



Unicorn and Dragon

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A Fantasy Masterpiece by LYNN ABBEY, the co-creator of "Thieves' World!" Wolves are loose in the English countryside. A dying monarch cannot enforce the laws, and his heirs are circling like vultures. The small castle that is Hafwynder Manor is thrown into chaos by the arrival of a mysterious young stranger, too badly wounded to explain his plans. The forces of 11th century history invade Hafwynder Manor. Its safety - - and perhaps the fate of all England -- may depend on the deeds of the blonde, impulsive Alison and her sister, the dark-haired and cunning Wildecant. With the forces of the outside world raging at the castle walls, the two young women must learn to shape their own destiny!

Unicorn and Dragon Details

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Author : Lynn Abbey

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From Reader Review Unicorn and Dragon for online ebook

Ksenia says

I don't know what happened. For some reason I just couldn't continue reading. This book, with the cover and summary, was totally up my alley but I tried...I really tried. I guess I was just too confused at some points with the history and I wasn't met with the pressing need to find out what happened next. As it turns out, Alison was the sister that was able to "lean" on people, meaning, she was able to go into their minds; so there was the sorcery aspect of it. And Wildecant was actually not her biological sister, which is revealed early on in the book, and is the more careful and mindful of the two; all the while they are looking after a mysterious stranger who was attacked by wolves and they can't understand his language or what he was doing out there. Plus, the whole wolves thing confused me as well. The fact that wolves were out there seemed to really frighten people (more so than usual). Were the wolves supposed to be real wolves or metaphorical wolves?

Maybe I'll have to revisit this title at another time, although the other thing that is making me hesitate is that the author, according to her website, had planned this to be like 4 or 5 books. But only two were ever published. So do I want to start something, knowing that there might never be a resolution? Or do I be brave, suck it up, and just read the two books?

Rob Gates says

This was not a very engaging story. The pacing was very slow, the characters were not well developed, and there were times the story made no sense. Absolutely not what I expected or hoped for. I'm not all that interested in the history of that period, particularly its political machinations, so perhaps what was good about this story for others was lost on me.

Alex Fayle says

Can't really rate it although I remember reading it. The story isn't clear enough in my memory, but reading the description was enough to spark an "oh that book" moment, so I'm giving it a middle of the road rating.

Pam Baddeley says

The setting is Saxon-about-to-become-Norman England. King Edward (the Confessor) is dying, the countryside is beset by murderous men who turn out to be working for one of the claimants to the throne, and two women, Alison and Wildecant, raised as sisters, are caught in the struggle when a young Norman male, Stephen, staggers to their stronghold, wounded. Stephen has been attacked while trying to take a despatch cross country for his uncle. Raiders subsequently menace the countryside around, and Alison's father, Saxon lord of the settlement, has to ask Stephen's uncle for help against the raiders, even though this puts him in a difficult position because Duke William of Normandy is a rival claimant to the throne and it is not clear whether William should be Edward's successor, or Harold Godwinson or Godwinson's brother.

Alison's companion Wildecant has been passed off as an illegitimate half sister to Alison, although it emerges that she was brought to the settlement when she was five and is no relation at all. Alison has been secretly taught ancient goddess based magic from Celtic and pre-Celtic times by the sister of her dead mother. Wildecant has shared in the herbal lore taught them both, but feels left out because she lacks the psychic abilities that Alison has been trained in. They must be wary of anyone else finding out, as the church would view their abilities as witchcraft.

Despite the opening sequence of the attack on Stephen, this book is slow to get going and I struggled to keep interested. Partly because it focuses on two young women in Saxon-about-to-become Norman England, and their lives mainly consist of spinning and weaving, and creating herbal remedies, realistically enough. However, the book is fantasy, not straight historical fiction because Alison has the ability to read people's minds, and later on, a Norman male character is introduced who is a sorcerer whose magic actually works.

Wildecant's feeling left out leaves her vulnerable to the attractions of the sorcerer, Stephen's friend Ambrose, who might teach her his different magic, based on sympathetic magic and physical objects and not dependent on the psychic abilities which Alison and her aunt use, and which they view as linked to the ancient worship of the goddess. It remains ambiguous as to how much of a villain Ambrose really is, since although he is hostile to Alison and her aunt, he seems to have Stephen's best interests at heart.

I did not find the characters well defined. There is a lot of head hopping and it is hard to find any of them sympathetic, for example, Stephen makes a half hearted attempt to seduce Wildecant. Alison is characterised by being headstrong and is sometimes rash in using her gifts, and both she and her aunt are quick to assume that Wildecant - who has vague memories of her real parents and seems to be Norman - must be a supporter of Duke William of Normandy and hence cannot be trusted. The relationships don't ring true. Wildecant is probably the most sympathetic character, level-headed and putting up with a lot of suspicion from her nearest and dearest, especially as we learn that when six years old she was locked in a dark cellar for hours just for asking about her real parents.

There is one jarring continuity error where Wildecant defends herself against an attacker with a knife she had in her sleeve, but then a couple of pages later it is back in her sleeve in circumstances where she cannot have put it there herself.

Like Abbey's Rifkind books, this is illustrated, but by a different artist, and unlike those, the reproduction here is very poor and indistinct.

The story ends, not exactly with a cliffhanger, but with a question mark over the future of the two women, though it continues in 'The Green Man' which I intend to read next.

