



Burdens of the Dead

Mercedes Lackey, Eric Flint, Dave Freer

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In an alternate 16th century where magic is still part of life, the Holy Roman Empire rules Europe. Constantinople is under siege by the Venetians and their allies. The great city is the crossroads of east and west, and it is here that the power of Hekate, the Weeping Woman, Goddess of Crossroads, is at its greatest. Italian captain Benito Valdosta must deal with her deadly magic in order to destroy the fleets of the Chernobog assembling in the Black Sea before they can cut into the soft underbelly of Europe.

Then, in the midst of this struggle, Benito discovers that his infant daughter has been abducted by agents of Venice's most resolute enemy, Duke Visconti of Milan. He must set off to her rescue, knowing that he will surely face his own father to do so - for Italy's greatest condottiere, the Wolf of the North Carlo Sforza, is in command of the evil duke's armies.

With land battles, naval action, assassinations, and heartbreak aplenty - not to mention the ongoing conflict between the Lord of the Dead and Benito for the love of a woman - civilization is at the crossroads. Choices must be made that will bring victory and freedom for centuries to come - or plunge the world into a new dark age.

Burdens of the Dead Details

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From Reader Review Burdens of the Dead for online ebook

Cindy says

Very good continuation of this series. they pull in other gods and more of Europe/Asia. No real surprises but the characters continue to evolve and grow which is interesting!

Jennavier says

Burdens of the Dead was meant to be part of the book before it, and it shows. I would say the Venice thread is the more interesting of the two, but without the contrast that the Holy Roman Empire thread provides it suffers. Otherwise it has the same problems as the last one. The story is muddled and there isn't much by way plot movement or resolution. The climax of the novel happened quickly two thirds of the way through and the rest was aftermath.

Jeremy Preacher says

Burdens of the Dead was rather a disappointment. It doesn't really seem to be a necessary book - it doesn't advance much character development, the military side is dull and uninspiring, and the only really interesting character is completely new.

I like spending time with Marco and Benito. They are charming characters, and I've grown fond of them over the first two books. But Marco does very little of note throughout the book other than learn and apply medicine and occasionally roar at people, and Benito does what he does without really changing as a character. All of his growth took place in This Rough Magic, and this is just a coda to that. The kidnapping never seems really threatening, and it's resolved far too quickly and easily to generate any serious tension.

Likewise the whole military plotline - they're never in any real danger, the only loss of life seems completely forced and happens offscreen, and it's never entirely clear to me what the stakes are. There are two or three amusing setpieces, but that's it. Almost all of the problems in the book are political, and none of them are all that pressing.

Hekate's plotline is the only interesting one, to me. She's the only character that actually grows and changes in the whole book, and she and her dogs liven up what would otherwise be an unbearable slog. But I'm not even sure we'll see her again. Maria is set free (far too easily, I think) from her bargain, and it's not clear that the dead-god thing is ever going to come back.

Of course, it's not clear that there's any real end in sight. There's no movement in this book towards actually approaching, let alone defeating, the Big Bad, and I have no idea how they'd even get there. I've got patience for one more book that wraps it up, but if it goes longer than that, I'm afraid the series may have lost me.

Kathy Sebesta says

I think the best one of this series. Certainly the characters are fully realised and the story well done.

Matthew says

This book operates not so much as a sequel to *Much Fall of Blood*, but as a parallel book. It happens during the same time period, but in different places and with different characters. Where *Much Fall of Blood* focused on Transylvania and the Golden Horde, and particularly on Erik and Manfred, this book brings us back to Venice, and with it, the Valdosta brothers. I enjoyed it quite a bit, though I did feel that some of the distances were handwaved in somewhat artificial ways.

Likethereporter says

A bit cutesy, this series nevertheless continues to grow on me, and now I'm impatient for the next installment. Helps that Bartholdy is out of the picture, and we're spending less quality time with Chernobog.

Jan says

I liked that the gods remain with their own issues as they did with the traditional myths. They do not just wave a magic wand and everything is solved. I have read most of the series and it does seem like the stories can pretty much stand on their own. The main characters are believable while being larger than life.

