



## Binary

*Stephanie Saulter*

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## **Binary** Stephanie Saulter

When confiscated genestock is stolen out of secure government quarantine, DI Sharon Varsi finds herself on the biggest case of her career... chasing down a clever thief, a mysterious hacker, and the threat of new, black market gemtech.

Zavcka Klist, ruthless industrial enforcer, has reinvented herself. Now the head of Bel'Natur, she wants gem celebrity Aryel Morningstar's blessing for the company's revival of infotech – the science that spawned the Syndrome, nearly destroyed mankind, and led to the creation of the gems. With illness in her own family that only a gemtech can cure, Aryel's in no position to refuse.

As the infotech programme inches towards a breakthrough, Sharon's investigations lead ever closer to the dark heart of Bel'Natur, the secrets of Aryel Morningstar's past... and what Zavcka Klist is really after.

## **Binary Details**

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Author : Stephanie Saulter

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## From Reader Review Binary for online ebook

### Abhinav says

You can read the full review over at The Founding Fields:

<http://thefoundingfields.com/2014/05/...>

Shadowhawk takes a look at the sequel to Stephanie Saulter's fantastic near-future AI debut from last year.

“When a debut is as awesome as *Gemsigns* was last year, you expect the debut to be even better. *Binary* doesn't quite come across as fantastic as its predecessor, but it is still one of the best SF books I've read to date. Lots more industrial intrigue and politics this time, which are all just fascinating in the extreme.”

~Shadowhawk, The Founding Fields

For me, *Gemsigns* was quite a phenomenal novel that dealt with the ethical and moral implications of accepting genetically modified humans as a part of “normal” society and culture. In the near-future setting that author Stephanie Saulter conjured up, Mankind underwent a serious disease that threatened the very survival of the species, and out of this the GemTechs were born, who created a new species of humans free of any genetic markers conducive to this disease and all whom could serve as a servant class to get Mankind back on its feet. That these “gems” each had different abilities and powers depending on their function in this new bold new society, was just an aftermath of all that. In light of some recent conspiracy reveals and what not, the world government forbids the GemTechs from creating any more gems and to send all their genestock in permanent storage and abandon that line of development altogether. Out of this, we saw in *Gemsigns* who the gems struggled to become a part of the very society that they had formerly served and the positive and negative reactions of the “norms”, who were normal only in that they lacked the abilities of the gems and were all naturally-conceived, albeit minus the genetic markers conducive to the disease mentioned previously.

And that was the thrust of *Gemsigns* and Stephanie Saulter did an unexpectedly superb job of exploring that entire angle. Going into *Binary*, I was expecting something similar, and I wasn't exactly disappointed, though perhaps that is more down to the subject matter than anything. *Binary* continues along the path of the exploration of the ethics and morals of gems and norms integrating, but it also deals much more with the histories of the two main characters, the hero Aryel Morningstar who is the leader of the gems in London, and the villain Zavka Klist who is the owner of the GemTech company Bel'Natur.

Right off the bat, the second part of the novel's purpose is the most fascinating thing on display in this novel. Stephanie builds on these two characters, and she explores how they came to be who they are at this point in time. With Aryel, most of her story is revealed through flashbacks and with Zavka, most of her story unfolds in the present time, with some really shocking twists in the climax of the novel. We see that the pasts of these characters are inherently connected to each other and so are their fates, because they have a much deeper connection to each other than we got to find out in *Gemsigns*. Much of the novel is from their perspective therefore, and I loved every moment of it. I honestly could have continued on for another 100 or pages, seeing these two women interact, but sadly the novel was only so long.

The first part of the novel's purpose, or the overall plot, deals with the segregation of the gems and norms, and this is a much more subtle plot in the novel, though at times it is also quite obvious. First, we have a norm-gem married couple in the novel, Officer Sharon Varsi of the London police and the gem leader Mikal

Varsi. In the novel, we see how Sharon has to face a lot of hostility from her colleagues because of her marriage, and how she manages to rise above that, successfully as it turns out. She is somewhat of a primary character in the novel although much of her time is spent navigating the mystery of a genestock theft that could have some serious repercussions for both gems and norms alike. With Mikal we see how he is elected to be a city councilman, a campaigner for his people and the poster-boy for eliminating the rift between gems and norms. Both these characters I enjoyed and would truly have loved to see more of.

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### **Jacqie says**

I received a copy of this book from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

I finished Stephanie Saulter's first book, *Gemsigns*, for a book club and was pleased to lay my hands on a copy of the sequel so I could start it immediately. Unfortunately, this book was less interesting to me than the first one.

