out and get myself physical copies. They are that awesome.

? Sh3lly - Grumpy Name-Changing Wanderer ? says

I originally DNF'd this at 53% and then decided to try and finish it because I got it from Netgalley and wanted to be able to provide feedback. I am going to keep my original rating. I just didn't think was as good as the first one. I feel like the same story could have been told in less pages. This felt bloated and I didn't care about any of the new characters. I did like Balastair. The female characters were annoying and I didn't really like Cael either. I have the third one so will finish the trilogy. I hope the last one is better than this one.

Also posted at: [https://theparanormalpaladin.wordpres...](https://theparanormalpaladin.wordpress...)

Original review:

DNF 53%. I really enjoyed the first book, but this one is seriously annoying me. The two main characters, Cael and Gwennie are the most annoying, irritating characters and I wish they were killed off. I like every other character so much more. Why can't Cael be killed off and Lane be the main male character from here on out?

I hate Gwennie. I love Merelda McAvoy. I totally understand why she left the Heartland. She made a better life for herself and mega-bitch Gwennie had to ruin it for her. She's so selfish and will take anyone out to find her family. I get that her family is important, but you don't destroy other innocent people to accomplish your goals, you dumb bitch. I can't **stand** her. Kill Cael and Gwennie off and I will continue reading this. If anyone has finished this trilogy and can tell me that things change with these idiotic characters, I will pick this back up and try again.

But I don't have time for BS like this. I do not want a HEA for Cael and Gwennie. I am not rooting or cheering for them whatsoever. They should go back to the Heartland and eat rats and continue their existence that they thought was peachy keen. Only they wanted to bitch when they were in it, but not when they had opportunities to get out of it. Instead, they attack everyone and anything that offers them a chance because they are suspicious and selfish pigs. God, I hate them both. Ruined it for me. :(

I'm sorry. But this pisses me off. I can't even. Also, WAY too much switching between chapters and POVs.

Just when a little bit of action happened, it switched, then a few pages later, just when some momentum was building, ANOTHER switch. Seriously. That is frustrating.

Original post:

Yay, I was approved by Netgalley for book 2 in this trilogy! Here is my review for the first book. I really liked it and can't wait to keep going with this story.

:)

Monica says

This Review was originally posted on Avid Reviews: www.avidfantasyreviews.wordpress.com

Blightborn is the second installment in the Heartland Trilogy by Chuck Wendig. You can find my review of the first novel in the series, Under the Empyrean Sky, here:

<http://avidfantasyreviews.wordpress.c...>

The Heartland Trilogy is comprised of dystopian novels that paint a picture of a future where corn is the only crop permitted to be grown, and the rich live in cities that float in the sky. In the first novel in the series Wendig introduced the reader to the Heartland in a fast paced story that highlighted the struggles of the people who live amongst the endless sea of corn. Blightborn continues the story of the Heartlanders while at the same time introducing a glimpse of the privileged lives of those that live on the Empyrean flotillas. With this novel Wendig manages to create a story as fast paced and exciting as the first novel in the series, while also raising the stakes for his characters and expanding on his world in new and remarkable ways.

I would advise against reading the rest of this review if you have not yet read Under the Empyrean Sky, as the rest of this review will contain spoilers for the first novel in the Heartland trilogy.

Blightborn picks up right where Under the Empyrean Sky left off, with Cael and his friends on the run from their hometown, and with hopes of making it onto an Empyrean flotilla in order to rescue Gwennie, the woman Cael loves. Gwennie is currently living the life of a lottery winner, though it is far from what she expected it to be. She separated from her family, and rarely gets a break from her job of mucking out the stables of genetically mutated horses. Intermittently she is invited to one of the flotillas' extravagant parties only to be gawked at by the upper class, which finds her to be little more than an unfortunate provincial specimen. Both Cael and Gwennie must fight against the odds to change their fate; and if they fail, the Empyrean has plans that may change their lives forever, and make sure that the Heartlanders will never be able to fight back again, or change their lives for the better.

This book is both darker and more complex than its predecessor, and in many ways a more mature and accomplished novel. Fans of the first book in the Heartland trilogy will find much in this book to fall in love with. The characters grow and become more developed, the plot both expands the world and raises the stakes, and the ending of the book leaves the reader wanting more. The vast inequalities between the Heartlanders and the Empyreans become even more defined in this novel, and bring more meaning to the series' environmental message.

