



## Speculative Fiction Book Review

Book Title	<b>Idols Fall: Iconoclasts 3</b>
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Stars	

The thing is with trilogies, there is enormous pressure on the author to deliver a concluding story which exceeds the threat levels, the thrills and spills, that ratchets up the tension of the previous books. When you are Mike Shel and you've written *Aching God* and topped it with *Sin Eater*, that pressure must have been on a scale that can crush diamonds.

The thing is, he succeeds. There's that old cliché about exciting books being a 'roller coaster ride', isn't there? 'Idols Fall' would be the scariest ride ever and would probably fall foul of every health and safety regulation.

Quick plot summary: *Agnes Manteo now bears her father's sentient Djao sword, along with a terrible revelation—the gods are charlatans, ancient sorcerers who draw their strength from the suffering of humanity. She and her Syraeic companions have but one duty: to track down those pretenders and end their reign of cruelty and lies, no matter the cost. To that end, the magical blade—mighty, single-minded Szaa'da'shaela—won't allow any wavering of their commitment.*

*But the empire is in turmoil with the sudden passing of its undying queen. Noble houses clash and threaten civil war, murderous barbarians mass on the frontier in preparation for a bloody invasion, and all feel the aching void left by the clergy, whose temples were devastated by a great fire. Can the kingdom survive should Agnes succeed in tearing away its very foundations?*

So what makes it so good? I've spent almost 24 hours trying to decide if it's the characterisations which stand out or the world building. Then it struck me, they have to be equally as powerful, one complements the other. Let me illustrate this point. Sira Edjani in the first two novels is a priest of Belu, the Healer god. Her loss of faith at the end of *Sin Eater* reflects the macro level of disillusionment which starts to permeate society. The world building is so complex and detailed the story explores what it means to lose faith, in almost everything you have ever believed. Sira has been a favourite character of mine from the outset, a woman of enormous courage and yet possessed of equally high levels of sensitivity and empathy. Watching her torment is as bad as seeing some of the awful things that happen to others (such as Colin Mastro, yikes!). But to return to the world building, you need to have established layers and layers of political, socio-economic, cultural and religious credibility to allow you to explore what happens when one thread pulls loose and the world dissolves into chaos. That is what happens in *Idols Fall*, it is epic writing handled with masterful skill.

I cannot recommend *Idols Fall* enough. It is speculative fiction to be savoured by people who appreciate amazing storytelling and exemplary writing.