In *Binary*, the main characters have shifted. Aryel and Zavka are still antagonists (read into the title what you will) but Gabriel, Gaela and Bal don't really make an appearance. Instead Mikal and his policewoman wife are focused on, along with a lot of new gem characters with a set of abilities both mysterious and impressive. While none of the characters could figure out what these new gems were created for, I thought it was pretty obvious.

That was a large part of my problem with the book- it moved very slowly. Almost the first third of it was set-up, introducing new character, but not advancing the plot. And all the characters seemed nice enough, but I wasn't really worried about or attached to any of them. In addition, there were flashback chapters interspersed with the current plot which felt clumsy and randomly inserted, and also didn't make much sense.

The author might almost have been better served by starting over entirely, since the focus of the series shifted mostly away from previously important characters. I couldn't believe that the stakes were very high, and I felt like the momentum from the first book was lost. I'm no longer interested in reading further in the series.

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### **Justine says**

The setting in *Binary* is some years after the events of *Gemsigns*, and society is still settling into what it means to accept gems as full and equal members of society. There are still problems within the gem community as well. In particular, the issue of reproduction is complicated by the highly engineered state of gems, and there are the personal moral questions of how much intervention to do even if they are able to access the care they need to achieve a viable pregnancy. Bel'Natur, a former powerhouse gemtech, seems willing to help with that problem in exchange for some help with their research into a new infotech product they want to bring to market.

This time around the emphasis is more on the characters than the worldbuilding, which is basically in place from *Gemsigns*. That said, the characters in *Binary* are both richer and more subtle than they were in the first book. Interspersed with the story are flashback sections that flesh out the history of two of the main characters, which by the end of the book makes both seem far more substantial and human. All of this is

woven through what becomes a very intense story of corporate black-ops and intrigue.

Gemsigns focused on the question of what makes us human. In a way, Binary asks what is needed for our human life to be a life worth living. Is it companionship? Children and family? Building a legacy? Love? Whatever it is, it isn't the past, but the future, that holds the promise of something better.

*The past was indeed another country, full of peril and doubt; and she had been moving so fast for so long she had failed to notice how far she had left it behind.*

Stephanie Saulter continues to impress in this second book and her already evident skill as a writer has clearly grown. If you liked Gemsigns, you should be very pleased with Binary.

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### **Sophie says**

Excellent stuff. Really enjoyed part 1 (Gemsigns) and this sequel is just as good. It's clever social commentary disguised as sci-fi. It's also a thrilling read with a race to the finish. I love the plausible future Saulter has created, and I also love that main characters include a gay couple and an autistic man/boy. You have to read it with due attention, though, because there is quite a bit of tech-speak (i.e. I don't have a degree in molecular biology, but I did manage to follow the genetics talk, mostly), so make sure you have time for this one.

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### **Lel says**

This follows on from the story started in Gemsigns.

The focus of the story shifts on to some new characters but with a lot of the old still about playing a part. It still has the depth, danger and plot that made the first book such a page turner. You find out more about Aryels past and get a more in depth look at what drives Zavcka in her research into Gems.

I would say that this book was a little slower than the first to get going but when it did, I had the same page turning obsession that had me reading into the small hours of the night. The moral and ethical questions raised in this book build on the ones that stayed with me from the first. But I feel this time they are not as clear cut and many shades of grey are creeping in from all sides of the fence as characters struggle to find their place in the world.

If you liked the first book, I think this one will not disappoint. Off to number three.....

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### **Kate says**

This fine series continues. Binary is particularly touching although I did miss the worldbuilding of Gemsigns. 3.5 stars.

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## Book Riot Community says

Earlier this year, I could not stop raving about Saulter's *Gemsigns*. It tells the story of a future in which genetically modified humans are the norm, and those engineered with "commercial modifications" (imagine if pearl divers didn't need oxygen tanks to breath underwater, or extra organs could be grown by one person for another) are fighting for their rights in a society that is used to considering them as less than human. *Binary* is the follow-up to that novel, and I literally am dreaming about it as I read it. This, friends, is a sequel done right. By setting it a few years into the future, she's able to both continue the threads begun in *Gemsigns* and introduce new levels of complexity to the intricate, compelling world she's created. If you love science fiction that holds a mirror back up to society, that uses technology to explore the questions of what it means to be human, and that tells an amazing story in the process, pick these up now. — Jenn Northington

from The Best Books We Read In June: <http://bookriot.com/2015/06/30/riot-r...>

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## Jasper says

Originally posted at: [thebookplank.blogspot.nl/2014/04/bina...](http://thebookplank.blogspot.nl/2014/04/bina...)