Kathy Davie says

Fourth in the Heirs of Alexandria historical fantasy series revolving around two young men...wow, *young men*. When I started this series, Marco and Benito were just kids, scrabbling for a living, and now it's 1540 Venice.

NOTE: This is not historically accurate as Constantinople fell to the Ottomans in 1453 while Lackey, Flint, and Freer (LFF) have written this story as though the Palaeologus family still ruled.

My Take

Well, the prequel was vague and introduces an unexpected element, but it's only one page and does provide a hint of what is to come.

I do love this series with the strategy and maneuvering, the tactics, the battles, and that inside look at Italian politics and magic. It's a fascinating combination of the history of Venice, its relations with its competitors within and without Italy, including Constantinople, and the gods and goddesses of the area.

Burdens of the Dead is a complex story with so much happening in it, yet LFF keep it coherent and easy to follow. I enjoyed the interaction between Antimo and Hekate. Too much time has passed since people worshipped Hekate and people have forgotten what she still expects, which makes for some interesting thought processes by both parties. I'd be curious to know how much LFF were inventing and how much is "common knowledge".

Our heroes---Benito and Marco---are atypical for the time as they want to save life, and they're not interested in power. They're good people with a lot of allies.

Oh, crack me up! I love the Venetians' reaction to Dr. Turner! If ever there was a comparison between medieval medicine and what we know today. Makes me wonder how today's medical wonders and our expectations will be viewed 500 years in the future.

"In the minds of the ordinary folk, books were a powerful testimony to intellect. Using them was not."

I did enjoy Lemnossa's battle. Useful tactics, and well enough written that I could visualize how he placed and used his ships. Too bad he couldn't be in charge of the fleet heading back to Constantinople. Of course, he might not have been devious enough to get around that idiot Borana. However do men like him get put in charge? And it's not limited to this time period. Idiots always seem to rise to a position of command. Look at the Allied command in World War I...

It's foiling plots, wreaking havoc, planning tactics and battles, and getting reacquainted with the gods and goddesses of old.

I ain't buying it that Hekate is that gullible when Chernobog lies to her. And I'd say about half of the section on Hekate becoming aware of the world again feels right but the other half was clumsily done and too "cute".

The Story

It's Mario Calchetti, one of two surviving seamen from a small convoy that was attacked, who bears witness and warns the Venetian podesta in Trebizonde who, in turn, manages to send the Eastern Fleet, led by Admiral Lemnossa, out ahead of time with its cargo of women and children to Constantinople. A city besieging its own allies within its walls.

Meanwhile, in Venice, Benito and Duke Enrico will be leading a Venetian fleet against Constantinople. It's the wrong time of the year for ships to sail the Mediterranean, but the Venetians will follow Benito anywhere. And Benito hedges his bets with help from the tritons.

It's lucky for the Valdosta boys that Maria does have that bargain to live with the Lord of the Dead as he cares enough to allow her a window into her human world. One that will prove useful in days to come.

Hekate has spent the centuries mourning the loss of her children, until Antimo changes her perspective, and she becomes aware again of the world. A change that becomes stronger after she helps with the birth of Spiro and Eleni's child.

The big question is, can they slash through all the webs Chernobog is weaving throughout their world?

The Characters

Benito Valdosta and **Maria Verrier**, the earthmother, have a daughter, **Alessia**. Benito has learned he is the son of Carlo Sforza, the grandson of the duke of Ferrara, and Benito is now acting governor-general of Corfu. He's come a long way from his canal-brat days. To help save Corfu, Maria made a bargain much as Demeter did and is the wife of the Lord of the Dead for four months every year as well as the high priestess for the **Mother Goddess of Corfu**.

Marco Valdosta is Benito's half-brother, and now, the ward of Doge Dorma and grandson of Duke Enrico Dell'este. Married to **Katerina, Lodovico Montescue**'s granddaughter, he studies medicine, treats the poor of Venice, and tries hard to avoid politics. He has been carrying the mantle for the Lion of Saint Mark since *Shadow of the Lion*, 1. The couple lives in Kat's family home, the *Casa Montescue*.

