



The Shadow of the Lion

Mercedes Lackey, Eric Flint, Dave Freer

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It is the year 1537. The great winged Lion stares over a Venice where magic thrives. The rich Venetian Republic is a bastion of independence and tolerance. Perhaps for that reason, it is also corrupt, and rotten with intrigue.

But for the young brothers Marco and Benito Valdosta, vagabond and thief, Venice is simply--home. They have no idea that they stand at the center of the city's coming struggle for its very life. They know nothing of the powerful forces moving in the background. They have barely heard of Chernobog, demon-lord of the North, who is shifting his pawns to attack Venice in order to cut into the underbelly of the Holy Roman Empire. All Marco and Benito know is that they're hungry and in dangerous company: Katerina the smuggler, Caesare the sell-sword, Montagnard assassins, church inquisitors, militant Knights of the Holy Trinity, Dottore Marina the Strega mage... and Maria. Maria might be an honest canaler, but she had the hottest temper a boy could find.

Yet among the dark waters of the canals lurk far worse dangers than a hot-tempered girl. Chernobog has set a monster loose to wreak havoc on the city. Magic, murder and evil are all at work to pull Venice down. Fanatical monks seek to root out true witchcraft with fire and sword. Steel-clad Teutonic knights, wealth traders, church dignitaries and great Princes fight and plot for control of the jewel of the Mediterranean.

And somehow all of these, from thieves to mages to princes, must gather around Marco and his brother Benito, under the shadow of the great winged lion of Venice.

The Shadow of the Lion Details

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From Reader Review The Shadow of the Lion for online ebook

Gail Morris says

catching up on books

Melanie says

Interesting Read

Little tedious. Took 60 chapters before story started moving. Characters well developed. Good read for believers and non believers, draws on many forms of theology

Jennavier says

I think this is my fifth time reading this book, but since it's now goodreads official I'll write a real review. I read this book as a variety starved teen in Yellowstone. Considering that it's an epic fantasy written by three people not really in that genre (Mercedes Lackey maybe, but Eric Flint writes sci-fi and David Freer writes satire) it was definitely different. Ten years later I still love it. The story is set in alternate history Venice (!!!) and stars a huge cast that due to outrageous mannerisms I can keep strait. It's good vs. evil in a big way. I would call this the popcorn fluff of epic fantasy. If you don't want to get into that draggy stuff that they're coming out with over the last two years, this is a good series to read.

Suzannah says

The things I liked about this book, I loved. The things I didn't like, I didn't like at all.

On one hand, it took only the first couple of chapters to pleasantly surprise me with the story's epic scope, meticulous historical detail, alternate-universe/fantasy speculation, vivid characters, and capable, gripping writing style.

On the other hand, I felt that the book didn't ultimately live up to its promise. It brought its multiple plot strands to a satisfying, but not a stunning conclusion. And by the latter half it was bogged down in a welter of detail and complexity that made it more difficult for me to care.

On one hand, I loved how the authors dealt with religion. It came with enough of a twist to be a fun AU version of real history, but enough historical know-how and sympathy to be convincing. There are good characters and bad characters in all factions. There is a terrific scene where (view spoiler)

On the other hand, I was really hoping there wouldn't be, but there were about three or four sex scenes, mostly toward the end. There's also a bunch of magical/violent content that some of my followers may find inappropriate.

But overall, I'm really glad I read this book. As a historical-fantasy doorstopper, it provided me with some very helpful notes on how to construct such a historical-fantasy doorstopper of my own, especially with regards to using a third-person omniscient POV. It's just a shame that people aren't writing books of this technical calibre for a YA audience, or for the many adults who read YA because they prefer their books to be fairly "clean".

3.5 stars.

Jessica says

This is, absolutely, the best fantasy book I've probably read in a long time. It's a perfect twist of historical fiction and fantasy swirled with romance and epic adventure. If I ever crave to read the Odyssey, Romeo and Juliet, all Greek Mythology, and some good ol' Mercedes Lackey Valdemar books, then all I have to do is pick up this book (and its brother) and sink into a captivating story combining all these elements into a steamy pie of wholesome goodness.

Ralph McEwen says

free download from baen.com

Karen says

I totally read this series out of order, and it made sense anyway. Great writing.

Chris says

I had two major problems with this book. I really wanted to like. A Venice with magic and a real griffin. Cool! Sadly, not cool here. One problem I had was the male characters act like boys. I suppose this really isn't a problem, considering the male characters are in fact boys, but the female characters are the same age or younger, but act years older. I'm a woman, I suppose this shouldn't bother me, but it does. True the sexes mature at different rates, but not one male character is mature or likable.

The second problem I had was the book dawdles. There is no other word for it.

Derek says

Fun story with amazing amounts of intrigue in a fantastical 16th century Italy.

K.F. says

I don't normally go in for really long sweeping hard fantasy novels but damn if this series never fails me every time I reread it. Seriously some food the least oppressive writing ever, amazing characters, and just ace research. The cast of characters is a bit much and the politics may be hard to follow but it's worth it to just get to know everyone featured. I,anime game of thrones, but less problematic. Will say that the lack of POCS did bother me a little this time around but if I recall, there are definitely POCS in the next books.

