



## A Midsummer Tempest

*Poul Anderson*

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"What if Shakespeare were a historian & his world a mortal one of men & elves? Somewhere, spinning thru another universe is a history almost like ours except for the result of a revolution or two & the earlier incidence of a few inventions. A prince called Hamlet has lived in Denmark. The English woods are full of Pucks, Titianias & Oberons. Cromwell is at the throat of King Charles, but locomotives rage thru the verdant countryside & observation balloons tower over battle lines."

## A Midsummer Tempest Details

Date : Published September 12th 1978 by Random House Publishing Group (first published 1974)

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Author : Poul Anderson

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## From Reader Review A Midsummer Tempest for online ebook

### Mike says

An early take on the alternative history genre, with a very specific conceit.

The starting premise is that Shakespeare was a great historian rather than a playwright and that the content of all the plays he wrote really happened. Some of the impacts of this are readily apparent. There really are faeries in the forests of England. Some less so. Loyalist armies travel by train to battle Cromwell?

Unfortunately our main characters are thrust into this world and follow fairly standard variant of the heroes journey, searching for the macguffin that will solve all their woes. Shakespeare tropes appear from time to time; cross dressing as disguise, wrongful accusation, love at first sight. But high Shakespeare it is not.

Nevertheless are serviceable read.

As the saying goes, all's well that ends well.

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### Nikki says

The idea of A Midsummer Tempest is intriguing: a world in which Shakespeare was not a storyteller, the Bard, but wrote about reality: the Historian. Oberon and Tatiana really existed, Prospero really broke a staff and hid a book in the deeps... The story is set in the time of Cromwell, though, and Oberon and Tatiana are minor though essential characters. The main characters are Prince Rupert and a young Puritan woman, Jennifer, who come together when Rupert is captured, along with Will, who serves under Rupert and later becomes close to him.

The idea is fascinating, and the implementation did keep me turning pages, but two things annoyed me. One was that I was for the most part more interested in the part kept on the fringes of the tale -- Shakespeare's characters -- and the other that Poul Anderson continues his obsession with rendering dialect, to the point where it's nigh on unreadable, and certainly isn't pleasant to read.

I liked the little pop-in part played by Holger, because I loved Three Hearts and Three Lions, but it seemed a little gratuitous.

Overall, it did turn out to be interesting -- and inspired me to want to know more about the setting and the real Prince Rupert -- but not as much of a pageturner as the others I've already read.

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### D.J. Sylvis says

An intriguing story -- set in an alternate universe where all of Shakespeare's plays were word-for-word history, not fiction -- but dammit, when you start with that assumption I want to see more of the characters he created than a brief glimpse of Oberon, Titania & Puck at the beginning, then a scene or two on Prospero's island at the end.

The alternate history was well thought-out, and at times the plot held some thrills, but at the same time it was

utterly predictable 90% of the time, and there were a few hints of sexism that were unnecessary even in a historical context.

I don't know if I'd recommend it, but I probably won't get rid of it, either -- it might be worth another read in the future.

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### **Josh Karaczewski says**

A great premise (imagine an England where Shakespeare was a Historian, chronicling true people and events) and sumptuous language are mostly wasted in a poorly paced, dull plot; and much like most of Shakespeare, the supporting characters, especially the splendid Will Fairweather, outshine the predictable and repetitive main characters.

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### **Baron Greystone says**

Fun, but a little slow in parts. I would've liked even more of a Shakespearean vibe, although Poul made the attempt. It just lost that in several long passages. Also the ending of the story was a little weak. But while there is certainly a link to *The Tempest*, I see no link to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. (Other than a few lovers, which most Shakespeare, and most fiction for that matter, includes.)

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### **Lyn says**

*A Midsummer Tempest* by Poul Anderson is a fantasy / sci fi novel that has a structure not unlike a play, with scenes introduced before each. This is Heinlein's *Glory Road* multiverse ideal coupled with Anderson's own ideas of future / alternate history and structured and shaped as an homage to Shakespeare.

There are some fun cameos by characters from his novels *Three Hearts and Three Lions* and *Operation Chaos* and also the themes set out in his *Guardians of Time / Time Patrol* books; and also a brief reference to a Heinlein character if one is quick enough to catch it. Shakespearean characters also populate the narrative and provide the unusual setting. Reading this also makes me think about Heinlein's *The Number of the Beast*.

