



## Funeral Games

*Mary Renault*

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As *Funeral Games* opens, Alexander the Great lies dying. Around his body gather the generals, the provincial satraps and the royal wives, already competing for the prizes of power and land. Only Bagoas, the Persian boy mourning in the shadows, wants nothing. Tracing the events of the fifteen years following Alexander's death, *Funeral Games* sees his mighty empire disintegrate, and brings Mary Renault's Alexander trilogy to a dramatic close.

## **Funeral Games Details**

Date : Published November 6th 2003 by Arrow (first published 1981)

ISBN : 9780099463498

Author : Mary Renault

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## From Reader Review Funeral Games for online ebook

### Ahmad Sharabiani says

Funeral Games (Alexander the Great #3), Mary Renault

Funeral Games is a 1981 historical novel by Mary Renault, dealing with the death of Alexander the Great and its aftermath, the gradual disintegration of his empire. It is the final book of her Alexander trilogy.

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### Seth Reeves says

The final book in Mary Renault's novelization of the life and death of Alexander the Great did give me what I longed for in the second book, the point of view of more of the characters. It also kept going with her somewhat stilted, overwrought writing style.

The story is all about the few years following Alexander's death. You immediately are given to understand that the only person around who could at once expand and maintain so vast and diverse an empire was gone and there was not a single person left in his wake that could take his place. This makes sense considering that Alexander wanted all of his soldiers and officers to marry up with the conquered peoples and create a new race of Macedonian/Greek/Persian/Indian/a ton of other ethnicities while most people at this time in history would have considered anyone from even slightly outside the tiny area they grew up in as either barbarians or simply unsuitable-to-mix-with foreigners.

Everyone around the empire that felt that Alexander unfairly ignored them while he was alive or sees their chance to stand out starts to think about how they are going to fill the power vacuum. They succeed and fail to varying degrees but the people who really get reamed are anyone who was directly related to Alexander as they are enemy #1 for anyone that wants to rule the empire. A character you are sympathetic to in one part of the story can turn around and become a horrible tyrant only to eventually get strung up and fed to carrion by his or her own men.

I can say I'm glad I read these books. They've been hanging out on my Kindle almost since I first got it and I had put off reading them because the reviews weren't very kind. I can't knock the author for taking all this history and getting it into around 1300 pages of novel without every chapter being a revelation in style and prose. I must say I enjoyed historical fiction by Gore Vidal or Robert Graves much more but the story was intriguing in places and she managed to strain a lot of the melodramatics out of this last book that were somewhat annoyingly displayed by Hephaiston in the first book and the eunuch and narrator Bagoas in the second book. I think this trilogy is definitely worth reading, if only to make you more knowledgeable about one of history's greatest historical figures, but I would advise taking them on when you are on a real reading binge or are about to study Alexander the Great in college. Otherwise, although the story and the man's life are unbelievably interesting, you might get a bit bored and give up on them midway through the second book. The third one wraps it up very well so just don't stop till the end, like Alexander.

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## Vaidya says

While *The Persian Boy* stopped at the point where Alexander was dying, this book takes off from there. It's a rollicking ride covering the 47 years after Alexander's death, the infighting, intrigues, conspiracies to get the Macedonian throne.

After the first quarter of the book, characters keep dropping dead like flies, killed by rivals through various means or in battlefields. All that is left at the end is just Ptolemy who wisely chooses the Satrapy of Egypt, fortifies it well, and stays away from Macedonian squabbles. At the very end only he is left to tell the tale of Alexander. The rest die, killed conspiratorially by rivals.

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## Iset says

I didn't expect to be doing this, but I'm actually marking *Funeral Games* down from the first two books in Mary Renault's trilogy; *Fire From Heaven* and *The Persian Boy*. The difference? Renault jumps about a lot in time here. Of course her previous novels did this too – all of them were selective in their scenes, not comprehensive – but this time round Renault covers a much wider span of time, the events of thirty-seven years in total, a wider range than the first two books combined. And historically those thirty-seven years were chock full of conflicts, plots, and sudden reversals of fortune as Alexander's generals duked it out for a slice of his empire. As a result, Renault ends up jumping from event to event, and some scenes, especially in the second half of the book, feel abbreviated, and the characters sketched rather than fully, immersively formed. That was my single major problem with *Funeral Games*. It was difficult to get into the story in the same way I had with *The Persian Boy* or *Fire From Heaven*, when Renault had to sketch the huge cast of characters that pop up over these thirty-seven years and resort to a tiny brushstroke here and there to try and convey much more about these characters.

