



# Shadows Return

*Lynn Flewelling*

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## **Shadows Return** Lynn Flewelling

With their most treacherous mission yet behind them, heroes Seregil and Alec resume their double life as dissolute nobles and master spies. But in a world of rivals and charmers, fate has a different plan....

After their victory in Aurënen, Alec and Seregil have returned home to Rhíminee. But with most of their allies dead or exiled, it is difficult for them to settle in. Hoping for diversion, they accept an assignment that will take them back to Seregil's homeland. En route, however, they are ambushed and separated, and both are sold into slavery. Clinging to life, Seregil is sustained only by the hope that Alec is alive.

But it is not Alec's life his strange master wants—it is his blood. For his unique lineage is capable of producing a rare treasure, but only through a harrowing process that will test him body and soul and unwittingly entangle him and Seregil in the realm of alchemists and madmen—and an enigmatic creature that may hold their very destiny in its inhuman hands.... But will it prove to be savior or monster?

## **Shadows Return Details**

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Author : Lynn Flewelling

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# From Reader Review *Shadows Return* for online ebook

## Wealththeow says

The two roguish heroes of Flewelling's "Nightrunner" series return, almost ten years since their last appearance. Only a few years have passed in their world, but they've still experienced some serious changes: not least, there is a new queen of Skala, and she has little use or trust for the Watchers. Alec, Seregil, and the remnants of their merry band are left to raise families, build inns, or play at being dissolute nobles. When the queen commands Alec and Seregil to deliver a message to her exiled sister Klia, they leap at the chance for another adventure.

(SPOILERS FROM HERE ON OUT)

But instead of the swashbuckling excitement and intrigue they (and the reader) expect, they are quickly kidnapped and sold in the slave markets of Plenimar. (The slavers in this fantasy world are dark-skinned, keep harems, and have curly beards. OH FLEWELLING NO.) There, Alec's unique half-blood heritage is both a blessing and a curse--instead of warming someone's bed or working in a field, he is bought by an alchemist, who first "refines" Alec's blood and then uses it to create otherworldly monsters. The alchemy and the creatures are chilling and interesting; the rest of the book is less so. Alec and Seregil spend hundreds of pages just sitting around their slave quarters, and the B plot (Thero and Micum, their fellow Watchers, try to rescue them) seems tacked on. All this could have been forgiven had the interpersonal relationships been interesting, or the inner monologues been insightful, but alas, that too was not to be. Instead, I had a hard time remembering who many of the characters were. Several horrific scenes were rendered significantly less horrific due to A)Flewelling's unexpectedly euphamistic style and B)not having any emotional connection to the characters involved.

This is a mediocre beginning to another trilogy in the Nightrunners series. I like Seregil and Alec as a couple (refreshingly little angst!) and Flewelling has written good court intrigue and adventure in the past. I hope she returns to her strengths.

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## Kathryn says

I managed to skip the currently reading altogether with this one! Only took me six hours, too, which I'm sure must be a personal record.

The much anticipated fourth installment of the Nightrunners series, *Shadows Return* is absolutely awesome. It picks up a year and a half after the end of *Traitor's Moon*. Alec and Seregil have reestablished their personas as Lord Seregil and Sir Alec, and have rebuilt their inn, appropriately named The Stag and Otter. Of course, they've also reestablished themselves as the nightrunners of choice of the Rhiminee elite. However, things aren't going so well for them. Seregil has fallen out of favor with many of the nobles of Rhiminee, because of his Aurenfaie heritage, even though Skala is winning the war against Plenimar--barely--because of Aurenfaie aide. Queen Phoria is resentful that Skala needs aide from the 'faie, and therefore all things Aurenfaie are out of fashion among those trying to curry royal favor. She is convinced that Skala is far too dependent on magic, and has disbanded the Watchers, the secretive band of spies Seregil and Alec were part of, simply because they had been under the direction of the Oreska House wizards. Furthermore, nightrunning jobs are getting scarce, and Seregil's heart is no longer in it. "Too much risk for too little purpose" as he puts it.

So, when the opportunity for another mission to Aurenen comes up, Seregil and Alec agree to it. While there, they are ambushed and kidnapped by Zengati slavers, under the direction of Ulan i Sathil. Ulan is seething over the events of Traitor's Moon, and is seeking revenge on Seregil and Alec. As it turns out, because of some unique properties of Alec's mixed Hazadrielfaie/human blood, he is a highly valuable commodity in the Plenimaran slave markets, and is sold to a high ranking alchemist. Seregil is sold to the same man, although neither of them is aware of the fact.