In a genre that is flooded with mediocre novels, Wendigs' stand far above the rest of the pack due to his unique setting and wildly exciting plot lines. This is a series that will surprise even the most jaded fans of the

dystopian genre. Wendig has made me a true fan with this book, and I will be eagerly awaiting the final installment in the Heartland series.

My rating for this book is 8/10.

I received a copy of this book from Netgalley and the publisher in return for an honest review.

Melanie R Meadors says

Wow.

This book was everything awesome that the first Heartland book, *UNDER THE EMPYREAN SKY*, was, and more. Wendig's characters are like real people, multi-dimensional and complicated. There are no cliché cardboard cutout archetypes or tropes here. Every character has their strengths, weaknesses, things that you love, and things that make you want to scream.

I went into this book expecting a second book, maybe a little saggy, like many middle books of trilogies are. Hell no. This book kept me engaged the entire time, kept me wondering what would happen next, and kept surprising me. The setting details are fantastic, the action and pacing impeccable. In this book, we learn so much more about the characters we already know/love/hate from the first book, and meet several new folks, too. Things grow more complicated as the plot thickens, and the world isn't as black and white as it perhaps seemed earlier in the series.

Something that stood out for me about this book as I read it is Wendig's treatment of his younger characters. There is no talking down here, no weird older author's take on teens. This is an author who understands the way a seventeen year old thinks, and tells it like it is. Wendig's respect for his subjects is clear. There is no annoying whining here, like I've noticed in several other YA books I've read. These are characters who teens can be proud of, who they can sympathize with. Sure, they have their rough moments, but they take action. They make mistakes, but they learn.

The future Wendig has portrayed here is eerily reflective of issues happening today—I can see how this world could exist. The themes of this trilogy are timely and thought provoking.

BLIGHTBORN is an action packed, emotional ride that both teens and adults would enjoy. The only negative part is that I have to wait a year before getting my hands on the next one!

Nina says

I actually had to stop midway through this book. Not that it was lacking action or anything, but the treatment of the female characters made me too uncomfortable. I realize it's all dystopian so poor people clearly must be depraved and HORRIBLE to each other, but the situations he put them in didn't really seem necessary for the plot to move along, and it wasn't taken seriously enough for me to handle continuing to read it. It may be a personal issue, but I still couldn't do it. Also, the perspective changing every 3 paragraphs made it very hard to get into any one person's story.

So sorry, but not my thing!

Nichole says

I really wanted this to be a five star book. I really, really, really did. But gosh darn it, I just couldn't do it. The story is amazing, the world is incredible, I love everything about this series. The only thing that screwed it up, was again, the writing style.

This author can take a story, weave so much into it and create a great climactic ending that just blew me away and left me wanting, but I was distracted. It was almost as if he had a list of every cliché simile ever written and put them in the most inappropriate places. You don't compare a voice being drowned out by a ship to a farmer drowning a bunch of kittens. I am no English major, and I will ever claim to be, so if I am the only one that takes issue with it, so be it.

None the less, I will be anxiously awaiting the next book, slowly going mad.

Liz Neering says

This book, this SERIES, is so good I think I'm going to be sick. I didn't want it to end, least of all where it DID. Lane, sweet Lane, WHAT HAPPENS, I MUST KNOW.

In all seriousness, BLIGHTBORN is as well paced and tightly plotted as its predecessor. The characters are remarkable. They're deep and complex and difficult, and they tug at my heartstrings and surprise me in the best and most painful of ways.

I have to comment on the wonderful representation in the book, too. There's no punching down to be found here. There's a fat kid who isn't craven and cowardly, but brave, steadfast, strong, and a quick thinker.

There's a gay kid who's multidimensional and not demonized or mocked by the narrative (though yes, he does face the fears and lashing-out of those who don't understand). And people of color! Who aren't cannon fodder! Confetti everywhere!

I'm literally salivating over the thought of the next book. I can't even deal, you guys.

Hacen says

Actual Rating: 3.5

Daisy says

Quality Rating: Four Stars

Enjoyment Rating: Five Stars

◆ Thanks to NetGalley for this eBook copy for review ◆

I have so much fun reading these books. Past the decent story and the writing and characters, the enjoyment

from just getting through this series is enough for me to want to keep coming back.

While I don't feel Wendig's writing has dramatically developed since *Under the Empyrean Sky*, I can't deny how much the humour engages me. However boyish and immature at times it's really entertaining: I have a feeling it's a particular kind of comedy that won't appeal to everyone so don't be too disappointed if you don't get it.

