



Saturnalia

John Maddox Roberts

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Every culture has its wild entertainment, but the Roman Saturnalia is looked upon as the granddaddy of them all.

Roberts's vivid fictional account of the annual event takes place in first century Rome is a historically correct picture of excess, with the city's ordinary life shut down, all rules and most laws inoperative, and even slaves permitted to celebrate without restraint. At the same time, the noted family of Decius Caecilius Metellus the Younger have reluctantly summoned the young playboy, banished to the island of Rhodes for his wild ways, to seek his help in solving a crime that touches them directly and dangerously. They need him to use his investigative talents to look into the poison death of a politically powerful relative and the suspicion that it is the man's wife who administered the dose. Decius, convinced she is innocent (of this murder, at any rate) looks further for the killer---a quest that leads him to a secret, banned cult of witchcraft being practiced by highborn Romans of both sexes. With the witches at his heels, Decius plunges into the maelstrom of Rome at the height of Saturnalia, and barely escapes with his life.

Saturnalia Details

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From Reader Review Saturnalia for online ebook

Sophie says

Looked at poisonings and the opinions on witches and religions in Ancient Rome while solving the crime.

Lila says

I don't have all the books, so I am reading this #5 following #2. Comparing the two, Saturnalia holds together better as a plot than The Catiline Conspiracy. It is easier to track the characters now that we know them, but I think this plot also introduces them better. In addition to hearing more about the interesting Greek doctor Asklepiodes, Decius has picked up a young slave, Hermes, and a finance, Julia, a member of Cesar's family, who is an enthusiastic partner in mystery solving. We get lots of detail about Roman witches and the Saturnalia, the Roman Christmas.

Denise says

The holiday of Saturnalia took place during the 3rd week of December in the Roman calendar. Gifts were exchanged, families came together for feasting and merrymaking, and homes/businesses were decorated. (Note: This is where the idea for the Christian holiday of Christmas came from).

But regardless of the season, Decius Caecilius Metellus must juggle his home life (he's married to the niece of Julius Caesar...a man he does not trust), his finances (there's never enough money!), his family (will his father ever stop calling him "boy"), and the swirling politics of Rome at the end of the Republic.

Nice tight stories that move the reader along in the plot. Make sure you read these books in order or key events will be confusing!

Stacey says

Book 5 in the series, featuring Decius Caecilius Metellus the Younger a well born Roman man with a reputation as an investigator, at the time of late Roman Republic.

This isn't one of my favorites in the series. It's not as much fun & feels darker to me.

The plot is fairly straightforward. Decius' family has recalled him from his most recent exile (he gets exiled at the end of nearly every book as a result of his snooping). They want him to investigate the sudden death of Metellus Celer, who is married to Clodia, sister of Decius' old enemy Clodius. The family wants him to prove Clodia did it, but as he tells them, he doesn't work that way. He'll find out WHO did it, no matter who that turns out to be.

Along the way he becomes involved in a banned witch cult that appears to have ties to poisonings.

Lots of twists & turns & certainly held my interest.

Sandi says

Usually the family of Decius Caecilius Metellus the younger finds his interest in sleuthing unbecoming but, when a family member dies and rumors abound, Decius is recalled to Rome just in time for the year end celebration of Saturnalia. Another fun audio listen with narration by **John Lee**.

Argum says

Book 5 skips a fair amount of time where our hero was hanging out in Rhodes after the end of book 4. His highranking kin Celer has died, the family suspects Clodia killed him, and they call Decius home to prove it. It is the time of Saturnalia and about to be the year Clodius is in charge of the city, a bad time for Decius to be in Rome and going after Clodia. We find ourselves in the midst of witches and unapproved religions. The witch bit was quite interesting as were the expounding upon Roman view of religion sections. I didn't expect the killer to be who it was, but enjoyed the ending.

Shannon Appelcline says

Back to Rome! And some variety in the series. Our hero, Decius, is starting to get some respect from his peers. His father actually calls him in to look into this murder, the apparent poisoning of one of his kinsmen. Though we do get some of the same 'ole "we can't prosecute because of politics", when Decius actually figures out what's going on in the end ... he takes things into his own hands. It's good to see both the evolution of Decius' character and his relation with others.

There's also a surprising amount of continuity. A lot of the situation and the mystery comes out of setup in earlier books. I kinda wished I remember them better ...

Ray A says

Outstanding story, terrific series!

