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 *(Live link to Review)*

**Midwest Book Review – Published in April 2015’s Small Press Book Watch**

“*The Jack of Souls*Stephen C. Merlino
Tortoise Rampant Press
www.stephenmerlino.com
9780986267413, $12.95 PB, 350pp, www.amazon.com

**Critique:** The first volume in Stephen Merlino's 'The Unseen Moon' series, "The Jack of Souls" is a terrific read from beginning to end and clearly establishes Merlino as a master of the fantasy action/adventure genre. Highly recommended for community library Science Fiction & Fantasy collections, it should be noted for personal reading lists that "The Jack of Souls" is also available in a hardcover edition (9780986267406, $29.99) and a Kindle edition ($3.99).

 **Synopsis:** Harric is an outcast rogue who must break a curse put on his fate or die on his next birthday. As the day approaches, nightmares from the spirit world stalk him and tear at his sanity; sorcery eats at his soul.

To survive, he'll need more than his usual tricks. He'll need help (and a lot of it), but on the kingdom's lawless frontier, his only allies are other outcasts.

One of these outcasts is Caris, a mysterious, horse-whispering runaway, intent upon becoming the Queen's first female knight. The other is Sir Willard -- an ex-immortal, ex-champion, now addicted to pain-killing herbs and banished from the court. With their help, Harric might keep his curse at bay. But for how long?

And both companions bring perils and secrets of their own: Caris bears the scars of a troubled past that still hunts her; Willard is at war with the Old Ones, an order of insane immortal knights who once enslaved the kingdom. The Old Ones have returned to murder Willard and seize the throne from his queen. Willard is both on the run from them, and on one final, desperate quest to save her.

Together, Harric and his companions must overcome fanatical armies, murderous sorcerers, and powerful supernatural foes.

Alone, Harric must face the temptation of a forbidden magic that could break his curse, but cost him the only woman he's ever loved.