Both boys, men I should say, are beloved by the common people of Venice: the **Strega**.

Doge Petro Dorma and the masked Council of Ten rules in Venice. **Admiral Dourso** is a friend of Lodovico's. Marco suspects that **Lord Calmi** is Venice's spymaster. The **Schiopettieri** are the guard of the Ten.

Izaak ben Joseph is a goldsmith and Kabbalistic mage who lives in the Camp Ghetto in Venice. He has an affinity for his raw material and suspicious of some Byzantium gold.

Marissa di Pantara is a bastard daughter of the *Casa Brunelli* for whom the priest begs Marco to find work for her as she is depressed from the loss of her daughter.

Admiral Lemnossa is brilliant but unappreciated, bringing valuable news to Benito.

The Venetian fleet bound for Constantinople...

Admiral Dourso commands the Venetian fleet. **Giuliano Lozza**, a swordsman and landowner in Corfu, is married to **Thalia**. **Count Alfons of Valderobes** dresses well and hasn't a clue; he commands the Aragonese fleet. **Admiral Borana**, the Genovese commander, is unsure whether to be submissive or aggressive, but Benito knows how to work around him.

In Ferrara...

Duke Enrico Dell'este of Ferrara, the Old Fox, finds much to be proud of in his grandsons. His people love him, and he works to keep them and his family safe. **Lorendana**, his daughter, had been married to Valdosta and became Sforza's mistress, so her sons Marco is a true Valdosta while Benito is not.

In Milan...

Carlo Sforza, the Wolf of the North, is the most notorious mercenary condottiere (and a real life figure) in all of Italy and currently is employed by the duke of Milan. He fears his son even as he is filled with pride for him. **Francisco Turner** is Sforza's personal physician. Sforza's captains include **Melino** and **Di Galdi**.

Duke Filippo Maria of Milan will do anything to hurt Venice, including kidnapping. **Augustino, Count di Lamis**, is the duke's second cousin, and bears a resemblance to Sforza, a fact the duke uses.

In Genoa...

Doge Doria must pay attention to which way the political winds blow. **Captain Carlos Di Tharra of Sardinia** leads the first Genoese fleet and participates with the fleet heading to Constantinople. He wishes to fulfill one of his family's greatest fantasies---a meeting with Androcles, the triton.

Trebizond...

Michael Magheretti was thrilled, at first, when he was appointed podesta in Trebizond. Lucky for him he doesn't like coffee. **Signor Juliano Gambi** is feuding with **Signor Nestor Paravatta**; both are merchants to whom the Hypatians pass the warning.

Iskander Beg, an Illyrian, is the Lord of the Mountains.

Ilkhan Hotai the Ineffable, a Mongol and Great Khan of the Southern Horde, is based in Baghdad. He's gotten lazy over the years, but his wits have never dimmed. He comes to have doubts about **Grand Vizier Orason**. **General Quasji** commands in the northern march; **General Harob** campaigns in Cicilia and is a devout Nestorian; and, **General Malkis** is retired but has great influence. **Borshar** was sent as a tarkhan, an emissary, to the Golden Horde. **Tarkhan Qishkai** is sent by Ilkhan to take down Borshar.

In Constantinople...

Antimo Bartelozzi is a spy for the duke of Ferrara and has a love for dogs. **Signor Porchelli** is the Venetian ambassador. **Vestarch Kasares**, one of the eunuch administrators in Byzantium, is bewitched. **Primikerios Melekaniodes** is the eunuch in charge of allocations who tried to please too many sides.

Emperor Alexius rules, sort of. He's too weak and ineffectual to be of much use. Terrified of being overthrown and too cheap to spend the money, Constantinople has no real army nor any good commanders for what there is.

Hekate is the goddess of childbirth, witchcraft, the cares and concerns of the common people, the hunt, the Crossroads and Gateways; and she roams the roads, mourning the loss of her children, carrying her bone harpoon, and accompanied by her red-eared dogs, **Ravener** and **Ripper**. The **Hypatian Siblings** are a religious order in Constantinople with healing skills. It appears that they are very well prepared for all sorts of contingencies! **Brother Ambrose** is saved from assassination and proves a point.