Last year I read Stephanie Saulter's debut, *Gemsigns* and was taken from the first few pages. Genetic tinkering is for me one of the most alluring subjects that science fiction currently has to offer, also by my job I am still intrigued by all that authors come up with. In *Gemsigns*, Stephanie Saulter introduced the reader to post-syndrome world, Syndrome decimated the world and could only be saved by genetic engineering leading up to the gems. The gems were the workhorses of society ruled more or less by the norms. One scientist, Eli Walker, was tasked to asses the whole situation and decide whether the gems were truly human and if they should be given equal rights. I was taken by the powerful story that Stephanie Saulter wrote, both as an entertaining and action packed science fiction story but also delving deeper into the human aspects and what drives them to do certain actions. The book ended in a perfect way, with enough room to be picked up in the sequel *Binary*.

*Binary* picks up several years after the events of *Gemsigns* and it seems that peace has been returned between the gems and the norms, the godgangs and gem hating has stopped. The gems have been given the same rights as the norms they are free to do what they want, even procreating, but this isn't all that easy for them. The gems also aren't the sole workhorses of society anymore, they aren't mere property but full class citizens.

But where does the story picks up in *Binary*? Well even though some years have passed it seems that the past events have left a definite mark upon society. Added to this is the fact that the gemtech co-operations, the companies that created the gems, are no longer allowed to create them all the genestocks have been frozen into one big database and everything is tightly monitored. However, even with this tight security a certain genestock goes missing and it is up to Sharon Varsi to find just where it went, but her lead proof to wind up

nowhere as there is virtually no trace of where the genestock went to.

I think it was a smart move to skip a few years into the future when picking the story of Binary, it plays out more as a action-reaction or some unavoidable consequences that now slowly come to surface, because the story of Sharon Varsi is just one of the three story threads, you also have Rhys who is suffering from an disease that would require help of a gemtech company and you have Zavcka Klist (do you still remember her from Gensis? what a b....) who has managed to let her gemtech company, Bel'Natur, survive the cut.

All of these different story started up individually but later on in Binary, Stephanie Saulter nicely weaves them into each other. The story of Zavcka was for me by far the best one. It is also, I think by this one that the other two stories get connected. In Gensis you had gotten to know Zavcka Klist as a ruthless women who only wants her own way. However now that the gems are free she had to reinvent her Bel'Natur, she wants to do this by launching infotech, a disc that would allow a person to record all their thoughts and transfer them... It is just this type of technology that caused the Syndrome in the first place. Zavcka Klist is again playing a dangerous and dirty game, is this really for the better of society or does she has plans for here own because with Zavcka you never, ever, know...

A definite plus to the present story of Binary is the fact that Stephanie Saulter introduces interlude chapters that take place when Aryel was still a young girl. There was a big revealing in the end of Gensis about what Aryel has hidden under the cloak, and from the start Aryel made up for an interesting protagonist, however she never said a word about her past... Well, you get the full lowdown of all the stuff that happened on Aryel when she was still in the hands of one of the gemtechs. Like I said I really liked this part and a lot of questions do become answered and scenes become that much clearer by this, a clever move.

Most of the characters that you got the meet up with in Gensis make an appearance in Binary. First and foremost is Aryel Morningstar, the protagonist of the series so far. After the big reveal in Gensis, Aryel has gained a celebrity status and is held as one of the icons of being a gem. Aryel hadn't wanted this status in the first place but it does seem that she is coping with it pretty well, other people however want to use it to create some extra publicity. Aryel was the leader of the gems and she still is a resolute character, but now her past seems to catch up with herself. Her character gets another degree of complexity by the flashbacks to her past. Linking these events to her present story and the actions she takes, you can clearly see that it starts to weigh her down. Secondly, you have Zavcka. Now running a legitimate business with Bel'Natur. Zavcka desperately wants the help of Aryel, her iconic status can help her launch her new product but all that has transpired between Aryel and Zavcka make their relation strenuous. I am going to be honest when I say that I had thought Zavcka had turned out for the better... Well I was in for a surprise. The end. Wow. As a third you have Rhys, Rhys was made from a special genestock, that now seems to fail on him, he is having seizures that threaten his life and that of his friend Callan, Rhys is seeking a cure but for that you would need the specific genestock. But his cannot be found. Anywhere. I liked how Stephanie Saulter showed Rhys's character and that of Callan they have a complex relation, and it comes to show that love makes strong and their battles do pay off in the end. Last and definitely not least you have Eli Walker, the scientist tasked with deciding if the gems and the norms should be given equal rights from the first book and Met officer Sharon Varsi. Eli is just himself as from Gensis and still questioning and examining the gem-norm society. Sharon Varsi is tasked with finding the stolen genestock. Sharon's character gave a nice view on some more of the normalcy that is still present in society. All in all I was again very pleased with the level of depth that Stephanie Saulter gave to her characters. They all just want to get by at a daily level but things are just to complex.

