



Shadowbridge

Gregory Frost

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"You rattle the darkness where you walk, Jax."

Enter Shadowbridge, a world of linked spiraling spans of bridges on which all impossibilities can happen. Ghosts parade, inscrutable gods cast riddles, and dangerous magic is unleashed.

Monstrous creatures drain the lives of children and for a price, you can sample their fleeting quintessence--provided the creatures don't sample you instead.

Traveling these spans is a brilliant, secretive shadow-puppeteer called Jax, who knows all the stories of love, of war, of the gods, and even of Death and his lover.

But Jax has more than a few secrets, too--not the least of which is his true identity: that of Leodora, daughter of the greatest storyteller who ever played the spans, and the woman known as the Red Witch.

Shadowbridge Details

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From Reader Review Shadowbridge for online ebook

Alicia Marselje-scott says

The writing style was what hooked me, I liked the imagery the author created. I loved the stories inside the stories, but there was no great climax, no real urgency to the story line that keeps you hooked. Overall, it was still a very enjoyable read. Looking forward to the second book.

Travis says

Shadowbridge by Gregory Frost- This is the first book of a two book adventure. The second book is called Lord Tophet. Gregory Frost's other works include; Attack of the Jazz Giants and Other Short Stories, Fitcher's Bride, The Pure Cold Light, Tain, Remscela, and Lyrec.

The story is about a puppeteer named Leodora who discovers that her father was the great shadow-puppeteer named Bardsham. It also tells the story of the troupes musician, Diverus and his strange background. The story is mostly filled with the stories that Leodora, or commonly known as Jax, tells during her shadow-puppet plays. Most of the short stories have to do with the creation of the world, which is mostly consisting of a sea and spanned by bridges called the Shadowbridge. On these bridges or spans, most of the worlds populace live, with others living on little islands around the spans. The main focus however, is on the back stories of the two main characters, Leodora and Jax. With Leodora's back story, you learn that she was raised by her grandfather, grandmother, aunt and uncle in a small fishing island beneath the Shadowbridge. Their family brings the fish to market up on the Shadowbridge. During a trip, Leodora gets separated from her uncle and grandfather and is almost kidnapped, when her family rescues her. After the attempted kidnapping, her life changes dramatically and she runs away from home with her father's friend, Soter, who brought Leodora back to her family after her birth. Diverus' story, on the other hand, is much different. He was born mentally challenged and through the power of a nameless god, he becomes aware. But he is thrown into a disgusting and horrified world before meeting Leodora.

Negatives:

- 1) Lack of Story. There doesn't really seem to ever be a solid story. Really, this book is just a bunch of shorter stories with little patches in which a main story is told after the tales. Also, about half the book is back story for the two main characters. While the 'real' story doesn't start-up until the last fifty pages, for the majority of the book it really just feels like an anthology and really nothing else. At times, it was a little frustrating to not have a main story line and that everything that happens in the present is seeped in mystery.
- 2) Scene Breaks. It was hard at times to know when a scene was done. When a scene was over, there was a strip of nothing to symbolize this. What my problem with that was, after a tale was told, it ended at the end of a page and when the next page started, I wasn't sure why suddenly we were in the present again. It was a little disorienting.
- 3) Jax's Identity. In the start of the story, we were told the reason why Leodora is Jax is because women, in this world, aren't usually allowed to do things she was doing. This is why she was Jax, her male disguise. Which is fine and understandable, but after we meet Diverus, it just suddenly is known she's a woman, yet at the same time it wasn't. It was a little confusing. The scene doing this is when Jax is trying to hide from a tavern keeper's wife's 'needs.' The problem was that we knew that Jax was Leodora, yet every other time when Jax was mentioned, it was followed with Leodora and it felt a little confusing and awkward to read something that the character was referred to in two different ways.