The Black Brain, **Chernobog**, the monster of Vilna, is a demon prince who has taken over the body of the black-magic-using Prince and Grand Duke **Jagiellon** of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. *It's actually an improvement.* **Count Mindaug** once belonged to Jagiellon before he fled to **Elizabeth Bartholdy**, Jagiellon's contemporary and rival. **Count Tcherkas** has taken his place. **Poulo Bourgo** is a Milanese thief, mercenary, bodyguard, who can't go back to Venice, a concern that Chernobog renders immaterial even as he makes Bourgo invincible. The change makes it simple for Bourgo to enter Venice and reconnect with those from his slaving and drugrunning days. **Lord Paletto** of Venice had partnered with Poulo to satisfy his own sexual appetites and the **Di Farvelli clan** in business. **Malaki Molados** is a pimp, used furniture dealer, and drug dealer.

The **Baitini** are assassins who look to one man, supposedly: the **Old Man of the Mountain** in Alamut, their official leader, but in truth the **Supreme Master of the Hidden Hand** is one of those who gives them orders. A series of decisions from the **Master of the Blade**, the **Master of Poisons**, the **Master of the Garotte**, and the **Master of the Hidden Hand** are made from a belief in their own invincibility. **Abdullah** and **Malkis** are trapped in the cloister.

Prince Manfred of Brittany, the nephew to the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles Fredrik, and second in line to the throne, and his mentor-bodyguard **Erik Hakkonen** have left to visit the Mongol Horde (*Much Fall of Blood*, 3). Erik is married to **Princess Bortai** of the Hawk clan of the Mongol White Horde within the Golden Horde. Since he killed Borshar, he'll get the 100,000 whatever reward.

The great winged **Lion of Saint Mark** is a powerful magical creature who protects Venice; his mantle can only be taken up by one of the first four families of Venice: the **Montescue** (only Lodovico and Katerina are left), **Lacosto** (all gone), **Terrio** (gone), and the **Valdosta** (only Marco is left). The **tritons**, merfolk, include the undine **Juliette**, Umberto's sister as well as Alessia's godmother, and the triton **Androcles** are usually contacted at St. Raphaella, the water-chapel. Mages who gather to help include **Bella Santini**, a midwife; **Sister Serenity**, a Hypatian sibling; a nameless old man; and, **Trillium**, a fey child-woman from the marsh.

Aidoneous is the Lord of the Dead. In *Much Fall of Blood* he made a bargain with Maria: four months with him in his lands and the other eight with Benito. **Poseidon** is the god of the sea, a.k.a., Earth-Shaker. **Amphitrite** was his wife until he betrayed her one too many times. **Pegasus** is the son of Hekate and Poseidon, imprisoned by his father in a long ago time.

The Cover

The cover of the book I read is definitely a Baen with a colorful collage of deep oranges and blues with the black winged Lion of Saint Mark flaring and snarling atop the ruins. The cover pictured places Pegasus atop the ruins instead.

The title seems to be more of a reference to the end of this story with the new bargain Maria makes with the Lord of the Dead, to carry the *Burdens of the Dead*.

Beverly K says

If I could, I would have given this 3.5 stars. Unfortunately, GoodReads does not permit me that option.

It took me a long while to fall back into the book. It's been years since I read the previous books and having been thrust right into that world with little history rehashed meant that I spent a lot of time wracking my brains trying to recall what happened. If it wasn't for remembering that I had loved the previous books, I would have given up.

That said, I enjoyed it once I remembered enough. It was hard to grow attached to certain historical figures with lack of background about them too. I loved being back with Benito and Marco again.

Still...having waited this long for a new book and then having no sequel within sight...is frustrating. For that, I think I'll approach a series that has either finished or has at least several books out in it.