This is still science fiction. And what would that be with out some cool idea's? Stephanie Saulter really put a smile on my face when she started the parts on genome splicing, epigenetics and much much more. I don't

know whether this will mean a lot to you if you haven't got any prior knowledge about these subjects. But luckily I do and Stephanie Saulter does as well. For me this came totally unexpected but it worked well when it was explained and Stephanie Saulter did an amazing job when integrating these parts in her story. Pretty darn awesome!

The ending of the story of *Binary*, revolves around Zavcka. I had thought her to be changed, but I was wrong. When Stephanie Saulter drops the bomb on you the ulterior motive that Zavcka has I think you will be awed just as much as I was and thinking "did she really just do that"?? Stephanie Saulter executed the story of *Binary* perfectly building up a tension and producing several false leads until finally it dawns on you that some people just cannot be trusted...

Just as with her debut, *Gemsigns*, Stephanie Saulter creates a powerful entry in the science-fiction genre with *Binary*. She never stopped surprising me with her twists and turns that were riddled all throughout the story. What Stephanie Saulter managed to do in *Gemsigns*, exploring both the science of science fiction and a heavy emotional side with the gem and norm society, she does so again in *Binary* and perhaps even better. Given the fact that Aryel character and the relation to Zacka is explored in much more depth. Great characters and a superb storyline that will make you stop and wonder. If you are looking for a unique concept in science-fiction, get the revolution series. You won't go wrong.

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## Mieneke says

When I received a review copy for *Binary* I was super stoked as its predecessor *Gemsigns* topped my 2013 favourite debuts list, by a mile I may add. And then I was hit by a gigantic case of book fear—the fear you get after being swept away by an author's book that their next book couldn't possibly live up to your expectations. And thus *Binary* languished on my to-read-pile, until last Christmas, when I gave you my heart kicked myself in the behind and told myself to get it in gear and pick up this book I'd wanted to read so badly before it was out. Thank you past-me, because I have to admit that *Binary* was fantastic and every bit as good as I could have wished for.

*Binary* is set several years after *Gemsigns* and features a mix of old and new characters. Of course, Aryel Morningstar and Dr Eli Walker return, as does *Gemsigns'* antagonist Zavcka Klist. We get added viewpoints from Rhys and Sharon, who are great new voices. Sharon Varsi is a norm DI, who married Mikal, who is the manager of the Squats, the gem community in London. Her viewpoint has a sort of police procedural flavour to it as she investigate the alleged theft of genestock from the European Gene Archive. I loved her character, she has a certain unflappability that I enjoyed. Rhys, the other new main viewpoint character, is Aryel's younger foster brother and a tech wizard. He also needs to discover how to cure the attacks he's been suffering from that leave him weakened and sore. In addition, he has a wonderful and lovely romance. At first I was a bit taken aback by the pace of the relationship, but then I realised that they'd been communicating online for ages, so it wasn't a case of insta-love trope.

There are several great secondary characters, but my absolute favourite was Herran. His genes have been manipulated in such a way that he's brilliant with anything digital, yet he suffers from severe communication difficulties and exhibits behaviours that in this day and age would usually be associated with severe autism. Saulter develops his character beautifully. In her piece on the exploration of disability in *Guardians of the Galaxy* focussing on Groot and Drax, Sarah of Bookworm Blues talks about how Groot is limited by his vocabulary, but can communicate broadly via body language and verbal cues. Once one learns to understand these, he can be quite expressive. Herran's development feels quite similar. In fact, Rhys even notes on

meeting him in meatspace that Herran is far more fluent in a digital format. But throughout the narrative he becomes more and more eloquent as more point of view characters learn to understand his language, while Herran also expands his arsenal of non-verbal cues. I just really loved Herran; he's a gentle, loyal soul and one that is far more devious and nimble than many around him expect.