I cannot say enough about how excited I am about this book. I've been a fan of Lynn's for years, ever since receiving a recommendation for *Luck in the Shadows*. Sure, as far as plots and settings go, it's nothing new, typical fantasy fare, but Lynn's added her own unique twists. Starting with the fact that Seregil is no one's "knight in shining armor", and is more likely to run or talk his way out of a fight than stand his ground. He doesn't have any qualms about killing someone who deserves it, instead of whining about how he's a better person than that, he'd be sinking down to their level, blah blah, what crap. Not to mention he's a sexy bastard, but I digress. And Alec is as sweet as ever, Seregil's redeeming grace. Of course, he can still kick ass about as effectively as Seregil; he's got a lot to learn yet, but it's clear that their relationship has progressed far from the master/apprentice stage and they're working as equal partners now.

Another thing I like about this series is that I never get the sense that Lynn is moralizing or preaching. The fact that the protags are two men in love with each other is just a fact. Nothing special. The whole society is like that, completely nonjudgmental when it comes to matters of sex. And that in it's way is as effective at getting themes of tolerance and acceptance across as when there's a very obvious message (such as in Mercedes Lackey's *The Last Herald Mage* trilogy). There's nothing particularly graphic in them, although there is plenty of innuendo and before-and-after scenes.

Basically, I have nothing bad to say. *Shadows Return* has all the elements that made it predecessors so great--a nice blend of questing, quiet character development, action and romance.

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## Rose says

Not enjoying this book was painful for me. I've read, and enjoyed, all of Lynn's other published work. My copies of the first two novels in the *Nightrunner* series are dog-eared and well-loved. I was so excited to finally have a new *Nightrunner* novel to read after so many years, to check in with my friends Alec and Seregil at last.

But I didn't want to see them like this, in bondage, separated from each other, angsty. I suspect the homunculus-child was supposed to be kind of spooky but I just found it corny and laughable. The language is spare and lacks the polish and depth of her previous work (not her fault -- apparently the publisher demanded a fairly limited word-count).

Unfortunately, the whole thing reads like fair-to-middling fanfiction, and I was ultimately so put off by this book that I won't be reading any more entries in the series. I'd rather remember Alec and Seregil as brave and dashing adventurers, not a couple of helpless prisoners mired in psychosexual melodrama.

But hey, at least the cover art is fantastic, for a change!

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## Katerina says

La cosa più importante che ho imparato da questo libro è che non dovrà mai essere permesso a Lynn Flewelling e George R.R. Martin di incontrarsi.

Questo è un libro che, alla fine, mi ha lasciato con un sacco di dubbi: da un lato è scritto benissimo, ha una trama durissima, nonostante l'ambientazione sia limitata c'è un sacco di espansione del mondo. Vediamo Plenimar, vediamo l'alchimia, vediamo il conflitto da un'altro punto di vista. Non so quanto la Flewelling riesca ad essere realistica sulla schiavitù ma di certo è un libro che ne mostra la crudeltà e gli orrori, e che dice chiaramente che anche appartenere a un 'buon' padrone è orribile.

Mi sono trovata costantemente in ansia per Alec e Seregil e sono stata malissimo per loro, leggendo tutte le violenze e umiliazioni di cui erano vittime.

Quindi perchè alla fine non sono del tutto convinta? Bella scrittura, grande coinvolgimento, buona gestione dei personaggi... tutti elementi che dovrebbero portare al massimo risultato, no?

Il mio problema è che, alla fine, in questo libro di 546 pagine succede esattamente una cosa che avrà conseguenze a livello di trama. Senza contare che tutta la storia generale (view spoiler) ad un certo punto viene completamente abbandonata perchè Alec e Seregil si trovano lontano da tutto e tutti, e gli altri personaggi ritornano sulla scena solo quando trovano il modo di andarli a salvare.

È un libro di transizione, per certi versi, e la Flewelling mi ha colta alla sprovvista perchè non comincia come tale: all'inizio mostra i personaggi nei loro nuovi ruoli, con tutta l'incertezza dovuta all'ascesa al trono di una nuova regina che non si fida particolarmente di loro e potrebbe come non potrebbe stare cercando il modo di eliminarli, e i vari mediatori sempre sul filo del rasoio, la minaccia di essere dichiarati traditori che pende sulle loro teste ogni volta che dicono "Sì, ma...".