Carole-Ann says

This is a Headline Publishing Ltd edition

Shigi says

I felt like this book was a good set up for a story but the various threads never really go anywhere. You never

really grow to care overly much about Alison, Wildecant, Stephen, and Ambrose and it's never really clear how all the characters' motivations and magical meddling are actually affecting the story. Is Ambrose evil? Did any of the magic working actually do anything to affect the battle? Who are Wildecant's real parents? Are we supposed to be onboard with any of the "romance?" Are we supposed to root for one sister versus the other or just both of them against the outside forces?

Of course, now I find out that there's a sequel - but I feel that this story was lacking as a standalone and I'm not sure I need to know what happens enough to read the next novel. There's not enough emotional payoff in the first book to keep me invested.

Marianne says

An interesting idea, that feels like an expansion off the Mists of Avalon. A neat mix of magic versus shamanism. Wish the book had been longer. At it's length, and with the second book, kind of unsatisfying, and so off they go.

Rachel says

It took me a while to get into this book. Then I read it obsessively for most of two days. I ended by wanting to sue the author for ending the story part way through. This was clearly intended to be the first of a series, and the library doesn't have the follow up, if indeed it exists.

Sadie Forsythe says

I would have been greatly assisted in reading this book if I had a firmer grasp of the 11th century politics of the Normans, Saxons, English and French. I was able to follow the plot, but there was definitely a whole element I was locked out of, seeing as knowing at least the rudiments of this history seems to be assumed. As it was I thought it was interesting, but never truly felt I got to know the characters and at the end was left wondering, "Eh, what was the point?" Perhaps it become clearer in future books. This one wasn't bad, but it didn't sizzle for me either. Maybe it just hasn't aged well, being published so long ago (1987).

Camilla says

This is actually my second reading of this book. I couldn't remember a single thing from the first reading (apart from it being a medieval fantasy about a pair of sisters), which says a lot right there -- good enough to read over again, but not remarkable.

This is the first part of (I think) a two-book series. It tells the story of the daughter and adopted daughter of a Saxon landowner, and how their lives change when a half-dead Norman messenger accidentally arrives at their manor in the middle of winter. There are several interesting conflicts set up between the girls, including jealousy over the young newcomer, the consequences of the use of magic, which one girl can do and the other can't, and the adopted girl's status in the household. In addition, there's political manoeuvring amongst

the men over the succession and outlaws outside the manor walls. There's plenty happening in this book, but some of it seems contrived and the Celtic magic and "last priestess" thing seems hokey.

But it's still a fairly solid history-based fantasy, and I'd recommend it to people who enjoy that sort of thing but are looking for a simple story, not a world-saving epic in nine parts.

Joanne G. says

Although there was much I liked about the story, it missed the sweet spot by feeling more like a prequel rather than the actual story. It ends in an unfinished state. There is a sequel, but I'm not sure I'm intrigued enough to search it out.

Authors, when I pick up a book, I expect a full story--even if the book is the first in a series. I have a feeling that this book along with its sequel would make one good book.

Annie Smidt says

Ok, this is a young adult medieval wicca novel. Not my usual fare. But I remembered really liking it as a kid and felt this urge to reread. Wasn't really that great the second time around... I had trouble understanding it, actually. Guess you have to be 13.

Althea Ann says

OK historical fiction with a pagan/psychic element. I have to admit I picked it up due to the lovely Robert Gould cover.

The book is also supposed to be 'illustrated' by Robert Gould, but don't buy this because of that: this edition, at least, has the very worst printing quality I've ever seen in a book, and most of the 'illustrations' are indistinguishable masses of grey dots.

The story: set in 11th-century Britain, two 'sisters.' Allison is blond, beautiful, legitimate and not only that, heir to secret pagan powers, including the ability to influence others' minds. Wildecant is dark, unassuming, and seemingly without any remarkable powers. She's also not Allison's true sister - was she kidnapped? Adopted?

Into their manor house comes a young man, rescued from both wolves and outlaws. Since they don't get to see new people too often in their sheltered life, it's not unbelievable that both women develop crushes on him. Conflict and jealousy ensues, mixed in with magic and political conflict between Anglo-Saxon and Norman factions.

Not bad; there's a sequel which I may pick up one of these days. It has a little bit of a Mists-of-Avalon feel to it.

fawnydawnny says

Ok I feel bad giving this one star but it really was bad...in my opinion. This seemed like something I would be really into but it was confusing to say the least! I couldn't follow what was going on, it seemed really jumbled with the unexpected stranger and all the political ramifications, maybe I just had to know more historically speaking?? The sisters element was intriguing but I don't know...there could have been something there but I just didn't care for or about either of them. And the "last priestess" thing just seemed ridiculously contrived...maybe a second reading sometime in my lifetime huh?

Kat says

I really wanted to like this book. I enjoyed "Sanctuary" and the cover art is absolutely gorgeous. The admire the sense of realism imparted in the opening chapters; it really does feel like the Saxon countryside just before Duke William of Normandy takes over.

That being said, I was bored. The pacing is really slow with no signs of picking up, the limited-third-person POV jumped around with no rhyme or reason whatsoever, and most of the characters are non-entities. Alison struck me as being impulsively spoiled and everyone else except Wildecant had next to no personality. I did like Wildecant, but not enough to continue slogging through, especially since this is the first in an unfinished series. (And, spoiler, there are no actual unicorns or dragons involved.)

If you like the just-barely magical historical fantasy genre with old Briton, you might like this book, but be prepared to only find the scenery and history engaging.