I have stated before and must again muse, why Poul Anderson is not more read by this generation? His imagination and story-telling ability is unmatched by all but the very best of contemporary authors. Maybe a good film based on his works would spark an interest.

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### **Louisa says**

A novel about an alternative 1600s that is in the middle of industrialisation, and the English Civil War sees the use of steam trains, etc. Still, there is magic along the edges as *Our Brave Prince* flees defeat and meets *A Delectable Beauty*.

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The title is a blend of "A Midsummer's Night's Dream" and "The Tempest", and Shakespeare is a historian rather than a dramatist in this alternative world. There is a long chapter in the middle that (to me) seemed very out of place and pointless, where Anderson dragged in characters from his own "Three Hearts and Three Lions" and "Operation Chaos" books. Turns out that was Anderson's tribute to Fritz Leiber's Change War series, but I would never have guessed that if I hadn't seen it stated outright in another book.

The book is also dragged down by Our Brave Hero having a sidekick who continuously rants on in Anderson's take on Cornish dialect or something, which makes parts tedious to read.

The dragoon chuckled. "Zo now you can heat tha shot at pleasure, my loard — theirs, I mean, for thoase ball-pates 'ull glow red from tha breath o' Hot Rupert, tha Dragon Prince, as I hear their scribblers ha' named ye in their landlubbers' broadzides.

The soldier shrugged. "Tha guns talk moare an' louder, my loard. How they do argue, an' what a harsh logic they chop! I dwould I could zay, instead, they're ballin' each other; but no, that'd bring forth pieces on earth 'gainst men like good Will, an' mesim we been a-pistoled enough." He un-slung a leather bottle from his belt and reached it over. "If you do want dwarmth, your Highness, heare, stoke yourzelf from a Puritan houseoald where lately zome of us made requisition. Fear not, 'tis indeed a hellfiere preachment, but zafely decanted; for we'd hard ridin' ahead of us, an' thought that whilst tha spirits war for swillin', tha flasks war weak."

And so it goes, all through the book.

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## Josephine says

What if someone wrote a book in which all Shakespeare wrote was historical fact...and then concentrated *on Shakespeare's characters*? Not that *A Midsummer Tempest* was entirely bad, mind, but it's more an alternate history, in which fairies are real, than a study of what the world might be like if Shakespeare's plays were truth.

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## Thannasset says

**A fine romp through alternate history, some favorite Shakespeare, and alternate history across several fictons/continua, whatever. Read and enjoy, ye English speakers and lovers of Shakespeare!**

Go for it! You're in for a treat! Fine work by a writer who spanned a lot of years in his career.

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### **Ron says**

Premise: what if Shakespeare's play--all of them--were history, not drama?

Great fun.

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### **Mary Catelli says**

A clock chimes in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, which is impossible, since clocks that chimed were a medieval invention, but Poul Anderson took it and ran with it. This book takes place during the English Civil War and the Industrial Revolution. Both.

Prince Rupert is captured. One soldier in his force, Will Fairweather, keeps after him, and his captor's niece, Jennifer, helps him escape -- to meet Oberon and Titania, who offer him and Jennifer magical rings powered by their love. Alas, Jennifer is caught sneaking back, and her uncle and his forces chase after Rupert and Will, and Jennifer is forced to reveal all by sleep deprivation. Her uncle sends men to chase him, making use of the magic of the ring.

Meanwhile Rupert stumbles on the Old Phoenix, where he meets someone from another world who tells him how the English Civil War went. With that inspiration, he decides to follow Oberon's advice and find those magical books that Prospero drowned. . . .

The chase is on, and through magic and adventure, Rupert and Jennifer wind through Europe and back again to England.

People who like steampunk may find it especially intriguing, since it has anachronistic steam technology, albeit in the early stages.

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### **Deedee says**

What if Shakespeare's plays were History not entertainment? Anderson combines the whimsical elements of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "The Tempest" with the romantic real-life commander Prince Rupert of the Rhine (leader of the Cavaliers during the English Civil War in the 1640's). It is hard to combine reality and whimsical fantasy; many fantasy writers have tried and failed. Anderson tried and succeeded. I can understand why it won the awards it did.