E poi, all'improvviso, tutta la storia converge unicamente su Alec e Seregil, e il mistero degli Hâzadriëlfaië viene tirato fuori in un momento in cui tutto il mio interesse come lettrice era investito su un'altra cosa per cui il mio atteggiamento è stato un po' "Ok, ma proprio adesso deve diventare rilevante?!"

In effetti ero così presa dall'altra storia (quella dei primi capitoli) che ci ho messo un po' ad accettare che no, non saremmo tornati lì, e no, dovevo farmi andar bene il nuovo set di personaggi perchè con quelli avrei vissuto la storia.

Non siete felici che sia riuscita di nuovo a renderla più tragica di quello che è? Perchè nonostante quello che ho scritto sopra sono rimasta incollata a questo libro finchè non l'ho finito, e ho infranto la mia regola del "Aspettiamo un attimo prima di andare avanti" perchè dovevo sapere come continuava, e dovevo saperlo subito: i nuovi personaggi sono interessanti e trasmettono tanto. (view spoiler)

È un libro coinvolgente, che non ha paura di mettere in scena sofferenza continua con praticamente nessuna luce in fondo al tunnel e nessuna possibilità di uscirne per i personaggi: se non avessi saputo che di libri ce ne sono sette, ed avendo visto le cover, avrei davvero temuto che la Flewelling avrebbe ucciso Alec o Seregil, o entrambi. Ciò non toglie che il suo sadismo sia estremo e che, davvero, lei e Martin non dovranno mai sedersi a un tavolo e parlare dei propri lavori perchè le idee che finirebbero per darsi a vicenda potrebbero portare noi lettori alla morte.

Quindi? Quindi gli ho dato tre stelline perchè nonostante io veneri il modo in cui questa donna scrive, e nonostante riesca a farmi a pezzi l'anima quando vuole, l'ho trovato un libro troppo concentrato su solo due dei personaggi che popolano il suo mondo, e (view spoiler). Ho apprezzato molto, invece, come la Flewelling sia riuscita a non essere banale e ci abbia finalmente mostrato qualcosa di Plenimar. Certo, se ci facesse anche vedere qualcuna delle persone che disapprovano alchimisti e necromanti, invece di limitarsi a dirci che ci sono, l'avrei apprezzato di più. Ma non si può avere tutto, e sono ancora lontana dalla fine.

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## **Kelly says**

Only the last hundred pages earned this one the third star. This book fell into the trap that many sequels to even good series (which the first Nightrunner books were) do, especially ones that take place after the main characters have fallen in love. For some reason the author doesn't feel the need to give either of the parties much of a personality characteristic, other than being in love with each other. Its like since they don't have to woo each other, or unwittingly fall in love, therefore they don't have to be enticing to each other.. which has the unfortunate downside that they are not interesting to me either. Instead, the book substituted with rehashing events from books past and melodramatic thoughts and dialogue that made the two protagonists entirely different characters from the ones I remember.

I just have a real problem with the idea that people suddenly cease to be themselves when they fall in love, and may have no other opinions or thoughts other than 'I love you.' That is not what happens after happily ever after. At least I hope it isn't, and if it is, stop trying to sell it to us, writers, moviemakers and song-singers of the world, because that should not be something that we should want.

However. I will admit that both main characters suddenly got interesting again in the last hundred pages of the book, when they suddenly became people again, with conflicting opinions and shades of grey in their thoughts. Only then do any interesting questions or ideas come up, or does the reader feel any interest in the outcome. Before that, the most interesting character was (view spoiler)

I also felt the book suffered from pacing problems. The first three hundred pages were repetitive descriptions of our protagonists' life as slaves, thoughts of escaping.. and doing nothing about it, pretty much over and over, and just "playing the role to the hilt," until they get a real chance to escape. Also, she dropped anvils like she was Coyote looking for Road Runner, man. Unbelievable. Her writing tone was very uneven. She often used a more archaic tone with older word choice and descriptions, and then would drop into a more modern feel very abruptly. It threw me out of the story a bit.

There's clearly an open ending, and there's clearly another book coming. I'm hoping that that last hundred pages indicated that the quality of the first trilogy will be back in the next book. We'll see!

