

Book Review: August 2006

by Kathi Isserman (reviewer at [JAW & L-word.com Literature](#))



Tristaine: Book One The Clinic

Cate Culpepper
ISBN: 1-933110-42-2
Trade paper, 192 pp, \$15.95
May, 2006
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Nann Dunne
*Editor-in-Chief
& Publisher*

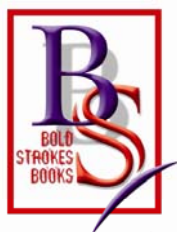
I read Cate Culpepper's first edition of *The Clinic* and loved it. I did not think it could get any better. But this smartly edited and tightly written second edition takes hold of the reader immediately. It is engaging and thought provoking, and we are left pondering its lessons long after we read the last pages.

On the surface, *The Clinic* is a story about a military research facility where Jessin, an Amazon of Tristaine, is being held for bogus crimes. Brenna, a healer, is tasked by Caster, her superior, to break Jess' spirit and make her compliant. Caster's intent is to force a peaceful annexation and assimilation of Tristaine because Caster and her people believe the Amazons, who are lesbians, are deviants and savages. Brenna goes along with Caster to keep her job, and inflicts physical pain and humiliation on Jess, thus going against everything she has been taught. When the "treatments" begin to turn brutal, Brenna starts to question Caster's authority. She also is feeling more than compassion for Jess. This is when *The Clinic* really gets interesting.

Culpepper creates a compelling set of characters in Brenna and Jess. Brenna is reluctant to give up her comfortable lifestyle, and she uses alcohol to dull what she really feels as she continues to inflict more violence on her prisoner. Jess, through her unselfish sacrifices to help Brenna save her job, enables Brenna to see that she is free to make choices of her own. Brenna's transformation consumes most of the book and is executed realistically and thoughtfully. Caster's stubbornness and heartlessness is juxtaposed beautifully alongside Brenna's growth, letting the reader feel the intensity of this novel.

While there is a romance between Brenna and Jess, it is an added bonus, blending smoothly with the overall plot. Culpepper is an exceptional storyteller who has taken on a very difficult subject, the subjugation of one people by another, and turned it into a spellbinding novel. As an author, she understands well that fiction can teach us our own history without the force and harshness of nonfiction. Yet *The Clinic* is just as powerful in its telling.

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Book Review: December 2006

by Lori L. Lake (author of *Have Gun We'll Travel* & reviewer at [MBR](#))



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Cate Culpepper

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Editor-in-Chief

When Brenna begins work as a medic at a clinic where political prisoners are held and interrogated, she's not supposed to feel anything for the miscreants she doctors. Despite cultural and political expectations, however, Brenna can't help but feel for her patients. In particular, one named Jess piques her curiosity, and Brenna can't resist the gradual slide into involvement, even if it's dangerous and the clinic director, Caster, may find out. In contrast to the repressive world where Brenna now lives, the village of Tristaine that she learns about from Jess sounds like a haven, and as she gets to know Jess, Brenna finds herself longing for things she'd never considered. Will she acquiesce to the powers that be – or take a chance and follow her heart? Even more troubling, will Jess survive the ordeals she is put through? The first of what is so far a three-part series (BATTLE FOR TRISTAINE: Book II, TRISTAINE RISES: Book III), THE CLINIC sets the tone for what promises to be a terrific series. Culpepper's writing style is spare and evocative, her plotting precise. You can't help but feel strongly for the Amazon warrior women and their plight, and this book is a must-read for all those who enjoy light fantasy coupled with a powerful story of survival and adventure. Highly recommended.

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