The big variable as to whether you get on with the Heartland stories is the world. Wendig has a very bizarre imagination, and the concept he creates are really key in the development of the story and characters - and it can be quite hard to get. Through the first book I got distracted by the unusualness of the living corn and the Blight (a 'disease' where people start growing vines through their bodies - see what I mean?), but because I read the second book next to the first it became a lot easier to accept the strangeness and focus on the story. I really love how the story's expanding as it progresses: the characters are continually being split up and reunited even within a single story, and the way their paths meet and then diverge regularly keeps the pace up. The diversity of settings also interested me as it allows us a huge view on the world previously denied in the last book at the same time (the simultaneous events happening from different perspectives was particularly good). Wendig is also beginning to explore more controversial issues, and quite well in my opinion: subjects like sexuality and abuse are broached, and dealt with in a positive way. The conclusion to *Blightborn* was a bit disappointing for me, as it was similar to the ending of *Under the Empyrean Sky*. The characters have developed as individuals, but as for their positions in the story we still have the same sort of construct and protagonist powers. Having said that I'm definitely looking forward to reading the conclusion to the series.

The Heartland Trilogy didn't capture me straight away with its characters, but as the books have progressed they've become more complex. My favourite aspect was that nobody was completely loyal: they're doing whatever they think is best like people do in reality, even if it ends up ruining everything. Admittedly, I'm still kind of indifferent towards Cael as a character, but as a protagonist I really like how he's going quite a different way from everyone else in the story. It's nice and refreshing to have the main character going off on his own path while everyone else keeps going without him - but still being affected by his actions.

I started to fall in love with Gwennie in this book. She's becoming darker and really came into her own power and strength independently in *Blightborn*. There's definitely been better development of women compared to the first book, but I can't help but feel their stories are still centered around romance: the boys only talk about her in terms of her position to them, and all other female characters are either attached to family or presented as a betrayer or weak.

I felt the pacing in *Blightborn* was much better than *Under the Empyrean Sky*: the diversity of setting and variety of characters was probably the main reason for this. Because we follow so many people in various situations, there's always something going on and it's usually a little different from everything else. A small issue I found with the previous book was the pretty much solid focus on Cael and his story that took place in the same landscape; jumping between characters made it a lot more engaging.

Though I don't want to compare this series to anything else, I feel a similar audience to *The Maze Runner* or Charlie Higson's *The Enemy* would be engaged by these books. Personally, I found reading the first two books close together really helped not only in keeping the story fresh in my mind, but also in terms of acclimatising to Wendig's frankly bizarre imagination. There may be a few small details that get to me, but overall *The Heartland Trilogy* is great fun and definitely worth the read.

Simply Sam ? says

I think this was a solid second book.

We're thrown right back into the story, but the action is now broken up between those on the flotilla and those on the ground hoping to rescue them. I still think the corn is completely bizarre, and in this book we get to take a closer look at the blight, though it is still not really explained. It's just so strange and more than a little horrifying. We learn that life on the flotilla is not all that it is cracked up to be (imagine that!) and that Cael's father has even more secrets up his sleeve. Cael and his cohorts end up teamed up with the rebel group, The Sleeping Dogs, on the ground, all while being pursued by Boyland and his new crew. Meanwhile Gwennie is roped into assisting the rebels in the air with a very reluctant Merelda in tow. The action comes to a head when the rebel group decides it's time for the flotilla to experience life in the Heartland and puts into action a plan to tear it from the sky.

There's a few new faces introduced, a lot of action, and even more creepy plant goodness. I really enjoyed it. I'm interested to see how this story concludes. On to the next one!

Oh, and I just want to add, I listened to the audio version of this book. I think the narrator did a fantastic job with this story (again!). I have limited experience with audio books, though, so I'm not sure how much weight my opinion carries on the matter, but there it is :)

Craig says

I won this book in a Goodreads giveaway. I wanted to like it... obviously I thought I'd like it or I wouldn't have entered the contest... but it just never clicked for me. I kept reading fifty pages or so and then putting it down for something else. The setting was interesting-- a dystopian civilization with the upper class floating about on steampunk-flavored, Bepin-like flying cities while the poor masses are stuck on the ground in a world taken over by Stephen King-ish mutant corn-- but the characters didn't grab me. The book was full of unpleasant people doing unpleasant things to one another, having unhappy sex, going off on ill-fated journeys, scheming and failing in poorly planned adventures, etc. I've read several good reviews of the book by people I respect, so the fault here is probably with me.