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## **Nancy says**

[Early on, Alec and Seregil are sent on a mission by Queen Phoria to retrieve her half-sister Klia in Aurenen. They are ambushed, sold as slaves, and separated. For a good part of the story, Seregil is ill while in captivity and Alec is beaten and experimented on by an alchemist who wants his un

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## **Kaitlin says**

Okay, this book was GREAT. Especially considering the fact that this gets a whole lot darker and more creepy in paces too. Once again, we're following Alec and Seregil as they are commissioned by the Queen to go and bring back her sister, Klia. Unfortunately, on their journey the two of them are captured and taken in as slaves, and the rest of the story focuses on their attempts to learn who captured them, trying to find one another, and of course, trying to escape...

What I liked about this book is that it certainly felt like a turn in the series from a story about love, romance, politics and trickery into a really high-stakes game. We see the shift of the power when Alec and Seregil are captured, and we get to learn about magics we've not yet even heard of, let alone seen.

One of the other great points is that this book really hones in on some of the most interesting elements from previous books, such as the backstory to Seregil's banishment, and also the true nature of slavery in this world. We haven't seen or heard too much about it up to this point, but this book really shows us the crueller parts of the world and the evil masters who haunt the slaver's ports.

I have to admit that Alec and Seregil made this book great because their un-yielding love for one another and desire to escape and find the other just captured my heart again. They honestly have to be one of my all-time favourite couples in fantasy!

I really enjoyed the pacing, story and set up of plot and characters here, once again, so a solid 4.5\*s from me for this and I will of course be starting the next book very soon :D

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**? percy ♡ says**

[if ilar doesn't come back (hide spoiler)]

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**Mello ♡ Illium ★Harry★ ?Myrnin? Torin Ichimaru says**

### **Synopsis:**

With their most treacherous mission yet behind them, heroes Seregil and Alec resume their double life as dissolute nobles and master spies. But in a world of rivals and charmers, fate has a different plan....

After their victory in Aurënen, Alec and Seregil have returned home to Rhíminee. But with most of their allies dead or exiled, it is difficult for them to settle in. Hoping for diversion, they accept an assignment that will take them back to Seregil's homeland. En route, however, they are ambushed and separated, and both are sold into slavery. Clinging to life, Seregil is sustained only by the hope that Alec is alive.

But it is not Alec's life his strange master wants—it is his blood. For his unique lineage is capable of producing a rare treasure, but only through a harrowing process that will test him body and soul and unwittingly entangle him and Seregil in the realm of alchemists and madmen—and an enigmatic creature that may hold their very destiny in its inhuman hands.... But will it prove to be savior or monster?

### **My Thoughts:**

I read this straight through without going to bed. It was intense because I was soooooo scared for my boys. They suffered, but they survived. Sort of. That part at the end was damned surprising! I cried even though I did know it wasn't the end of the series. I still cried. And I've gotten as attached to Sebrahn as Alec has.

I can't believe Ulan did that! I should have been expecting it. That man is treacherous. I know he wants to make sure his clan prospers, but there was no need to make sure that Seregil suffered! It wasn't Seregil's fault

the way the open port in Gedre affected Viresse. Ulan was the one that put forth that deal in the first place! And the identity of THAT person didn't surprise me, but it was still a shock to see how Seregil learned of it. What happened to him, anyway? He ran at the end. I wonder if we'll hear from him again. I for damn sure hope not. I don't care how long he's suffered in Plenimar, still hate him.

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## **Megan Daws says**

This seems to be the least popular book in this series and I kind of get why but, at the same time, I don't think this is the worst book in the series. I think Lynn Flewelling's writing improved with every book, it was just a few other little things that made this one not quite as good as it could have been.

Since this is the fourth book, there's not too much I can say without spoilers, so I'll keep it brief:

Good things:

- Of all the books so far, I thought this one showed some great character development, particularly on Alec's part. It's great to see him being more independent and, essentially, growing as a person.

- There's a new character that I already love. I don't even care what anyone says.

- I was very happy with the plot - so far, we haven't had a case of plots being largely reused, I felt this was very original and a great opportunity to really explore the characters.

Bad things:

- There are some great side characters in this series, and they were mostly absent from this. That was very sad.

- It was a bit slow and not that much went on, especially in the first half. This didn't bother me too much but I know some people like it to be more action-packed.

- It was pretty info dumpy. There was a lot of reminding you what happened in the previous books which I suppose would have been helpful to the people reading them as they came out as there was a big gap between Traitor's Moon and Shadows Return but I've read them quite recently so those passages could be quite boring.