The first half of the book felt much better written than the second half, largely because it spends a lot of time on the immediate aftermath of Alexander's death, and Renault can lavish more pages on events and developing the characters involved. It distinctly feels like a more coherent narrative. This section of the novel retains Renault's signature deft touch at characterisations and breaking down complex events into something lucid and understandable on a human level, without detracting from their complexity. In the second half, where many more years are spanned and characters far apart in location, there is a greater degree of summarisation going on.

A positive addition is that we get inside the heads of some of the people most closely connected to Alexander – family members, and the comrades who knew him the best. Through their eyes we finally see Alexander, how and why he was revered after his death, and how some who fought to carve up his empire for themselves failed spectacularly. A sense of ominous foreboding and unease permeates the whole book as the empire crumbles, and some of Alexander's old friends try to preserve it and his memory, others make a grab for power, and others simply see the writing on the wall. The character of Ptolemy provides what I felt was Renault's opinion on the failure of Alexander's empire – the nature of Alexander was a mystery, he says, that could inspire great deeds and achieve the unachievable, and with his death they are all left merely fallible men.

**8 out of 10**

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### **Davytron says**

Renault has done something really incredible with her beloved source material. Each entry into this series is spectacularly different. While I very much enjoyed it, the first, *Fire from Heaven*, was written in such a way that I am sure will deter anyone from reading further into the series. Subsequent entries into this series are much improved and, while the former always builds on the latter, each feels like it could be read and savoured independently.

While the series is subtitled with "a novel of Alexander the Great," only *Fire From Heaven* was from Alexander's perspective. The rest of the series explored how his actions affected everyone else. *The Persian Boy* was about Bagoas, a eunuch in the service of Alexander. It is glorious and depressing. It is everything one could want from historical fiction.

*Funeral Games* was about the fallout facing Alexander's empire following his early death. The only way I can really describe this is historical Game of Thrones. The fictional components made the story flow, but it's really the truth of the events that make the book so engaging and satisfying. It's hard to believe stuff like this happened! I pretty much gasped or shouted every few pages. So much drama. The third book had a very large and in charge cast of females which is sort of my thing.

Overall this series is magnificent and I am deeply satisfied with the time I have spent living in Renault's depiction of the ancient world.

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### **Robert Dunbar says**

*"I foresee great contests at my funeral games."*

Isn't it funny how Mary Renault ultimately became a sort of historical personage in her own right? Well, not really funny, of course, but more sort of inevitable. After all, who's in her class? These days? Did you read that "historical" novel about Anne Boleyn that was on all the best-seller lists a couple of years ago? Apparently, poor Anne really did commit adultery with all those men (and boys) who were tortured into confessing. Plus, she practiced witchcraft. No, really.

Off with her head!

Class has left the building. Or at least the genre.

Even a generation ago, the coupling of well-researched psychological/sociological comprehension to the elegant rhythms and imagery of her prose placed Mary Renault well above the throng of historical novelists. Her saga of Alexander the Great, begun with *Fire from Heaven* and continued through *The Persian Boy*, climaxed with *Funeral Games*. Have ancient settings ever been more convincingly evoked?

Desert sands engulf the passions of men and women who remain persuasively human.

Yet this was an age of heroes. Alexander's magnetism held together the known world, and his passing was felt as acutely as though it were the last of the gods who had died. (It's sobering to contemplate how different our modern world might be if he had lived even a few more years.) The plot does not lack for incident. Amid mounting tensions, the barbarian mistress hatches a plot against the unborn child of the royal bride. Shackled men are trampled by elephants, examples to a mutinous army. Warriors, dying in the arms of enemies, discover common ground, while the king's dancing boy refrains from suicide only so that he might care for his lover's body, which must travel in state across an empire. All the ingredients of royal melodrama churn, from conspiracies and secret marriages to incest and matricide. The pot fairly boils over. And the broth is bloody... despite an author's note informing the reader that "for reasons of continuity" several notable murders have been omitted.

As in some monstrous myth, the vengeance of the Furies spreads, not just through one accursed family, but to all. The hot Babylonian wind is scented with jasmine... and the torchlit night is full of cries...

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### **Fiona says**

A compelling account of the battle for power following the death of Alexander the Great. This is the first Mary Renault I have read and it took me a while to follow the pace of her often stilted writing. Sometimes it read like a translation. Very few of the characters were more than one dimensional but I suppose this is because the story covers such a long period and so there was little time to develop them. Mostly, they didn't live long enough anyway! Despite all this, it's a good read and was quite unputdownable towards the end.