With the Declaration and the delivery of Dr Walker's report in *Gemsigns*, societal changes were set in motion that were analogous to Abolition and the end of segregation rolled into one. Almost five years on things are changing but not as fully or as fast as desired. Mixed couples are becoming more common, but they are nowhere near accepted yet, something illustrated in how Sharon is given the cold shoulder by many of her colleagues for marrying Mikal. The latter is sworn in as the first gem city councillor at the start of the novel, but even during his inauguration doubts are voiced by the civil servant swearing him in, albeit not aloud. Yet at the same time there is also a growing sense of glamour attached to gems, such as Lyrriam and Gwen who are hounded by the paparazzi – who sadly aren't a phenomenon humanity has gotten rid off even over a century in the future – not to mention Aryel who is still held in atavistic awe by many.

The gillungs, water-adapted gems, have taken their settlement money and created their own underwater habitat tech, which is very successful and becoming quite profitable, something that's an interesting development as it seems that this is tech that isn't human gemtech-based and as such is a new area of research. I also liked that something I had noted in my review for *Gemsigns* – that all information technology was basically almost the same as in our day, because all R&D had gone into gemtech – was actually a plot element in *Binary*, when this research is rebooted. The outlawing of human gemtech – as opposed to agricultural gemtech – has created a vacuum for the gemtech companies who need to scramble to find new products to develop so they can be competitive again. Saulter really took this economic side-effect of the Declaration into account, which I enjoyed.

If *Gemsigns* asked what makes us human, the big question central to *Binary* is where do we draw the line? A question most clearly expressed in the quandary Sharon and Mikal find themselves in when it comes to having children. The fertility issues they run into, cause them to ask themselves if they are modifying the embryo's anyway, which is actually gem tech, where do you stop? Do you limit to enabling pregnancy with a viable embryo? Do you tweak out the markers for genetic diseases? Do you perhaps go as far taking out some of the more outré physical manifestations of gem parents? And if you do, what message does this send to your child? It's a fascinating dilemma and one which isn't as far removed from our own society as one might think, given even modern day worries about designer babies.

In *Binary* Saulter reveals some really big truths about both Aryel's and Zavcka's pasts, ones which were very surprising, especially the truths about Zavcka. These truths will also have far-reaching consequences for the future and I can't wait to discover what they will be in the final book in this series, *Regeneration*. *Binary* has confirmed Saulter is one of the most interesting new voices in SF and a must-read author. If you haven't discovered this series yet, I highly recommend you check it out, because it's one of the most thought-provoking series currently being published.

This book was provided for review by the publisher.

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### **Paula says**

I read the first book in this series (*Gemsigns*) after it was recommended by multiple people at WorldCon last year and discovered just why folks were raving about it - fortunately for me, the local library has discovered

Stephanie Saulter recently bought the second book (*Binary*) with the third book (*Regeneration*) on order, so that'll be reviewed on here in due course...

As this is the middle book of the trilogy and I hadn't done a proper review of the first one, I feel there needs to be some explanation of the setting: essentially, the book is set in London some years after a cognitive disorder called the Syndrome had decimated the world's population. In response to that, various companies had developed what they call 'gemtech', essentially genetically engineering people to do the jobs nobody wants to do or is able to do - so you might have someone (described as a 'gem') who can breathe underwater or work at very high altitudes, but who is essentially the property of those companies. The world is divided between 'gems' and 'norms' and *Gemsigns* is about the campaign for the gems to gain full human rights, against the opposition of the companies involved, led by a charismatic gem called Aryel Morningstar.

*Binary* is set shortly after that campaign has succeeded, with many of the same characters playing significant parts in its story. While the world is trying to work out just how gems and norms are going to relate to one another, a whistleblower informs the police that valuable raw material has been stolen from one of the gemtech companies. At the same time, the company concerned is trying to reinvent itself and tap into unexplored areas of research, namely the link between computers and people - for that research to succeed, they need the cooperation of one of their former pieces of property, which also gives the gems an opportunity to find out if the company has really changed the way it claims. Closer to home, one of Aryel's family is becoming more and more unwell from a disorder that seems to be related to his genetic code, so the opportunity to mine the company's archives for anything that might help is almost too good to be true.

I think one of the strengths of these books is how believable the characters are, especially in their interactions with one another - none of them are perfect but they are all very human, regardless of their background. In *Binary*, we discover something about the backstory for both Aryel herself and her main adversary, the CEO of Bel'Natur - meanwhile, new relationships are formed and old ones strengthened by adversity. Seriously, it's all good - read these books, read *Regeneration* when you get the chance and anything else Stephanie Saulter might write in the future.

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## Cindy says

If you loved *Gemsigns*, you'll be blown away by *Binary*. What an absolutely amazing book this is!