About halfway through the series (6th of 13); so far the author hasn't failed to please. Looking forward to book 7

Susanne says

Decius' Abenteuer machen süchtig. Im Moment finde ich sonst nirgendwo die Verbindung von "prodesse et delctare" (das war nun wirklich das Ende meines Lateins...) so gut gelungen! Über die römischen Saturnalien, die religiösen Bräuche und Rom allgemein erfährt man in diesem Band ganz nebenbei eine

Menge. Decius selbst, der die Abenteuer rückblickend im Alter erzählt, verleiht den manchmal etwas burlesken Szenen etwas melancholisches: Man ahnt, dass sein persönliches Glück nicht anhält, weiß (u.U. noch aus dem Geschichtsunterricht), dass sich seine Vision von der römischen Republik freier Bürger nicht erfüllt. Decius könnte als begabter Ermittler, ranghoher Adliger und selbstbewusster Römer leicht unausstehlich werden, wenn nicht seine Selbstironie und sein skeptisch-zynischer Blick auf die Sitten seiner Zeit ein Gegengewicht darstellen würden.

Jakub Spilka says

Moje první knížka ze série.

A?koliv jsem se toho bál, smysl pro historické detaily nemusel ustoupit zajímavému d?ji. Hrdina je "nedokonalý sympa?ák".

Joyce Lagow says

5th in the SPQR series, featuring Decius Caecilius Metellus the Younger, aristocratic snoop.

Many cultures and religions celebrated the equinoxes and solstices. The Roman celebration of Saturnalia took place during the winter solstice, and was a massive communal party. The social order was abolished; owners waited on slaves and the different social classes mingled freely. The festival was so popular that the Roman Catholic church moved the celebration of Christmas from January to the winter solstice to co-opt the vestiges of Saturnalia.

But of course, our boy Decius Caecilius has to be involved in something nasty in order to keep up the high jinks of the series. Back from his exile in Rhodes with his beloved Julia, Decius has been recalled (reluctantly, reluctantly) by his family to use his investigative talents to uncover the perpetrator of what the family suspects is the poison murder of the head of the family at that time, Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer (a historical figure) whose wife, Clodia, is the sister of Decius' deadly enemy, Publius Clodius, and who is the prime suspect, as least as far as the family is concerned. Decius, no fan of Clodia who nearly had him murdered in the past, is convinced, however, that this time, anyway, Clodia was not responsible. So who? His investigation leads him into the illegal, underground world of venders of abortifacients and poisons, the province of country women usually Marsians or Etruscans, who are known as saga (women herbal healers), striga (witches, far more deadly), and venefica (the most feared of all, suppliers of poisons). He stumbles over the rites of an ancient and deadly cult, barely escaping with his life (seems to be his particular talent), and goes on to uncover (naturally) a plot that involves, once again, the most powerful men in the land.

The strength of this series continues to be, not so much the historical political context of late Republican Rome, but the social one. Roberts does an excellent job of bringing the Saturnalia to life; the information about ancient cults and the role of women healers, witches, and poison sellers is fascinating. Add to that a fine sense of humor, and the series, while still lightweight as far as the mystery/police procedural aspect (just an excuse to portray Rome at that period) is concerned, is an excellent one. A fine read and excellent entertainment.

Georgina Ortiz says

In *Saturnalia*, SPQR series hero Decius Caecilius Metellus the Younger goes back to Rome to investigate his kinsman's murder. While not as hilarious and as comic as the previous book in the series, I find *Saturnalia* to be better written and its plot more well-developed. John Maddox Roberts is truly a great storyteller.

Saturnalia has all the elements of an entertaining read: suspense, horror, action, drama (that last bit with Decius shouting at Jupiter in the rain after a fight was thoroughly amusing), the works. Though the ending was a little bit abrupt, it left me wanting for more. Am actually restraining myself from downloading *Nobody Loves A Centurion* at this very moment!

Good work JMR! Hope you're finished writing the 14th book in the series because at the rate I'm going, I might be able to catch up with you :D

Miriam says

Entertaining as usual and you learn more than a couple of things in the process, definitely a very good deal!

Bjørn Håvar Falck-andersen says

Decius Caecilius Metellus the Younger grows on me. John Maddox Roberts has me hooked on this series where he combines interesting characters, a history lesson (light) on life in Rome with traditional mystery solving/crime. And it works. After finishing book 5 in this series I'm committed on spending my time and money on the rest of the books in the series.

I'm growing fond of the main character and his attitudes and approach to life. While it's annoying that he always get out of fights due to his fighting skills, I can forgive this heroic presentation of the man as the history is always presented as written by himself at a later time. It's actually a very good balance for a believable hero.

History is not my strongest side, but whether the author gives an accurate description of life in Rome at that time or not is irrelevant for how you will enjoy these books. For me the highlight of the series is exactly this insight to our past and the wonders of Rome.

Larry says

This had all of the elements of the previous books in the series, arranged in a harmonious package. Maddox portrays the city of Rome very convincingly. There are long passages where one of the characters explains to the protagonist how some aspect of the ancient world works. Maddox does this deftly, so that the reader is informed, but the exposition does not act as a drag on the plot. There was not a lot of character development,

but one would not expect to see that in a long-running series.