This was definitely not as good as Traitor's Moon, which I gave 5 stars, but I still did enjoy it rather a lot and am very annoyed at myself for leaving The White Road at uni. I can't read it until September \*cries\*

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## **Stewart says**

An overly grim and somewhat myopic fourth installment to Flewelling's Nightrunner series, in which our intrepid duo are kidnapped, enslaved, poisoned, tortured, humiliated and molested . . . and that's just the first half.

Throughout the series Flewelling has solidified such a fine fantasy realm, with such likeable characters, that even sub-par installments such as this one are still sufficiently entertaining. That said, this book needed more air and a lighter touch.

The enslavement would have worked better as a plot point rather than consuming the entire book. Also, the reunion of Seregil and Alec was very underwhelming, given the abuse they had suffered and the amount of time they had spent apart, and their bickering over Ilar seemed trivial in comparison to that suffering.



Flewelling's introduction of the rhekaro is an intriguing development, but I felt that she relied too heavily on its magical abilities in bringing the story to a close. Finally, the many wonderful side characters that Flewelling introduced us to in prior installments were sorely missed for the bulk of this one.

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## **Frankie says**

recensione sul blog: <http://thereadingpal.blogspot.it/2017...>

**A crafty nightrunner died of late,  
And found himself at Bilairy's Gate.  
He stood outside and refused to knock  
Because he meant to pick the lock.**

Alec e Seregil sono tornati a Rhímiree, ma non per molto. Phoria è ormai la nuova regina, e per testare la loro lealtà, e quella della sua sorellatra Klia, li manda ad Aur?nen per richiamare la giovane in patria. Solo che, mentre sono in viaggio, i due vengono attaccati e il loro futuro diviene più incerto che mai.

Alec e Seregil mi mancavano da morire! Questa è una delle mie serie preferite e ho un amore infinito per questi personaggi. Lynn Flewelling ha creato un mondo estremamente interessante sia dal punto di vista magico, con diversi tipi di magia e differenti modi d'utilizzarla, sia dal punto di vista più reale, ovvero gli intrighi politici e gli scontri fra regni nemici.

Purtroppo la parte politica manca quasi del tutto in questo quarto volume. Alec e Seregil vengono rapiti, diventano schiavi, vengono torturati, picchiati, divisi. Non sanno neanche se l'altro è vivo. Da questo punto di vista è stato un libro davvero tetro, e in alcuni passi un bel po' pesante da digerire. Soprattutto quando si arriva ad un punto particolare, che mi ha lasciato un macigno sul cuore. Yhakobin è davvero un essere spregevole...

Per quanto riguarda i personaggi di questo libro, Alec è sicuramente il personaggio che cresce di più in *Shadows Return*. La storia si concentra molto di più su di lui e sul suo lignaggio, e cosa esso comporta per lui e per i suoi nemici. Il rapporto con Seregil viene messo a dura prova da una vecchia conoscenza di quest'ultimo, che fino ad ora avevamo sentito nominare ma mai visto, e anche da qualcosa di più particolare. Lo spirito di Alec è diviso tra il suo talimenios e il piccolo Sebhran, che non può e non vuole lasciare indietro.

Seregil invece ha altri problemi, che da un certo punto di vista possono sembrare meno gravi. Non lo vediamo torturato quanto Alec, e la sua parte è molto più "psicologica". Diciamo che il livello di tortura che Seregil si torva ad affrontare è più sul livello emotivo e psicologico. Potrebbe essere interessante per qualcuno, in quanto vediamo un lato di Seregil che egli stesso vuole tenere nascosto, ma personalmente queste parti sono state quelle che ho amato un po' meno. Il suo passato torna a morderlo e Seregil pensa di non potergli sfuggire. Ma, come sempre, Seregil continua ad essere il solito personaggio: calcolatore, intelligente e pronto a tutto per salvare se stesso ed Alec. Certe cose non cambiano mai (e menomale)!

Yhakobin e Khenir sono fatti l'uno per l'altro. Tutti e due manipolatori, bugiardi, concentrati sui propri interessi. Eppure mi trovo ad odiare molto di più Khernir, perché si nasconde dietro ad un muro di "sono stato costretto" e "dovevo farlo". Balle. È crudele quanto e più dell'Iban che dice di servire e ho passato tutto il libro a sperare che morisse.