The story starts 5 years after the events in *Gemsigns* and the Gems have slowly been accepted into society by now. Not that everything's peachy, there is still a lot of caution and opposition from fundamentalists, but the Gem society is on its way to full acceptance. Mikal has been elected in the City council and there is even a big festival where Gems can show their technology and their way of living, 'The Festival of the Future'. It's promising to be quite the event.

In the meantime the Gemtech companies have almost all gone under, but Bel'Natur and Zavcka Klist are still going strong. The company has drastically changed direction, firing most of its staff and rehiring people sympathetic to Gems to start a new era in Infotech. Zavcka has a lot of plans and wants to use Herran's binary thinking to produce a new kind of product. Aryel is reluctant to let him go to Bel'Natur, but the choice is up to him. Meanwhile detective Sharon Varsi receives prove that genestock, genetic material from the gemtech age, has been stolen from the Archive. Is it true and why was it stolen?

There are a few new characters introduced in this book and some others that were already mentioned in the first book now get a lot more 'screen time'. First of all there's Aryel's adoptive family: Rhys and Gwen,

Gem twins who were found in the woods after a mysterious lab went up in fire, and their dad, one of the Remnants, who found them. Of all of them especially Rhys gets a big storyline and I loved reading about him. He's very smart, but plagued by a mysterious illness. In coming to the city, he hopes he can find out what's wrong with him, but along the way he also finds love. If you want to read about a heartwarming, lovely romance, than you'll love this part. It's LGBT and a romance so well written it made me 'ship' them a bit, if I can use the popular term.

People getting more time in the spotlight are Sharon Varsi and Herran, both very interesting characters who get great storylines. Herran really makes a lot of progress socially and it was wonderful seeing him slowly blossom a bit more, getting a bit closer to people and opening up more.

There are a few big storylines in this book that all come together smoothly in the end. We have the stolen genestock and the investigation to find out who was involved and why the genestock was stolen. Then there's also Rhys' disease and what may be causing it. Rhys can't find his genecode anywhere, so there's another big mystery there. He knows that having his genecode would give a lot of insight in this strange disease. A big part of the story is obviously also dedicated to the new Bel'Natur and Herran's part in that. In between all these there are also intermezzo's that are written from 2 point of view characters. I have to admit that I was a bit confused at first and that I didn't see the second POV clearly at first. But slowly I understood. It's interesting, because these parts are not explicit, you have to piece together the bits of information you get to understand the past of two of the main characters. It may be confusing at first but when everything comes together and you can see the whole picture I was more than satisfied with all the explanations. I know this part of the review may sound a bit cryptic but I'm desperate not to spoil anything for future readers. This is something you'll have to piece together on your own and enjoy the story as it makes its connection with all the other storylines.

I would love to write even more about this book, I think I could discuss and talk about it all day. It's full of interesting themes and characters and has an very entertaining story that will leave you in the dark 'till the end. Honestly, I would recommend this series to anyone who likes an intelligent, exciting, extremely well written science fiction story.

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### **Lindsay says**

A political SF thriller that continues three years after the events of *Gemsigns*.

The new legal status of gems and the ongoing presence of Aryel Morningstar have calmed much of the tension between norms and gems. The book starts with Mikal from the first book being sworn in as the first gem politician. He's also married to the norm policewoman Sharon Varsi from the first book and has taken her surname. The gemtech companies have moved into areas outside human genetic engineering and no longer have much contact with the gems that they created and enslaved. But that's about to change. It turns out that the gems may need the gemtechs, for both information about their past and help for the future. And the gemtechs need some of the expertise of key gems as well.

This situation revolves around the fraught relationships between Aryel, Eli Walker and Zavcka Klinst all from the first book and whether they can work together, and what hidden agendas are going on. The book ends up pivoting on Aryel's origins and Zavcka's motivations while introducing several new characters.

This series still lacks in nuance; the good guys are unambiguously good and the bad guys are horrible. However, this is a significant improvement on the first book, particularly in terms of the gemtech renewal.

There's also signs at the start that Zavcka herself may be moving her attitudes as well, but this turns out to be just a symptom of a greater insanity. There's also a lot of answers in this book and clear signs for the future of this interesting universe.

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### **Joanne Hall says**

Received from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

Binary-Evolution-2-Stephanie-SaulterBinary is what's commonly known as "That difficult second novel", the eagerly awaited follow-up to *Gemsigns*, which was released to much excitement in Spring 2013. This accomplished, information-heavy debut, set in a near-future world where genetic modification has become common, documented the struggle for genetically modified humans (Gems) to obtain basic human rights. Binary tells us what happens next, after freedom, after the dust has settled and humans and Gems are living uneasily side-by-side as supposed equals.

