



Murder is their business...  
and business is good.

# BRONZE GODS

AN APPARATUS INFERNUM NOVEL

FIRST IN A NEW SERIES

A. A. AGUIRRE

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## BURNED

Spread-eagled, she lay atop a reflective sheet of metal. All around, an elaborate arrangement of mirrors and lenses had concentrated the sun's rays on her. With a small sigh, Mikani knelt next to the body and ran his hands over her, not quite touching.

*There is no anger, here.*

*Strange.* Mikani smelled the girl's fear, feeling her agony in phantom shivers and pain. Terror, shards of

emotional memories screamed  
against the very stone. But of the  
killer . . . the mirrors and lenses  
were clear. Empty, as if they'd  
known no human touch.

*And yet, there is purpose . . .*

He saw her struggle, as  
aftershocks of terror rather than  
visual images: the taste of blood  
from a bitten tongue, the pain of  
constraints against wrists and  
ankles, harsh stone against the girl's  
back, and the sickening scent of the  
charnel house her body became.

*That would be so much simpler—  
to see, rather than feel.* Shivering,  
he turned away. Already, his head

pounded in protest, and from a  
detached place in his mind, he knew  
that when he came down, he'd pay  
dearly.

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**A. A. Aguirre**



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*For our beloved children, who put  
up with us while we wrote this*

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## Acknowledgments

First, Andres and I would like to thank each other. When I asked him who he wanted to mention in the acknowledgments, he said, “*You*, woman. I love you.” Obviously, I feel the same. I’m glad I could help make his dreams come true, as he’s been doing that for me for years. Other married couples have said they didn’t think their marriage could survive a similar

collaboration. Ours did, and, if anything, it's stronger. We created this together; it's forever, and *Bronze Gods* came out beautiful in the end.

Along the way, a number of people contributed to polishing this diamond. See, we wrote the first draft ten years ago, and since then, this book has changed faces more than *Mystique*; it's been rewritten more than eight times, and when we were on deadline, we penned two-thirds new material to make it live up to Anne Sowards's high standards. So that's where we'll begin.

Anne loved the world and the characters, but the plot was problematic, and she made us perform. We feared revisions might defeat us, but ultimately we got the job done, and we're so proud of this book. So thanks to her for being a demanding taskmaster. *Bronze Gods* is infinitely better for her input.

I suppose now it's time for the usual suspects. Thanks to our friends and family for understanding why we had no time while we were working on this. Thanks to the Loop That Shall Not Be Named for being there when my sanity was

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didn't kill us. Much love to Laura  
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agent, and who doesn't know it but  
will soon be asked to sell our epic  
sea monster story. (Not really.)

Heartfelt thanks, finally, to all

readers who take a chance on this  
book. And us.

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Turning and turning in the  
widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the  
falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre  
cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon  
the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is  
loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence  
is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction,  
while the worst  
Are full of passionate

intensity.

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—W. B. YEATS



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# PROLOGUE



LONG AGO, TEN PRINCES LIVED  
ACROSS THE WATERS AND through the  
mists in a land called Hy Breasil.  
They governed the wild, fey folk  
who dwelled in that place, where  
every rock, tree, blade of grass,  
ripple of water, and whisper of the  
wind contained powerful magic.  
The Ferishers were terrible and

immortal, but they were few. Yet  
even in those small numbers, they  
divided amongst themselves into  
two Courts.

---

• • •

THE SUMMER COURT embraced all  
those bright and beautiful while  
Winter plotted against them in  
briars and darkness. Into their  
eternal struggle came the  
barbarians: the bearded folk from  
another world—a sweeping,  
enormous one—outside the safe

confines of Hy Breasil. In that land,  
ships went missing from time to  
time, their cargoes and crews  
simply vanished, no wreckage  
found. And so the conquerors came  
to Ferisher lands with their  
relentless drive, cold iron, and  
incomprehensible ways. With them,  
they brought mortal bloodlines.

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• • •

AFTER THE LONG and bitter Iron War,  
both sides hovered at the brink of  
annihilation. The bearded ones bred

quickly; they had numbers while the  
Ferishers had magic. Auberon, the  
most powerful of the princes, chose  
the loveliest of the human flotsam to  
keep the peace. His siblings  
followed suit. Those treaty-born  
marriages created a lasting peace  
and a new people. Thus the first ten  
great Houses were founded, though  
some failed to withstand the test of  
time.

• • •

THAT COURSE CREATED a schism in

the Ferishers. Some felt it was better to fade and leave the physical world than to defile pure bloodlines. The two Courts fell into disarray, and eventually, eons later, only a handful could claim more than a flicker of fey blood. Hy Breasil changed forever, and the centuries marched on.

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• • •

ONLY THE WIND knows what happens next . . .



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