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### **Edmund Marlowe says**

#### Excellent Epilogue

This last of Renault's trilogy about Alexander the Great opens with his dying in Babylon. At first, it follows the ensuing and highly dramatic struggle for power in detail, then it takes gradually greater jumps in time until the end, when an elderly Ptolemy finishes his history of Alexander thirty-seven years later. It is a dramatic story, dark and violent compared to her other novels, in keeping with the real historical intrigues it relates.

Though not the sort of sequel that has to be read after its predecessors, as the plot does not depend on prior knowledge, it will be much better appreciated by those who have at least read *The Persian Boy*. Taking Renault's Greek historical novels together, I think one can say her view of Greek history is of it leading up to Alexander as its apogee, and then away from him, as here. As a result, *Funeral Games* reads like an extended eulogy, his death at the beginning its critical moment, and its focus becoming ever dimmer as it moves forward in time. Perhaps it is only thus that it could work as the last of a trilogy about a man who died in its first chapter. Like its predecessors, it is fiercely pro-Alexander, its most constant theme being what a tragedy his death was for almost every character, individually and collectively. The selfish motives of those who did not lament him merely serve to underline his excellence.

Renault's historical novels --have often been attacked for depicting women either as passive or not at all, though to have done otherwise would be hard in a faithful portrait of a society with such masculine values. *Funeral Games* should have been the novel to appease these critics, and I don't understand why it seems not

to have succeeded. The cast of females here is much larger, their roles more important, their characters richly varied, and four are unusually strong characters. The Persian royal mother, Sisygambis is a personification of the proud, dignified and thoroughly decent old lady. Alexander's mother Olympias is fierce and cruel but has enough of her son in her to inspire awe and reverence. His wife Roxane is depicted as similar but vile and without redeeming qualities, as if Renault wished to dismiss her as a worthy part of Alexander's life (a point to which I shall return). Most interesting of all is the almost self-made teenage Queen, Eurydike, perhaps because Renault put so much of herself into her. Poignantly doomed to ignominious failure in a man's world, despite her strong spirit, she, and perhaps Renault, appear to think she could have been an Alexander if only she had been born a boy.

Having made a special study of all the ancient sources covering the period in question, it may interest those who share my very high opinion of Renault that *Funeral Games* is not actually as perfect in historical authenticity as one might expect from her. For example, Eumenes was not nearly as old as depicted (Cornelius Nepos XVIII 13 says he became secretary in 343 when he was 19 and Alexander 12 or 13). The plot is sometimes flawed, as when Alexander's top generals are made to know Stateira was pregnant and think her son more worthy to be the next King, and yet, inexplicably, none of them say anything about it at the gathering assembled to decide the succession.

These are small imperfections. A much more serious criticism of her depiction of Alexander in all of her novels about him is that she has over-homosexualised him, not through overly emphasising his love affairs with Hephaestion and Bagoas, but through unfairly deprecating his two love affairs with women. The ancient sources depict Alexander as genuinely involved with both women and boys with a typically Greek sense of there being no contradiction involved, but the one affair of his life they clearly depict as both passionate and founded on eros is that with Roxane. On any fair assessment, it was surely one of the greatest love affairs of antiquity, the greatest man in the world choosing to marry (rather than take) a young girl of remarkable beauty but otherwise little importance.

In contrast, in *The Persian Boy*, Renault depicts their entanglement as a brief infatuation. Her Alexander soon tires of Roxane and thereafter merely tolerates her out of loyalty and kindness. The known reality was very different. Their surviving son was conceived sometime in the two months following Hephaestion's death and only eight months before the King's, which suggests it was to Roxane that he turned for solace in his greatest grief, rather than Bagoas or the new royally-born wife on whom he should have been trying to beget an heir.

Roxane's first appearance in *Funeral Games* is when she is removed from the dying Alexander's chamber at Bagoas's suggestion because her demonstrative and self-pitying grief was disturbing her husband. Actually, Bagoas is not even known to have been still living then, and Roxane is attributed a movingly loving role in her husband's last days by the only, albeit unreliable, sources to speak of it.

Even worse is Renault's total omission of Alexander's mistress Barsine, who came into his life well before Bagoas and was still sufficiently part of it at least three years later to bear him a bastard son, Herakles. Lest this be supposed to be an understandable simplification of Alexander's story rather than a desperate attempt to deny Alexander such heterosexual enthusiasm, I should point out that in her biography *The Nature of Alexander*, Renault goes so far as to pour scorn on Herakles's existence despite the unanimous certainty of our sources.