Equality has not solved all the Gems problems, and particularly pressing are the problems that may arise with future children, and children that Gems may have with so-called "norms". The threat from religious fundamentalists may have eased somewhat, but the biotech companies who were so invested in Gem creation and manipulation are still a looming danger, especially Bel'Natur and its calculating, manipulative chief executive, Zavcka Klist. She is interested in prolonging Gem technology for her own deeply personal reasons, and she will stop at nothing, not even murder, to make sure she gets her way.

The book unfolds, in flashback, the fascinating parallels and the complicated, unexpected connections, between Klist and the unelected Gem leader and advocate, the unique figure of Aryel Morningstar, and their conjoined story is set against a fast-moving fight to save the life of damaged Gem Rhys by finding his genetic prototype deep in the computer vaults of the Gemtech companies. Rhys, his twin sister Gwen, his lover Callan and almost autistic computer genius and hacker Herran unravel a plot involving theft, industrial espionage and murder that goes right to the dark heart of Bel'Natur, and that reveals secrets about the Gems own inception and purpose which, if brought to light, could have dangerous consequences for Gemkind.

Binary is fast, witty, technically adept, with a warm heart beating through it that occasionally gets lost under the cybernetic chatter. Much of the world-building was set up in the preceding novel, so it feels slightly less bogged down in explanation than *Gemsigns* was. The pace is quicker and more thrilling, and the reader has more time to invest in the characters. In *Gemsigns* it sometimes felt as if the idea was the star, here it's the Gems, fighting to retain their newly recognised humanity in the face of Klist's machinations. It's a smartly-written sequel that improves on its predecessor, alive with ideas and intelligence (and yes, heart). A first-class second novel.

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### **Shaheen says**

The sequel to *Gemsigns* has blown me away. *Binary* is grander and more sophisticated than its predecessor, but lacks none of its heart and brilliance.

This story is set in a near-future world where humans, driven to near extinction by The Syndrome, create a species of genetically modified humans (gems) to be immune to the disease and to serve as second-class

citizens to help humanity survive. *Gemsigns* introduced us to this world after the UN had issued a Declaration protecting gems from mistreatment, where gems and 'norms' were trying to figure out how to live as equals. *Binary* takes the idea further, and explores the role of the gemtechs - the genetic engineering conglomerates that made, and until recently, owned, gems - will play in this new world of equality.

If *Gemsigns* is a story primarily concerned with what it means to be human, then *Binary* is a study of humanity itself: its ability to trust and love, the strengths of its friendships and its courage. Its capacity for evil, its greed, and its lust for power. *Binary* explores these things through its two protagonists, Aryel Morningstar and Zavcka Klist, and a stellar secondary cast of characters, some familiar, and some new.

Aryel and Zavcka were my favourite characters in *Gemsigns*, the two people I really wanted to know more about, so I am really happy that *Binary* focusses on them. The two women play off each other brilliantly. Once again Aryel shines in the narrative. Her emotional strength and charisma keeps the other gems together and her analytical mind gives her a solid footing to take on Zavcka, who heads Bel'Natur, one of the largest and most powerful gemtechs still in existence. Zavcka and Aryel have many secrets between them, which are revealed slowly through the clever use of flashbacks, building up to a shocking revelation that will leave readers reeling.

Alongside these two amazing women is a varied cast of characters one can't help but like. Eli Walker has become this society's moral compass, Mikal has been elected as a councilman, giving gems representation in the government for the first time, and Sharon Varsi has become a Detective Inspector with the police. Sharon and Mikal are also the first gem-norm couple to get married, and have recently turned their thoughts to having children. Amongst the new characters, I love the charismatic and extremely talented twins Rhys and Gwen the most, but they're closely followed by Herran, a gem child with an affinity for computers who becomes integral to Zavcka's plans.

I loved the slight shift in *Binary* that sees its narrative take more note of romantic relationships than its predecessor. I can't name a favourite pairing because they are all amazing, but the sweetness of Rhys and Callan cannot be understated.

The cumulative effect of this story being both lighter on world-building and less introverted than *Gemsigns* is that it is much easier to read. Saulter has also honed her craft and become more adept at explaining the scientific, social, and political ramifications of the science she describes in her book without losing momentum, but the science itself remains complex and compelling. It's a delicate balancing act where I think Saulter has excelled.