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## Bill says

An alternate universe in which every word written by William Shakespeare was the literal, historical truth: clocks that chimed the hour in Julius Caesar's Rome, cannons in tenth century Denmark -- naturally they're more advanced than us technologically!

Poul Anderson picks up this premise and runs with it. Watch for the rhyming couplets, and wait for the climax -- it's one you won't soon forget!

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## Sean says

Set in a world where Shakespeare was not a playwright but "the great historian" and every word he wrote was true, complete with clocks in ancient Rome and so on. So, the technologies are slightly more advanced, railroads are beginning to crisscross England aiding the Parliamentary cause and Prince Rupert finds the possibility of aid from unlikely allies. An interesting read making good use of Anderson's knowledge of history and Shakespeare.

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## Manny says

### Prologue

*A paperback novel. The early 70s.*

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Pray tell me sir, about this little book?  
The author's name methinks I recognize  
It must be fantasy or SF tale?

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Nay coz! It is a fine Shakespearian romp  
A world where every play he wrote was true!  
And all prate on in just such wise as I  
Do now, in imitation of the Bard...

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Foresooth! But gets it not a little stale?  
I fear the joke could well go on too long?

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Ifaith! Th'art harsh! I know not what to say!  
Though thou mayst not, I liked it anyway.  
If Shakespeare parody should be thy thing

Then Poul's a prince, though true, he is no king

*[continued for 200 pages]*

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### **William Powell says**

Don't look for anything too deep, here. This is just Poul Anderson playing with ideas and spinning a delightful yarn.

It's one I come back to and read again from time to time, and I read it with a smile on my face.

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### **Samuel Lubell says**

This is a very poetic book about an alternate universe in which Shakespeare was the Great Historian and all his plays were true. The action takes place in an alternate 1644 during the English Civil War, except that Prince Rupert escapes his captives via steam train and gets help from the fairies Oberon and Titania who send him to Prospero's Island to get magic that can enable the Royals to beat the forces of Cromwell. A true fantasy classic from the 1970s.

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### **Tony Calder says**

Some websites list this book as the second book in the Holger Danske (main character in Three Hearts and Three Lions) series, however, as he appears only in one short chapter in the middle of the book, it is perhaps a bit of a stretch.

This book is similar in that it deals with an Earth history in which the Faerie Realm is real. In this case the story is set during the English Civil War and premises that Shakespeare's plays were recounting of actual happenings. The main character is the historical figure Prince Rupert of the Rhine.

I enjoyed this story, although not as much as Three Hearts and Three Lions, but Anderson's decision to put the majority of the speech in 17th-century English does make it a little more challenging to read.

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### **Morgan Alreth says**

Anderson likes to make new worlds and then go ambling through them, poking at things. In this case he's poking two things at once. Once, what if everything the Bard had written was true? Two, what effect would that have had on the English civil war?

This is a 'frame' story, which begins in the standard magic tavern at the nexus of universes. We are introduced to Valeria, the daughter of Steve and Virginia Matuchek who starred in Operation Chaos and Operation Luna. In this book Valeria is merely window dressing though, more's the pity. The story is told, in

the tavern, about this strange world...

We get dumped into Merry Olde England, complete with Puck, and muck, and flintlocks. It's supposed to be a grand adventure about a sweeping change in the course of history. But the peasants steal the show as far as I'm concerned. Of course, since my family are all peasants I'm prejudiced. The Groom ends up being critical to the success of the 'Grand Plan' and saves the day (yay).

Anyway, I had a lot of fun with this one. If you take it as an amusing way to play around with what-if games, and if you are the kind of person who has a sense of humor, you can't help but enjoy it. If you are the kind of person who reveres Shakespeare as a god, and thinks laughing at the heroes of history is sacrilege, I recommend Jane Eyre instead.

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### **Margaret says**

Here's a fantastical Shakespearean romp, in a universe where what the Bard wrote was literally true. In the early 17th century, Prince Rupert fights for King Charles against the Puritans; when he's captured, he is unexpectedly aided by his captor's niece and, more unexpectedly, by the fairy monarchs Oberon and Titania, who direct him to Prospero's island. Anderson's language is wonderful, and if you read closely, there are poetic surprises in the narrative and in the dialogue. This is a very enjoyable romp with engaging characters and lovely writing - I liked it very much.

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