Janet says

I adore the mix of magic, schemes, battles and personalities in Lackey, Flint, and Freer's alternate history Heirs of Alexandria series. This is a large-canvas story crossing the map of the known world of 1540, and told from many points of view, like George R. R. Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire*. But unlike Martin, each novel stands alone, with one location as the central nexus of the plot: Venice, Corfu, the Mongol/Balkan border, and now Constantinople. I get sucked in to Martin novels, but I find that the scheming and pride and violence and mistakes are so sordid that I eventually feel repelled from every character. In contrast, Lackey, Flint and Freer give you plenty of people to root for -- they unapologetically have likeable heroes and villians oozing with evil (in addition to plenty of politicians with mixed motives). *Burdens of the Dead* relies

rather heavily on the affection for the characters that readers carry over from the earlier novels in the series, but not so much that I stopped cheering them on as they launched sea battles (the best sea battles since Patrick O'Brien!), unravel spies' tricks, mount rescue expeditions and lay seige to their enemies. Romance and a closer-in look at personal development were central to the previous novel in the series, *Much Fall of Blood* (which occurs simultaneously with the events in this novel, to other characters). Earlier in the series we also got a closer, more horrifying look at the capital-E Evils of the world. Rather than focusing on relationships or a new Big Bad, *Burdens of the Dead* spends more time on the Risk-board view of war and geopolitics, with a focus on cleverness rather than gory mass casualties. (Unfortunately the frontspiece map is too limited. Sorry if that's one of your pet peeves.) It has fantastic action, and satisfingly accurate historical details in many respects, both domestic and military. If your household is anything like mine, with a mostly clear distinction between the "his" and "hers" fantasy novels on the shelves, I highly recommend this series as one you can both read and enjoy together.

Gail Morris says

I hope there is more to this series - but I fear this may have been the last.

Rena McGee says

The Children of Alexandria series has the following premise: Due to the libarian/philosopher/teacher Hypatia mysteriously converting to Christianity after a debate with a mysterious figure, she is able to save the Library of Alexandria and avoid being torn apart by Christian monks. With this significant change in history, magic and magical creatures exist and continue to share a somewhat uneasy existence with the mortal world. (Magic users are accepted by the Hypatian Order, and this version of Christianity is slightly less horrible to non-Christians during this time period. **Jews and other non-Christians are still confined in ghettos but you get the feeling there are fewer pogroms.**)

Read this review on **Rena's Hub of Random** on WordPress.

Leons1701 says

Not sure why, but this feels like the weakest entry in the series so far (however, I haven't read *A Mankind Witch* yet, so who knows). Maybe it's the overlap with "*Much Fall of Blood*", maybe it's that the new characters just aren't compelling, maybe it's the lack of Eric, Manfred and Francisca. Still, being the weakest entry in a series like this one isn't exactly a huge condemnation.

There's not much character development here, but then this is the fourth go round for these folks so they're pretty well established. Benito did most of his maturing in "*A Rough Magic*", this is just polishing some of the remaining rough edges a bit. Likewise, Marco's main arc was handled in the first book. And maybe that's the problem, nobody is really being developed here. The closest we come is Antimo Bartelozzi's relationship with Hecate but I don't see much change to his character there. Hecate is the one undergoing the real change,

but she's a secondary character. Significant, yes, but only in how she interacts with the main characters.

Jill says

Humans and gods live against the backdrop of Renaissance Eur-Asia.

History, myth, and fantasy are presented as one with no distinction between them available outside of the reader's education. The writing is repetitive. There is no need to read the previous books; it is easy to catch up. The multitude of characters and constant switching of points of view causes a distraction to following the storyline. In short, the story is decent entertainment, but forgettable.

This book contains alcohol use, magic, and references to sex.

Ron says

Lackey, Flint, and Freer continue developing their alternate world where history went awry from our time-stream with Mongols, magic, demons, tritons, and gods/goddesses all taking part in history. This volume is a companion to *Much Fall of Blood* providing Benito and Maria their canvas to play out the attach on Chernobog's Black Sea fleet. Hekate, the goddess of the crossroads, becomes an integral part of the story. In all, much intrigue, backstabbing, adventure, fighting and character growth. By the end of the tale, the world is a larger place. We will have to wait to see what comes up in the next volume.