Positives:

- 1) Stories. Honestly, they were just great. They were interesting, well told, and really helped understand the world. They had the feel of mythology and religions that we have in our world today. Some of the stories involved various gods and heroes, reflecting things in Greek and Roman mythology. Then other stories told of the creation of the world and how death came to be. I really thought they were clever and how they were introduced was just wonderful.
- 2) Back Stories. Just like the tales within the stories, the back stories were just wonderful. They really make you care about the characters and gave a lot of insight to their personal state of being. Not only that but they were disturbing in various ways. Each story made me feel disgusted by what happens to the characters and it really makes you feel more emotion towards them.
- 3) Cliffhanger. This is yet another story that has a cliffhanger that makes it so that you can't wait to pick up the next book. This is mostly caused by the fact that you have little story and you hope that the mysteries that were given are explained in some way in the next installment. Still, the story hooks you in a way that you don't want to let go.

Side Notes:

- 1) Myths and Tales. While I mentioned them above, they still were great. I really hope to read more about this world and the various things about it.
- 2) Shadowbridges. They were just simply interesting. How something came to be is an interesting question and I liked how each span was totally different and consisted of a different culture. Even the descriptions made them sound impressive.
- 3) Cover Art. I do like it. It does give a wonderful example of the bridge and how crowded it is. It's just pretty and not really all that busy for your eyes to look at.

Overall: 4/5

Final Thoughts:

Even though there is no real story line until the last thirty or so pages, it was interesting reading about the various tales. Now I'm a sucker for mythology like what was given and the tales were entertaining to say the least. The characters were great because you connected with them and I did feel bad about some of the things they've been through. It really is an entertaining, fun read.

Daphne says

This book felt a *lot* longer to me than it actually was. I even picked it up because epic fantasy stories that aren't 600+ pages long are rare, but it almost felt like it had that many pages after all. For some reason the story just seemed to drag on forever to me.

Shadowbridge is the story of a puppeteer that collects stories and plays them out, so this book contains many shorter stories that people tell to her or that she tells to the reader. There was nothing really wrong with this format exactly, but there were many stories that didn't really feel like they were going anywhere or had a larger purpose to the book. There was also a flashback to the main character's past a little bit into the book that seemed to be almost 1/3 of the entire book in length, which was part of what made this book so slow. I probably would have been able to move past that if the story didn't go straight into *another* flashback almost straight after, this time of a different character that then becomes a larger character as well. I felt like between the different stories, the long flashbacks and the amount of time spent worldbuilding, there was almost no main plot to this book. Something only happens right at the very end, but I don't really care enough about the story to find out what it is in the sequel.

I do want to make a note about the worldbuilding, because the concept of it is really interesting and I really enjoyed the way it was described. A world that's an eternal bridge over a seemingly endless body of water has so much potential that wasn't realized very much, which is a shame.

M.L. Williams says

Frost is a talented writer who has created a fascinating world that sometimes sounds familiar then takes you on a wild imaginary ride.

Jeffrey says

Lyrical novel about a puppeteer, her musician accompanist and a strange and wonderful world teeming with people all of whom live on or below a bridge. The novel is generally divided into sections and interludes. Various interludes are stories about or by gods, or avatars of gods, demons, death and the maker of the world. The sections are bigger stories about two of the main characters Lea and Devirtus, both of whom have encounters with the Gods. Unlike Frost's earlier book *Lyrec*, this book kind of ends abruptly in the middle of the story.

I really enjoyed the novel's lyrical prose and the novel world that the story is set in.

Michelle says

I read this novel for calico_reaction's February Dare Challenge. I really enjoyed the January Dare read, *Replay* (who I ended up lending to my mom, and she loved it too!), so I snatched this from my local used book store (thankfully they had it, because nowhere else in town did) and snuck into my reading schedule. I've been super busy this month and haven't had a lot of time for reading, so thankfully this book was fairly short. :) Unfortunately, this book is also a duology, and there is no doubt in my mind that it was originally written to be one single book, but more on that in the review. No spoilers, so if you want to read the full-review, no need to worry.

To start, I have to say, I really enjoyed this book! Calico has yet to let me down.

This book's strength, in my opinion, is found in the world-building. The spans, the spirals, the bridge, everything just sounded so cool. It sounded like a world where I would want to live. I love how the cover depicted pretty much how I pictured the world, so kudos to awesome cover designs.