Shorter, grimmer and less moving than Renault's other historical novels, mostly because none of the major characters are deeply appealing, *Funeral Games* is still excellent by general standards.

Edmund Marlowe, author of *Alexander's Choice*, the tragedy of an Eton schoolboy strongly influenced by Renault's writing, amazon.com/dp/1481222112

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### **Diana says**

It was surprising to me how good this book was.

I'm quite a fan of Alexander as a character, so I thought his absence would be noticed. In fact, his presence was vivid throughout the book, with every single character reminiscing, mourning, or fuming. Everyone had their WWAD moment, and only Ptolemy seemed to approach it correctly. (Speaking of whom, I never thought I'd grow to love someone who founded a ridiculous dynasty of sibling-fuckers this much <3)

I desperately want to see this trilogy done right in a show that resembles HBO's Rome. The only good thing that came from the movie-that-shall-not-be-named is that, in my head, Roxane is Rosario Dawson and Hephaestion is a young Jared Leto with eyeliner

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### **Anna says**

This was honestly one of the most catastrophic books ever. I don't mean it was bad, just that everything in it was awful. It's the final chapter of a trilogy that no one ever writes, the part, after the hero has died, where everything goes to absolute shit and everything he worked for and stood for disintegrates.

(I loved the afterward where Renault points out that she actually left out a ton of the murders.) The only one I noticed was Kleopatra's though because her storyline just stopped after Perdikkas's death. The worst ones were Roxanne killing the pregnant Strataira and the deaths of Eurydike and Ariadios.

Eurydike was mostly awesome and so young, she was the perfect foil for Alexander who got near everything right and could see so far, while she was so sheltered even though her nature and nurture had set her such similar ambitions. Her storyline was certainly the most well-padded out and engaging. And her end was so shattering.

Renault handled all the chopping and changing of characters really well so that the storylines linked well. Bagoas at least was left some measure of peace and Ptolemy came out smelling of roses and had the last word which was nice.

So basically everything was terrible and I loved it.

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### **Aldi says**

Whereas The Persian Boy made me want to linger, this one made me want to get through it quickly because I knew everything would go to hell in a handbasket in a major way. Like Anna says in her review, it's that third book few authors would have the gumption to write. From the intimate, loving dignity of Bagoas' voice, it switches to a brisker tone; a chronicle, still beautifully written but also much more matter-of-fact, of how

after the golden hero's death, his legacy falls rapidly and perhaps inevitably (there was only one Alexander) to pieces, his lovers dead or irreversibly diminished, his potential heirs' future precarious at best, his generals and former friends tearing down each other and his kingdom.

Ptolemy was the only breath of fresh air, wisely choosing to stay out of the succession wars and go found a dynasty in Egypt instead. I'd always liked him but I loved him madly for thinking of Bagoas and making sure he had a place that might eventually mend his soul a bit; it hurt so much to see Bagoas reduced to a broken shell, and his offhand mention of the only reason he didn't kill himself (because he didn't want to intrude on Alexander and Hephaestion's reunion) made me cry long after I thought I was done.

Apart from Bagoas, my sympathy here lay mostly with the women (Roxane, Eurydike and Olympias) who tried to make a place for themselves after Alexander's death, and were thwarted. Roxane and Olympias have mostly been characterised as ruthless murderous harpies but let's be honest, either of them could've done as good a job or better as any of the men who grasped for power; and Eurydike was mostly lacking age and experience.

The whole thing stays pretty brutal all the way through, so I was glad she chose to end on the chapter with Ptolemy; it was a little bit of a breath of relief.

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### **Brenda Clough says**

For completists and fans of the period, but less good than the first two.

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### **Alicja says**

rating: 4/5

The world wasn't ready for Alexander the Great's death; he left behind an empty throne without a worthy successor. Yet many tried... and this is the setting of this third book in Renault's trilogy. Alexander's generals formed factions and alliances for various territories or seeking regency, new Macedonians with royal blood hoped to fill his shoes, armies and brothers/fathers divided over loyalties fighting against each other while Alexander's still unborn children were used as pawns in the power struggle.

During the first two novels in the Alexander the Great series, Renault inspired awe as she led the readers through Alexander's extraordinary life, watching the pieces fall together (through missteps, treachery, and pain as well as joy, loyalty, and love), as the dreams of an empire come together. In turn, this novel takes what he had built and smashes it to pieces through folly, hubris, greed, ignorance, feuds, and idiocy. It became increasingly painful to watch Alexander's empire fall apart page after page. Not to fault Renault, she paints a beautifully heartbreakingly picture, but it became almost emotionally unbearable to get through the last 100 pages.

