

Jim Butcher

by Georgine Olson; updated by Lynne Welch

Genre

Urban Fantasy
Fantasy
Hardboiled Fiction
Coming of Age Stories

Why readers like this author

When Jim Butcher introduced wizard Harry Dresden as the protagonist of his urban fantasy novel *Storm Front: A Novel of the Dresden Files*, he was bucking several trends. At the time (2000), most of these tales featured a lively female narrator, full of sass as she confronted an unending series of thrilling adventures. Harry, by contrast, was a licensed private investigator, unequivocally male and with a dry and matter-of-fact narrative voice reminiscent of the classic hardboiled detectives exemplified by Sam Spade. Butcher's choice of setting was another deliberate step away from the conventions governing most of these stories: Harry lives and works in the Midwest, while most of his earlier counterparts live on either the East or the West Coast. In addition, Butcher incorporates deities from a wide variety of mythologies across the globe into his tales, rather than restricting himself to the traditional vampires, witches and werewolves so prevalent in many other urban fantasy series.

Harry is young, talented, and unconventional. His business is struggling, and he moonlights as a Chicago Police Department consultant for "unusual crimes," those suspected to have been committed with the aid of magic. But he's also a romantic idealist always ready to champion the underdog. His precarious status and continued existence are further threatened by repercussions from the past. In Harry's world, magic is the enemy of technology, which means that frequently he is cut off from easy solutions. Instead, Harry generally winds up doing everything the hard way, and makes things even worse for himself by his general anti-authority attitude and rampant wisecracking. Every tale offers Harry a new and different problem, threatening those he holds dear and forcing him to stretch both magically and personally in order to prevail. Stories are rapidly paced, and each occurs shortly after its predecessor, affording Harry and his allies only minimal time to recover from one adventure before plunging into the next. One of his allies is the equally smart-mouthed spirit "Bob the Skull," who functions as a sort of personal, talking Wikipedia and also as Harry's confidant/advisor.

While continuing to develop the Dresden Files, Butcher also launched a graphic novel version of some titles and additional spin-offs to the series available only in that format. In addition,

the Codex Alera traditional coming-of-age fantasy series Butcher introduced in 2004 is now complete at six volumes. Set in a fictional world loosely based on Ancient Rome, *Furies of Calderon* and its sequels explores what could happen when the fate of a magical world in crisis depends on a young man with no magic raised in a shepherd's croft. Like Harry, Tavi of Calderon is young, reckless and threatened by events around him; unlike Harry, Tavi must rely on his own wits and the loyalty of others who can command magic, to prevail over the enemies they encounter. Military encounters, a touch of romance, and high-stakes adventure combine to make this series a page-turner.

Readers who enjoy or would like an introduction to the urban fantasy genre should start reading the Dresden Files at the beginning, with *Storm Front*. Those preferring traditional epic fantasy are well-advised to start with *Furies of Calderon*, first in the Codex Alera.

Read-alikes

Like Harry, Ravirn, of the series bearing his name, is in his mid-twenties, prone to wisecracking at inopportune moments, and a fierce champion of the underdog. Unlike Harry, whose magic regularly fries whatever technology is in his vicinity, Ravirn uses magic to write code and hack the computer systems of the Greek gods on Mount Olympus, who use computers to keep track of everyone's life threads. When he discovers a plot to destroy free will, he, like Harry, becomes an agent for change in his world. Where Harry has Bob, Ravirn relies on Melchior, a webgoblin who transforms into a laptop and, like Harry's Bob, is sarcastic and always ready to offer his opinion, whether or not it is asked for. Kelly McCullough's five-volume urban fantasy series beginning with **WebMage** is initially set in Minnesota, and the Midwestern perspective is another point of similarity for readers who enjoy the Midwestern setting of the Dresden Files.

Libriomancer introduces Isaac Vainio, another mid-twenties young man barely eking out a living, whose previous use of magic has resulted in his present difficulties. In Jim Hines' Magic Ex Libris series, Isaac, a former member of the Porters who police the werewolves, vampires, and other supernatural characters inhabiting this version of our world, is now forbidden to use his magic and works in a small Upper Peninsula (Michigan) public library, cataloging all sorts of books with magical possibilities. Like Harry, Isaac is prone to shoot off his mouth and thereby worsen whatever trouble he is currently in -- and trouble seeks him out on a regular basis. His allies help where they can, but Isaac, like Harry, has unrealized potential that each new adventure reveals, often to the discomfort of authority, and like Harry, he grows from outlaw to essential member of the governing council for users of magic, with increased responsibility and risk but no appreciable rewards.

Kevin Hearne's Atticus O'Sullivan, by contrast to Butcher's Harry Dresden, is not young, but he looks and acts it. Heedless of consequences until they affect him personally, this 2100-year-old Druid tumbles into and out of trouble on a regular basis, and he involves his friends and loyal Irish wolfhound Oberon as well. Hearne's Iron Druid urban fantasy series begins with **Hounded** in Tempe (Arizona), where Atticus owns and operates an occult bookstore and herbal apothecary. Atticus narrates with collegiate fratboy flippancy where Harry is darkly sardonic, but both series introduce

an international cast of mythological characters, both protagonists are repeatedly drawn into risky adventures by the need to succor the innocent and oppressed, and both men build unlikely alliances for their continued struggles. Hearne's books are a good choice for readers interested in male urban fantasy protagonists similar to Harry.

Mark Del Franco's Connor Grey is a druid investigator who lost his powers during the course of a previous case. Like Harry, he lives in a big city (Boston) and makes a living by helping its police solve crimes of supernatural origin. Connor is also like Harry in being targeted by powerful enemies from his past; his sardonic way of expressing himself; and the fast-paced, high-stakes hardboiled-private-eye-meets-police-procedural tales. As with most of these series, beginning with the first title, ***Unshapely Things***, allows the reader to meet the characters and enjoy watching them change, grow, and develop new relationships and priorities.

Readers who enjoy Tavi's coming-of-age adventures in the Codex Alera traditional fantasies may wish to seek out Mercedes Lackey's Dragon Jousters series beginning with ***Joust***. Vetch is an orphaned young Altan serf working on a Tian farm (the Altans' hereditary enemies) when he is selected to become a dragon boy. His new duties allow him to hatch and imprint a dragon of his own, and he escapes captivity to become a leader of his own group of dragonriders, eventually leading them in war against the Tians. Both Tavi's and Vetch's worlds are magical variants of Earth's ancient civilizations and gods – in Vetch's case, Egypt – and the magic in each is specific to the user: one may control the weather, or fire, or healing, etc. Fans of Tavi who enjoy the Dragon Jousters books may also want to read some of Lackey's other series.

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