A brilliantly plotted, vividly told tale that encompasses the breath of humanity's triumphs and its failures, *Binary* accomplishes what few sequels do in surpassing its predecessor in every way. Although the story feels finished, I'd gladly read 4 or 5 more books set in this world! I highly recommend this series to all fans of science fiction, and am looking forward to reading what the author gives us next.

A copy of this book was provided by the publisher for review.  
You can read more of my reviews at [Speculating on SpecFic](#).

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### **Helen says**

Very interesting and the tension barely let up. There were new characters who caused me no end of worry!

Also no cliff-hanger :)

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## **Jessica Strider says**

Pros: interesting mystery, character development, minor romantic elements

Cons: only learn snippets of what's happened since book 1

Several years have passed since Eli Walker presented his recommendations with regards to the integration of gems (genetically modified humans) with the general human population. Gems are finding recognition despite lingering hesitation from the norms around them. They've had time to think about their futures, including marriage and children - something many gems know won't be possible without help due to their modifications. Bel'Natur is headed in new directions and wants Herran, a severely autistic gem, 's help with their project. The police are sent an anonymous tip that some of the locked up genestock isn't as secured as everyone thought. And Aryel Morningstar's foster father and siblings, Rhys and Gwen, are visiting London. Rhys, has a dangerous medical condition that knowing his genotype could help cure, but he and his twin were rescued from an experimental black lab, and all his gem enhanced efforts to uncover information about it have been unsuccessful.

The novel starts off slowly, reintroducing you to familiar characters and gradually adding in the new players for this book. Some characters (most notably Gabriel's family) are absent. It's not clear at first how much time has passed since the events of book 1, though you eventually figure out it's been 3 or 4 years. You don't learn much of what's happened in the meantime, mostly snippets, but you're left knowing that while some things have improved, others are taking longer.

The main plot threads start a few chapters into the book, giving you time to get grounded in the characters again before the police mystery begins, Rhys goes for testing and Herran starts his new job. The various plot lines converge at the ending, creating quite a few explosive reveals. You get to learn about Aryel's origins as well as some interesting things about Zavcka's past.

As weird as it sounds, considering her abrasive personality and the things she's done, I found myself feeling sorry for Zavcka in this book.

While Gwen indulges her first love, music, by way of meeting a popular gem musician, Rhys starts up an affair with one of Aryel's friends. It's a sweet affair, made serious at times due to Rhys' condition and his fears for the future.

While I would have liked to know more about what happened to some of the characters from the first book and what happened in the interim, this was a great book that once again delved into human psychology to show how various people react to new and challenging circumstances. There's the heartbreak of the couple who can't conceive, the norm who married a gem and faces ridicule from co-workers, adulation from music fans, revulsion from those who want a return to the way things were, and more. The various reactions all feel honest based on where different people come from and their circumstances. As with the first book, the POV is squarely with the gems and their sympathizers. It's a fantastic follow-up to *Gemsigns* and I can't wait to read the last book in the series.

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## **Ms Z L Mcbrown says**

### **Takes a while to get into but great character building and gripping novel**

Page turner. Read in a day and going to read the next one now. Part of a trio, don't read the first one

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## **Sally says**

Loved this! It is a few years after *Gemsigns*, and I wish I could have heard more about some of the characters from the first book, but a great story, and very well written. I am anxious to see what happens in the third book, but having some trouble finding it.

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## **Wayne says**

I confess that my relative low rating is probably due in part to me not reading the first book since I had mistakenly picked it up at the library thinking it was a one off.

That said. I found the multiple viewpoints of the dozen players and the flashbacks from the two major players diluted my connection to the characters and the overall narrative. Every other page was a new character's viewpoint and I'd have to make the requisite adjustment to figure out which person's POV I was getting at that particular second which lowered my enjoyment of the book.

It also took about 100 pages to stop reminiscing and introducing characters to get to the meat of the tale. However I kept guessing major plot point/revelations about 200 pages before they were revealed. There is only one occupation where increased situational awareness and increased strength is useful and it doesn't take a genius to figure that out. As for Zavcka the comment about 'older than they think' was a dead giveaway to the explanation at page 350 (or so).

I was left waiting for the characters who were all genetically engineered geniuses to come to the same conclusion I had after a second of thought.

I didn't dislike the book but it felt like it took a long time to make a point that wasn't that interesting to begin with. It was an okay book to read while getting about on public transport but it wasn't a page turner by any means.

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## **Joanna says**

[ Zavcka is the evil sorceress,

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