♥Xeni♥ says

I really really want to find the second of this series. Because the first book was so good. My most favorite part of this book is actually the beginning, the fight scene. I can read that scene a few times and not get bored.

But the rest of the society and build up of the world is just as fascinating! I'm sure that the second book in the series is just as amazing!

Annette Pedersen says

Read with pleasure again

Joy says

On page 56 is explained the pivotal point that makes this an alternative universe. The Library of Alexandria is NOT burned, thus preserving the knowledge of magic from the ancient times. Also Hypatia rather than being murdered becomes the Saint of a liberal order of religious philosophers...the Order of Hypatia worshiping Hagia Sophia, Holy Wisdom. Outstanding!

Can't wait to get to the next book

Marina Bonomi says

Crossposted from 'Outside of Dogs: a Reviewer's Blog'

I'm often wary of collaborations, but in this case as I was reading I kept forgetting that the book has more than one author, no mean feat, in my opinion.

I picked The Shadow of the Lion from the Baen Free Library, I was intrigued by the premise, a fantasy set in 16th century Venice, and I figured that, it being free, at worst I would just lose a couple of hours before

deciding it wasn't for me (I'm past the phase in my reading life in which I forced myself to finish each and every book I started).

In that couple of hours, or even less, I was hooked. The alternate history is intriguing (also 'alternate theology' if you wish, thanks to the conversion of Saint Hypatia), the characters are nuanced and three dimensional, there are as many intriguing and strong females as males, and it manages to completely sidestep one of my biggest turn-offs in fantasy (the 'big, bad, fanatic church' and 'poor, persecuted magic users/pagans' trope) here there is bad and good on both sides. I loved equally the dottor Marina (a family name here) the strega, and father Eneko Lopez, a Basque former soldier of venture turned priest who, I believe, is the fictional alter ego of Íñigo López Loiola

The plot is complex, many of the major players on the European checkerboard of the time are there (but for France, the rival of the Empire is different in this story, and the Empire itself is headed by the Hohenstaufen, not the Habsburg), it may not be your cup of tea if you don't like politics in your fantasy but the politics is neatly balanced by the action, in my opinion, and neither feels overdone.

And, most of all, Venice feels real. The one in the book is the city where I studied, with its pride, its history, its special mix of sea and island that sets it apart from any other city in Italy, the strong esprit de corps of the workers at the arsenal, the strength and world-view of the canalers, the pomp and sense of duty of the best of the aristocracy... I could go on for hours. Venice is a character in the novel, and not a minor one.

This is not to say that the book is perfect, but my problems with it (if that's even the right word), are definitely minor.

I did a couple of double-takes reading of the Swiss guard of the Doge and of the Scaliger of Verona as an enemy of Venice in 1538 (in this world the Scaligers were thrown out of Verona in 1387 and Verona gave itself to Venice in 1405), but I think it likely that these aren't mistakes but points of divergence (note to writers of alternate history: please, please put a note on historical matters somewhere in your book spelling out what is intentionally different , this reader, for one, would be grateful) .

All through the narrative there are Italian words for flavor, I've no doubt they work fairly well for readers that don't know Italian, for me... the mis-spelled words were like a constant itch I could not scratch. Giacomo for Giacomo, Polestine for Polesine, Caesare for Cesare, Fruili for Friuli, Veneze for Veneziani, capi (a plural word) used also as a singular, in one instance slices of prosecco on a platter (prosecco is a wine, neither cheese nor salame) and why should Kat, a scion of one of the 'old houses' of Venice bear the definitely non-Venetian family name Montescue ?

They are all small, silly things, but an Italian beta-reader would have weeded them out, and I believe an already good book would have been made even better by it.

One caveat : I read The Shadow of the Lion on its own merit, some reviews I happened across point out that the novel is a reworking of Lakey's contribution to Merovingen Nights, a series set in a shared SF world originally created by C.J.Cherryh, apparently the series was never completed and is now out of print, not having any knowledge of it I cannot weight in either way.

Ron says

“Just as simple as original sin and just as seductive.”

Excellent. Amazingly deep, rich epic fantasy set in an alternate timeline very close to Renaissance northern Italy. The nations, myths, religions, factions and families are close enough to historical that the student of history has a leg up on the fun. Yet Lackey has shifted emphasis, history there, motives somewhere else just enough to create a fascinating new universe.

“There is such a thing as evil in the world, which cannot be persuaded, but only defeated.”

Amazing that Lackey produces such good word so quickly. Nonetheless, there are signs of this story being rushed to print. For example, modern expressions, like “A man’s got to do what a man’s got to do” or “Give me a break,” occasionally knock the reader out of the story. Also occasional repetition, perhaps stemming from the team of authors.

“He’s only half a saint. The other half is pure idiot, I promise.”

Completely satisfying conclusion, despite this being the first of a series. The reason is that the other installments are written by different authors and focus on different main characters, characters who play a part in this drama.

“The ultimate coin in this sinful world is trust.”
