



Companions on the Road

Tanith Lee

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The siege was over. The citadel of Avillis had burned, burned through the night, with its terrible Lord and his monstrous children in it. Nothing remained now but broken walls, charred stumps where trees had, grown, tattered lattices open to the sky. But at the heart of the palace the great Cup of Avillis stood untouched: pure gold, crusted with jewels each worth an emperor's ransom. Small wonder that Kachil, common thief, should covet it. Or Feluce, dapper arrogant climber; riches would mean much to him. But why did Havor of Taon, the hawk, join them to carry the cursed Cup away? For it was Havor who found that the Chalice once stolen could not be lightly cast aside, even in horror and despair. While always, inexorably, half-seen, slipping through shadows, shapes in the mind's eye, three phantom riders followed after it across the winter-blasted plain.

This chilling tale of flight and inescapable pursuit rises to a confrontation of ghostly powers. Havor thought his story could have only one ending, but the spirit world can summon Forces of Light as well as Dark.

Companions on the Road Details

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Author : Tanith Lee

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From Reader Review Companions on the Road for online ebook

Eleanor With Cats says

A novella I've passed over a few times before, now encountered as its own paperback with a nice cover and shiny gold letters for 'Tanith Lee'. It's good. I like Havor, he's honest, and it's classic 1970s Tanith Lee.

I'd be a bit curious to know the Lord of Avillis' family's backstory. Evil people who love each other. (Did they?) And why is the daughter always the actor, was she the centre of the group in life? Interesting.

Read, you'll like it.

Dannii Elle says

And this sums up exactly why I adore Tanith Lee. She is such an exceptionally clever writer that can make a 100 page novella have the depth and complexity of any a great fantasy tome.

This classic fantasy quest begins with the burning of the city of Avaris. Commander to the king's army, Havor or Taon, resigns soon after, sickened, it would seem, by the pillaging of the city around him. He leaves the burnt ruins of the city to fulfil the dying wish of a young soldier, to bequeath his impoverished family with his earnings upon his demise. But on his departure from the city he is trailed by another of his soldiers and the conversing duo, wrapped up in only each other, find their gold stolen by a surviving member of the city's waning civilisation. The thief, upon threats of death, promises to lead the pair to untold treasures in return for his life and a third of the spoils. This the pair do, but they leave the city with far more than gold as shadows on the horizon continue to dog their journey and haunt their dreams with the promise of death.

Like all of Lee's work, this was extraordinarily well-penned piece. I not only read her writing but feel every one of my senses evoked by the sensational style. There is beauty to be found in every paragraph and it makes every one of her stories a joy to read, regardless of the genre or what the narrative contains.

But these things too are a joy to devour. Despite the seemingly simple story-line and the small cast of characters, there are untold wonders awaiting to be discovered amongst the limited pages of this book, that continue to feel fresh and innovative decades after its publication.

Sunni says

This book contains two short novellas that are wonderfully well developed for their length. Both are surprisingly good and very different as well as original. Both are full of intrigue, and really caught my attention quickly. I have never encountered anything quite like them. I thoroughly enjoyed them, and would recommend them to anyone and everyone. Lee is a very accomplished writer with a vivid imagination and a talent for putting it into words. This was a book I picked up because I had nothing else to read and I couldn't have been more pleased with my accidental encounter with these two short Lee works.

Elisabeth Haljas says

A random book I really chose only based on the title. It turned out nothing what I would have expected. A well written fantasy quest with curses, magic, thieves and nobility. It was an interesting read, reminding me of the Amber series with the setting.

Karl says

Contains:

Two Novellas

"Companions On The Road"

"The Winter Players"

Larry says

This is my favorite work by Tannith Lee. It comprises a pair of novellas. Each could have been expanded into novels, but as novellas, they are tight, and lean, and focussed. Lee has a gift for making unattractive characters sympathetic, even the entities who pursue his party.

Adinda says

Tot nu toe heb ik maar één werk van Tanith Lee gevonden dat me niet beviel, en dat was dit boekje zeker niet. Met haar kenmerkende ingetogen, poëtische stijl bouwt Lee hier een gestage spanningsboog op, tegen de achtergrond van een surrealistische droomwereld. De kwaardardige geesten van Avillis kunnen op zichzelf namelijk niet zo veel uithalen, maar zien hun kans schoon zodra hun doelwit in slaap valt... Een kort maar krachtig verhaal, met een mooi einde.

Wolf says

There aren't that many great examples of the fantasy novella. Particularly these days it seems as though only monster doorstops of books (preferably part of a vast series) get published. This book is a beautiful illustration of how a short piece can be far more effective.

The story follows a group of soldiers after they have plundered a fallen city. They take a curse with them, along with their loot. One by one, it seems, the curse, or perhaps the sorcerous dead rulers of the city they burnt, will claim them.

The result is artfully atmospheric, enchanting and tense.

Tanith Lee is something of a hit and miss author, but this is very much a hit.

