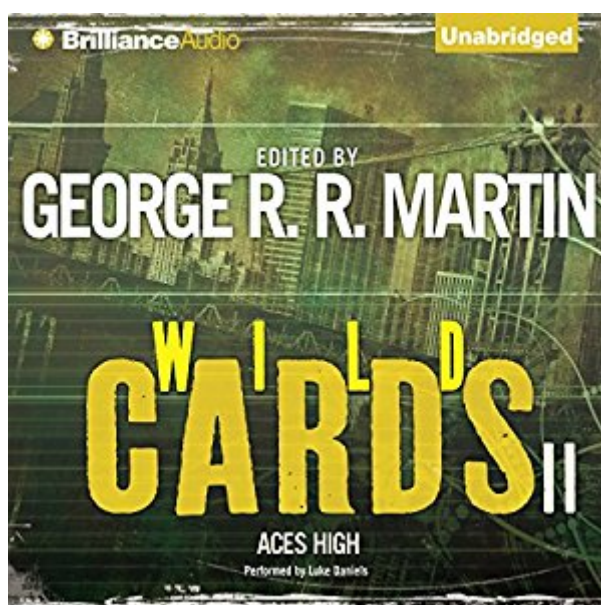


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# Wild Cards II: Aces High



## Synopsis

After the alien virus struck humanity in the wake of World War II, a handful of the survivors found they possessed superhuman powers. The Wild Cards shared-world volumes tell their story. Here in book two, we trace these heroes and villains through the tumultuous 1980s, in stories from SF and fantasy giants such as George R. R. Martin, Roger Zelazny, Pat Cadigan, Lewis Shiner, Walter Jon Williams, and others.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Note that there are 10 reviews for the prior printing of this book if you want to look at them. The main difference between this book and book 1 is that there is a unifying plot here -- bad monster from space, and evil cult type helpers on earth. If measured against the standards for a good plot in traditional books, it, let's be honest, falls pretty short. That said, the point of the series is the creativity and fun of the individual stories of the aces and jokers, and on that level this book succeeds even better than book 1. You get more Croyd (always fun), more Turtle, more Mark Meadows, who may or may not be the ace known as Radical, but displays new and fun "abilities" here, more Tachyon, the introduction of Jube as a main -- and very entertaining -- character, and the introduction to Modular Man, another great ace. Fortunato, who I don't really care for, is also here big time, as is the non-ace archer out for vengeance. I wish the plot was better, and the villains had more meat to them. But everything that made first book entertaining is here, plus a unifying plot which, while not great, definitely adds a little something over book 1. If you liked book 1, no reason to

hesitate.

For those who haven't read the first book in this series, *Wild Cards I*, it is a large composition of cooperative storytelling that involves the events and consequences surrounding an outbreak of superpowers. It is at turns complex, meaningful, intriguing and suspenseful - and as a concession to its medium of inspiration - a little bit cheesy. Great fun. This book is a change of pace, and it set a pattern that many of the contributing authors would use for the series. (Kindle availability is spotty, so this may yet not be a big deal to you.) Instead of more than a dozen stories with their own beginnings and ends, *Wild Cards II* engages in fewer stories, all of which follow the same global event. The reading is just as enjoyable, but markedly different. Here's where I'll start dodging spoilers. The event itself involves a threat from deep space that has some reminiscent ties to Lovecraftian horror. I feel it ties in to four-color comic book horror, which is to say there needn't be advanced motivations or sympathetic villains. The bad guys in this book are definitely bad guys. The good guys are incidental, though, and they maintain their heart-wrenching weaknesses from the first book. Turtle, Fortunato, Peregrine, Chrysalis, and Jube have all emerged from *Wild Cards 1* with more than a couple scars and here we see the cracks showing. Dr. Tachyon is back as well, but as opposed to his arc in *Wild Cards 1*, he's better composed and wanting to fight the good fight. *Wild Cards* has some popular legacy of being "realistic" but that term always bothers me in comics, sci-fi and fantasy. Realism isn't what we're here for, and it's highly subjective, so I'll try and put it another way: *Wild Cards* is about complex, vice-stricken characters whose weaknesses are sometimes physical and always emotional. They're strange, damaged goods, all wanting to fit into a world that doesn't want to accommodate them. You won't see spandex-clad poster children with paragon virtues. You'll see addicts, emotional burn-outs, grief-stricken has-beens, misguided egotists, and preening divas. If you like the iconoclastic rejection of *Four-Color Simple Times*, you'll like this. If you're up for more of a campy, easy-going and broad story, you should consider other things.

*Aces High*, book two in the *Wild card* series, has more of a central plotline. Whereas book one was mostly world building and introducing some main characters, book two pits those characters in a classic good vs. evil battle. The story features visits from two different alien species, with different ramifications for each. The world comes together to face one threat, and yet the social structure becomes even more segregated between Aces (those infected by the Wild Card virus who are granted powers that allow them to maintain a sense of normalcy), Jokers (those infected by the virus who are either deformed or granted powers with deformity) and Nats (uninfected

humans). Book one took place over the space of about 40 years as it traced the Wild Card virus back to its origin and brought it up to modern times (the mid-eighties, at time of publication). Book two now is entrenched firmly in the modern era, with second- and third-generation wild cards popping up as new characters, while some older ones are still around. Since most of the characters were established in book one, the second book turns them loose onto a single cohesive storyline. Though the book is written by many different authors, the effort to weave them together into a single tapestry is evident, especially how one character's presence or behaviors trickle into a subsequent chapter. It's very well done in that regard. There is a definite climactic ending to the book; it's nice to have everything wrapped up. But there are still plotlines left dangling, which are left out there to be explored at another time - most likely in the third volume, *Jokers Wild*.

I have found this series a tough one to like. Too many characters, too many jumps in focus, too much attention to faithful following of a real historical timeline (dampens the story instead of enhancing it). I will probably read the next book, but it will be a while before I do. It doesn't give me the satisfaction of finishing the story that other books of this genre do.

Back when the wildcards series started, I had collected many of the paperbacks. This book is more of an extension of those stories written by people and edited by George RR Martin. The anthologies are very exciting and fun to read. Brought me back to my childhood.

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