Nuova scoperta di questo libro invece è stata il piccolo Sebhran. Spero proprio di vederlo molto di più nei prossimi libri, perché è uno dei personaggi più particolare e la sua crescita è stata immensa nella seconda parte del volume. Grazie ad Alec, ovviamente.

Per quanto riguarda il linguaggio, mi sono trovata un po' spaesata. Se da un certo punto di vista rimane lo stile della Flewelling, da un altro lo vedo evoluto e meno "pesante". C'è una grande differenza tra i primi tre volumi e questo! Non è un male, anzi, ma è stato comunque sorprendente.

Nel complesso è stata un'ottima lettura e non vedo l'ora di leggere i libri seguenti!

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### **Devildoll says**

Here's the thing about fandom: if someone writes an MPREG slavefic, they label it as such, and you know what you are getting into going in. In profic, you sometimes aren't so lucky.

You pays your money, you takes your chances, I guess.

Here's hoping the next one will be better.

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### **Daesy says**

Well, what can I say? I love these books and I wanna adopt Alec and Seregil. This series is different from the typical M/M romance fantasy we can usually find, we don't have many sex scenes, but the author is able with little gestures, touches and loving words, to make us feel the love btw our MCs and the friendship, and make all credible. Maybe this books was a bit darker than the previous ones, but was still really good and in the end our heroes always find a way to get back to each other.

The Jealousy was a bonus, mostly because both of them don't wanna admit of being the possessive type, but fail miserably, when time comes.

(review to come soon)

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### **Jesse says**

Seregil and Alec are back in Rhíminee, but reminders are everywhere that the times have changed. Phoria is a much different queen than her mother Idrilain was, and almost everyone else has been affected by the unfolding events of the past three books...times are getting darker, and most of the characters are getting more serious and sober. Reading this installment, I really miss Nysander. Alec and Seregil are tough and can

make it on their own, but there isn't quite as much levity.

I sighed, a bit, when reading the synopsis for this and found that Seregil and Alec would be sold into slavery in Plenimar. I'd been curious about Plenimar since the beginning, since the country itself has been in the periphery for the most part.

As usual, by the time I finished reading the first page, I was hooked, and couldn't put the book down.

(view spoiler)

One other interesting thing: there is a marked increase in sexual references. Not saying I mind, because I don't! But it was interesting. Whereas sexual topics were skirted around (albeit poetically) for the most part in the first three installments, in this one the references are a lot more direct. I, for one, thought it was very refreshing (and probably also a sign of the times...the first three were written over ten years ago and attitudes have become more open-minded since then). I have to say, though, it was a pretty cool change to not beat around the bush as much.

All in all this was another solid 5 stars. I can't get enough of the Nightrunners.

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## **Meg says**

Shadows Return

OR

Alchemy! It's a Small Step Up From Necromancy

I enjoyed this one in the series more than the last two for a couple of reasons. One, it was less political. The book mostly takes place outside of Skala or Aurenen, so we're not playing the same collection of spy games. Two, without an entire cast of a couple of armies and all the politics of three nations to worry about, the book had a lot more time to focus on Alec and Seregil and their relationship. The two are the central axis on which this book turns and we get to see them and some of the problems they have together. It made their relationship more real and less of an aside.

I love the characters Lynn Flewelling writes, they are wonderfully dynamic. With the exception of necromancers, which are more monster than than character, we see very few characters who are Evil For the Sake of Evil (well, and Duke Mardus, but that was like, two books ago, geez). Characters have good sides and bad sides. Alec seems so perfect for much of what you read, but damn, when he gets a grudge, he becomes the most stubborn, prejudice little shit on the continent. He's unreasonable, angry, and even cruel. We saw some of this in the last book and we get to see more in this one. Seregil has always been a dynamic character prone to self pity, a subtle arrogance, and a stubborn streak that gets him into trouble as much as it saves him. (Don't worry, he doesn't do too much self pity in this book.)

Fun to see the two of them in the spot light, looking forward to seeing where the series goes in the next book.

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## Tracey says

First of all, what a gorgeous cover. But I was a little disappointed in the book. Not horribly so, but ... still. The previous book, *Traitor's Moon*, was so very good, and wrapped the series up so tidily, that I was surprised when I found out about the new book(s).