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

4 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <http://bibliosanctum.com/2014/08/02/y...>

I make it no secret that I've been in a bit of a YA slump lately. This year saw a few of my favorite YA series finishing their runs and I've been flitting around checking out more books to fill the void, and it's been difficult finding anything that clicked with me. This has led to discouragement and no small amount of burnout, so I'm really glad for books like Joe Abercrombie's *Half a King* and now Chuck Wendig's *Blightborn* to come along and snap me out of my funk.

If you've read the first book of *The Heartland Trilogy*, you'll know what I'm talking about. *Under the Empyrean Sky* was a real shaker-upper for me, making itself stand out from a lot of Young Adult dystopians novels by being surprisingly candid and authentic. *The Heartland* is a rough place that breeds rough folk, a place where killer corn, deadly Blights and piss-blizzards are an everyday reality. After several YA sequels

have disappointed me earlier in the year for having plots that are unimaginative and contrived, Wendig's refusal to sugarcoat or hold anything back is exactly what I needed. Blightborn was interesting and unpredictable, much like life in the Heartland.

The book picks up where the first one left off, with Cael, Rigo and Lane on the run, looking to find a way skyward to the Emyrean flotilla. Right on their heels are Boyland Barnes Jr., Rigo's father, and Wanda, who all have their reasons to pursue the three friends. Boyland wants revenge, after believing Cael killed his father. Rigo's father just wants his son back. And Wanda hopes to be reunited with Cael, her "Obligated". However, Cael's heart already belongs to Gwennie, who is living the life of a Lottery winner on the floating city of Ormond Stirling Saranyu and is realizing it's not all it's cracked up to be.

As you can see, interwoven between the various plot threads are these intricate relationships between the characters which add a lot to the story, so I highly recommend grabbing the Under the Emyrean Sky before reading Blightborn to fully experience all the underlying nuances. Wendig continues to explore and develop these relationships, especially when it comes to the dynamics between Cael, Lane and Rigo. As their fight for survival intensifies, the three friends learn to trust each other. Over a number of intense and sometimes touching scenes, they discover new things and gain a deeper understanding of each other and themselves in the process.

Romance also isn't a central focus of this series, but love and devotion certainly plays a part. It's the motivation behind so much of what the characters do, after all, with Cael and Boyland both going after Gwennie, Wanda after Cael, etc. Usually, I have very little patience with stuff like love triangles – or God forbid, love squares – but I've come to appreciate the complicated emotions flying between all these characters and the fact that they never remain static. Cael and his friends do a lot of growing up, and with growth also comes a more mature way of looking at the world and others. Cael, for example, is much less self-absorbed in this book, learning to put himself in his friends' shoes, and sometimes even in his enemy's. While he and Boyland have always been at odds, Cael can still admit to himself that what the other boy feels for Gwennie could be genuine and respect that, which is a huge step for him as a character in my eyes.

Another thing I loved about this book is the expansion of the readers' world into the skies. We'd heard over and over about the corruption and decadence of the Emyrean in the first book, and now we finally get to catch a glimpse of how the elite live. It was important to see the huge disparity between life on the flotilla and life down in the Heartland as it builds the story up quite a bit, setting up the stage for new players like the Sleeping Dogs rebels, who do their share of stirring things up both in the skies and on the ground. No dystopian novel is complete without an uprising, and the pressure that has been around since the first book finally boils over in Blightborn, culminating in a stunning climax, but not before Wendig takes us on a crazy wild ride to get to that point.

I highly recommend this series, especially if you're a fan of Chuck Wendig. I've always loved his writing style and characters, and that hasn't changed even with his venture into YA dystopian. Books like this one keep me excited about the genre!

Steven says

Blightborn by Chuck Wendig

Published 2014, Skyscape

Stars: ★★★★★?

Review also posted at: Slapdash & Sundry

Thanks, Netgalley, for giving me this great Chuck book in exchange for an unbiased review... though it's hard to be unbiased when Chuck is so awesome!!!

Seriously, this one kicked it up a notch... actually, way past a notch. Our heroes and heroines got deeper into trouble, a few new characters were introduced, and some allegiances changed back and forth a few times.

This series is proving to be further and further from being what I thought it would be, based off my pre-judgments and the cover (strictly sci-fi, if you were wondering), and is turning out to be a handful of genres deftly joined into a fantastic world.

Book three is next up (okay, at the time of this, I'm a quarter of the way into book three already). Let's see if the end of the trilogy is as explosive as the end of book two.