Jennifer (Jen/The Tolkien Gal/??????) says

You've probably never heard of Tanith Lee. You've definitely never heard of this book. Well, I'm good at picking up obscure treasures at secondhand bookstores.

Companions on the Road is the story of the leader, the baby, the thief and the charmer and their subsequent bad luck.

Havor is the young but world-wearied leader of the soldiers.

There was a sense of unfulfillment on him that twilight, that had something to do with the dreariness of the coming winter, but mostly with his own disillusion with the King's war, which he had fought for two years.

Feluce, his second-in-command, has a silver tongue, even if it is a forked one.

Feluce had a certain cruel charm, that caught some hard and held them. They admired his looks, his vicious sweet-talking, the barbed tongue that passed for wit.

And Lukon, the baby.

...a very young boy, an obedient soldier on the marsh, as yet untried in the war. This last battle, if it came, would be his first.

Kachil meets the gang when he attempts to steal from them.

He could not remember where he was, and an immediate feeling of miserable apprehension came over him. He had so often woken up like this and found himself in jail, or the cellar of some petty nobleman's house.

The group of soldiers, along with the thief, find a chalice in the ruins of the dead king's palace. Misfortune befalls them and they attempt to run away from their curse. Each misfortune befits the Achilles' heel of the respective character. Although this story is set in a fantasy world, the story is written more like a horror. A very good horror, at that. Not often does a story focus on the spoils and aftermath of war instead of the war itself.

I'm looking forward to reading more from Lee.

Edit: 3.5 stars

Leila Anani says

Three mercenaries steal a cursed chalice during the sacking of a city ruled by an evil sorcerer and his family. They hit the road intending to sell the cup, but three mysterious figures pursue them and pick them off one by one, until the hero Havor has to find a way to break the curse.

Unusually for Lee this has a male protagonist, although there is the ever present witch woman hovering in the background leaving strands of her golden hair... This felt like *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* on land, with the cursed chalice as the albatross our protagonist has to escape. You've also got the whole cup of abominations thing going on, mixing religion, myth and pagan belief which you see in some of her other books like *Blood of Roses*.

Themes:

- Evils of war
- True love
- Witchcraft
- Sin/Redemption

Although published by Beaver books aimed at teenagers, this isn't really a children's book. Its allegorical fantasy, that will delight adults just as much as younger readers. Not my favourite Lee by a long shot, its not as original or inventive as some of her books, its still well written and chilling in places, if somewhat brief.

Peter says

I wouldn't classify it as young adult or even children as other people seem to have done, it is not too complicated, and it reads easily, but definitely not something intended for children.

The world is not really detailed in depth, but feels familiar without being cliché. It's a nice change of pace to have some fantasy without all the info dumps. And as a reader you learn enough about the background to understand everything.

Short, but fun.

Timothy Jarvis says

A plangent fantasy tale; strong writing and heart.

Althea Ann says

Really, nice, really well-written quest fantasy in the classic vein. Three unlikely companions, all with different motivations, end up looting a chalice from the sacked city of Avillis.

On the road, however, they come to know that the chalice is cursed.

Will the soldier Havor be able to fulfill his vow to a dying companion; to bring money to his destitute family? Or has he met his doom with the ill-advised theft?

Tanith Lee's writing brings a richness and depth to this type of story that's rarely seen. However, this book is

very, very short. (This edition only contains the one story.) It's really a novella, not an novel.

Velocity says

A fantasy novella about a soldier with a conscience who, along with two other companions, loot a cursed chalice from an evil wizard's ruined castle, and -predictably- things do not go especially well for them. Predictable plot but entertaining nonetheless.

Shaitarn . says

I remember buying this book brand new from WH Smiths when I was a teen – it was probably one of the first books I bought myself and one of my first fantasy stories (the price on the back is £1.99; oh, how things have changed!). Then I lent it to a friend who never gave it back, so when I saw a copy for sale second hand a few years ago I snapped it up.

From the back cover: *The citadel of Avallis lies destroyed, its evil lord dead... and there is loot aplenty for the victorious soldiers. In a chill vault deep below the vanquished citadel, Havor of Taon and his companions discover the greatest treasure of Avallis – a gold chalice encrusted with priceless jewels.*

But as the three looters flee across the hostile countryside, they discover that the dark powers of Avallis are not so easily brushed aside...

This is the beginning of the story:

“The night they took Avallis was a night of blood, and blood-red flame.

It was the last city this side of the Great River, the end of the King’s long autumn campaign. The trees were already stripped back and bare as old bones when the troops came marching from the South, the skies white with snow-waiting.”

If you dislike that sort of prose you won't enjoy this story. If, like me, you do, then you may enjoy it immensely. Tanith Lee was an underrated writer. This novella (my copy was less than 130 pages) is a perfect little dark fantasy (horror dark, not grimdark). Although it would probably be marketed as YA, it's too good to be wasted on ungrateful teenagers – if you can find a copy, add it to your TBR pile.

Five well deserved stars.