Additionally, there are too many characters and I just couldn't help but not be able to emotionally connect with many of them. Due to their appearances in the first two novels of the series, Bagoas and Ptolemy held my interest and continued emotional investment (although they only occupied a small fraction of the story). Aside from them, I was only able to connect with Eurydike, who was written brilliantly; which also surprised

me since Renault seems to lack many interesting and realistically written female characters in her novels, usually the women characters aren't painted in a positive light (although that also seems to reflect ancient Greek attitudes regarding women). And yet I felt for Eurydike as she, still in her teens, struggled to become a warrior Queen in a time that saw her as a silly girl.

Yet, the memory of Alexander haunts those left behind, as if taunting them in their failure. Renault ends the novel perfectly (won't spoil it) tying it back to Alexander and leaving me in tears (again).

Overall, I couldn't connect as well with this novel like I have with her other works, this may have been due to how many characters had to have been introduced or maybe because they were destroying Alexander's empire which I have come to love. However, it is a brilliant political thriller that paints the struggle for Alexander's power by individuals without even half the charisma, tactical genius, or vision. It's like a train wreck that you just can't take your eyes off.

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### **V.E. Ulett says**

The Alexander the Great trilogy was my first reading of Renault. She does so much with so few words. She's now my second favorite HF author - along side Patrick O'Brian.

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### **Crystal Starr Light says**

Bullet Review:

I REALLY REALLY liked the first half and that would have been 5 stars. But then we started doing the time warp and I felt I was really an anthology of various people who knew Alexander instead of a cohesive novel. Still some good characters, but huge leaps in time skipping numerous events. But the end was worst; large jump in time, summarizing events.

Full Review:

Alexander the Great is dead (this is not a spoiler), and the various men and even women who knew him (or of him) desperately claw to get on top of the pile and to rule over the massive Empire Alexander carved.

At it's most basic, that's exactly what this story is, though there is far more going on that this one sentence cannot get into.

I'm sitting here, thinking, and I don't even know how I would begin to do what Renault did. What happened after Alexander died, the chaos, the power-seeking - there's a LOT of STUFF that happens, many people clawing to get to the top. So many people, all with different motivations and hopes for the kingdom, whether it be unification or just a small place to call his or her own.

I loved the first half. LOVED. Slowly, I'd been "getting" Renault and her craft as I've read through her Alexander the Great trilogy, and it was the first half of this book that everything clicked. I loved the characters, the way the story flowed - everything.

The problem happened as soon as we did the year jump. In previous books, time does pass, but it's nothing quite as jarring as seeing the big block letters "320 B.C." on the top of the page. I think, in order to show as much chaos and all the different peoples' intricate plans, Renault felt she had to do the Time Warp. And I don't know if it quite succeeded. When you jump a year, there are things that happen - such a Ptolemy moving to Egypt and taking over governorship there. This is something that is a given; the audience never sees it. And it feels weird that I should just accept it happened, when normally, this would be one more piece in the puzzle. (In fact, I think Ptolemy in general gets the shaft because we hardly see him at all in the book.)

We have quite the build-up to talking about Antipatros' reign - and then fast forward to the end and boom, yet time for another power struggle! What about the politics in that year of his reign? You cannot tell me that life was hunky-dory while he was ruling, that Eurydike and Roxane and Kassandros had just thrown their hands up and accepted his rule.

These are just a couple of the instances where I felt that I was only getting a small, small snippet of the most "exciting" portions of post-Alexander life. In many ways, it felt more like an anthology, a collection of short stories than a full-length cohesive novel.

And really, the disconnectedness is what makes me rate this lower. There's still a mighty good story - I loved Eurydike, even if she was incredibly stupid at times - but it feels like excerpts of a story instead of a full blown one.

Coming to the end of this book, I felt kinda sad. I've been Buddy Reading this trilogy with my friend for over a year now, and it's sad to leave the fascinating and exotic world of Alexander behind. I have really grown to appreciate Renault and her way with words and history. To people who think all history is boring, lemme just say: If you find it boring, you are reading the wrong author! Because history is absolutely FASCINATING in the hands of a competent author.

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NOTE: Thank you to the amazing, Iset for a fabulous Buddy Read! This was an enjoyable run; let's do this again!