Seregil and Alec are wonderful characters, and what they do best is the Nightrunning – hence the name of the series. And this starts promisingly with a mission successfully completed and another begun ... and then suddenly en route to Aurënen they are ambushed, and next thing you know both of them are on ships as slaves. Well, Seregil is a slave – Alec is destined for other, even darker things, and it isn't pretty, any of it. (Except the cover.)

I've read reviews commenting that they spend far too long imprisoned; I agree, mostly, but not entirely: it's not like they didn't both try. Repeatedly. It was a serious illustration of what slavery means: you may be an intelligent and resourceful and motivated young man, but if you are enslaved, you're still a possession. All the traits that make you a wonderful Nightrunner, lover, friend, person make you a lousy slave – and lousy slaves end up dead. Unless your owner has an ulterior motive in keeping you alive, in which case they make you a spectacularly bruised and miserable slave.

The identity of the owner was startling, and inevitable in its way - and explained a lot. And his fate, not at all what one would expect, is great for the plot. The white child ... fascinating idea. I wonder if Flewelling had that in mind when she revealed Alec's parentage. It was almost as tortuous to read about its creation as it was for poor Alec to go through it (all right, not quite: hyperbole for effect); much of the book was like that. Once the lot of them are free and on the run, the fight for Alec and Seregil to regain their status quo is almost as painful; I missed them. I haven't read the next book yet; here's hoping that whatever harrowing adventures come their way the two of them will be together, and will not fall prey to the "You don't understand me!" trap. Which is even harder to read than the "good lord, they're beating him up again" situation... at least in the latter I can have sympathy for the character if the writing is good and the situation is plausible. Although it is always a little hard to swallow that with all that abuse a character emerges in the end without any permanent damage. In the former, I just want to slap everyone involved.

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## Charlotte says

While the first three volumes of the Nightrunner Series are possibly the best books I ever read in the genre, *Shadows Return* doesn't live up to its predecessors at all and left me more than disappointed.

Where the first three novels shone with a great and credible world full of detail and characters that never drifted into cliché, with a plot full of twists and turns that drew the reader into the world, *Shadows Return* lacks all of these factors.

Sold into slavery, the protagonists suddenly lack their realism and credibility from previous novels and become angsty emo-ish boys that rather remind of a mediocre YA novel than a sequel to the Nightrunner Series. Plenimar, the country they are captured in, becomes a cardboardy evil place, something the author avoided so well in earlier novels, but now falls into headlong. The story stays flat and forced, and finally even resolves to deus-ex-machina elements with alchemically created boys and over the top magic.

I hate to give this so few stars, but all of the many things I loved about the early Nightrunner Series are gone

here. What stayed are old loved characters that feel sureally twisted like in bad fanfiction, an angsty plot that lacks credibility not everywhere, but often enough, and an outcome that promises no improvement for the 5th novel, although I sure hope the next one *will* be better after all.

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**??? eg ??? says**

*[he kissed his palm and pressed it to his heart. 'Keep well, talí' (hide spoiler)]*

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**Trix says**

For some reason, I found the third novel to be less exciting than the first two. However, the fourth novel seems to have made up for any lacking in 3.

[spoiler ahead] There wasn't that much action, really, if you think about it. They head off to Aurenen only to be kidnapped, dragged through a slave market then imprisoned by a Plenimaran lord. Much of the plot of the book develops within those walls. But it was the despair encompassed with the main characters in that villa that pulls at the attention of the reader (at least this reader). I usually like my books a bit more cheery, but introducing a mad yet lucid alchemist and his sterile approach at the tortures displayed, a broken slave half crazy for Seregil and no other friends in sight to ask for help... well, it doesn't get any more lonely and despairing. I admit the author had quite a creative imagination for this volume, as some of the punishments almost left me heaving. And by mid book, I was as depressed and faithless as Alec and Seregil felt.

It was a crude world, but only such a place could stomach to create a rhekaro. And yet, just like Alex, I found myself strangely attached to the strange elixir/child. With all its oddities or maybe because of it, he was endearing and despite proof of his deadly nature, I too, felt like protecting him.

The most intense scene was of course, towards the end. Alec's sacrifice was not extremely original but the effect was just the same. I could not believe they would actually die there, together. And Sebrahn's white flowers seemed appropriate when his song could kill.[end spoiler]

I really enjoyed this book. Not only for the touching moments and romantic closeness of Seregil and Alec but also for the helpless feeling that passed through the pages, the wondrous magic and ideas that created the plot and last but not least, the happy ending that I always seek.

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