The story had a very fairy tale-esque feel to it, with Leodora being a Cinderella of sorts: she's an orphan who's raised by her pretty evil uncle, is ostracized by the entire community, and ends up running away so that she can become a shadow puppeteer, following in the footsteps of her late father. Leodora's back story was very sad and I felt really empathetic towards her. Poor girl couldn't get a break. Her pathetic story also had a very magical feel pervading throughout, and it really just fitted well with the story and the setting. I don't know how to explain it, but this whole book had something special about it that I can't quite put my finger on.

This can also be said about Diverus' story, which while I found a little boring at first for some reason, really gripped me after awhile. I especially liked how the brothels worked. You think they're prostituting young boys for sex, but it's actually something completely different and also very magical, like the rest of the book. It was very neat and a nifty little bit of world-building, which Frost has proven he's very adept at.

The theme behind the book is also very well executed: the power of stories, and how they change. I absolutely loved the stories that were told by the different characters throughout the story, and how even some of the flashbacks were pulled off (such as Diverus', which is introduced by something along the lines of: "This is how Leodora told his story.." or something to that effect; just brilliant.) Again, and I can't stress this enough, it just all felt so magical and really amped the atmosphere/feeling this novel gives off.

The one thing to keep in mind when reading this book is something I mentioned above: this series is only two books long, and I'm pretty positive it was meant to be one single book. For one, you can tell by the pacing. This whole first volume is set up, so if you don't keep in mind that this book was intended to be one volume, then the pacing can come off as really slow, or uneven. I've read reviews where people have said that they felt like nothing happens in this book, that it's all flashbacks, and for the most part this is true (though I would argue about nothing happening -- quite a bit happens, I thought) but if this were one book, it would really come off quite well. So, just something to keep in mind when reading. Also, the book ends on a complete cliff-hanger, so it would be wise to have the sequel on hand if you find yourself liking this first installment.

Final Verdict: I whole-heartedly recommend this novel. It's quite different from your usual fantasy fare and has some beautiful world-building. Frost has also proven to be an adept story-teller by giving us a story about stories. The book is all very fairy-tale-esque and exudes a very magical feel that just made me all warm and fuzzy and was really immersive. Be warned though: if you're going to read this book, as soon as you find yourself to start liking it, make sure to get Lord Tophet, the sequel. :) I don't have a copy yet, as they didn't carry it at any of the book stores where I live, but I'm visiting my boyfriend out of town this week, so I'm off to go buy myself a copy very shortly. And I have to say, I can't wait to read the sequel.

Holly says

I usually don't try to read serial books cause as I buy used books or borrow from the library it's sometimes hard to find the rest of the series. in this case I'll be actively looking for book two. I'm hooked...

Michael says

This is one of the most interesting, unique fantasy settings I've come across. The writing is wonderful and the story and characters really drew me right in. Highly recommend this to everyone who enjoys the fantasy genre.

Linnae says

I got about a third of the way through this one. The world-building was intriguing and unique--that's what kept me going as long as I did. Characters were okay, but I wasn't super invested.

Then I read other reviews, many of which said that this book doesn't have an ending to speak of; in other words, this and the sequel are basically one book split in half with no attempt made to tie anything up in this first one.

I got this one on a great deal \$1.99, or something like that. The second is \$9.99. I can't see myself paying full price for the second half of a story that I liked just okay. Hence, I decided to stop where I was and save myself the frustration of being left hanging at the end.

Will I come to regret that choice? Nah--I've got too many more waiting in the wings.

Jettshrek says

Roughly 60% of this book is backstory. I don't mean exposition in the prose and dialogue that, when pieced together, provides a background for the character. I mean that after the first chapter, the book literally backs up and tells the life story of the main character. Finally, about 80 pages later, the story resumes. For about a page. Then, we get to experience the life story of another character. After all that is over, another 25% of the book consists of stories and fables that the main character tells or collects. The remainder is devoted to world-building and plot. Despite that small amount of space devoted to world-building, the author does a rather good job of it, so I must congratulate him for that. Unfortunately, the book pretty much has no plot. A summary of it could be given thusly:

What you learn:

1. The characters are running from something mysterious in their past.
2. Leodora and Diverus, two of the characters, are touched by gods.
3. There's some dude named Lord Tophet involved.

What you don't learn:

1. What they are running from.
2. Anything about how gods work in this world.
3. Who the hell Lord Tophet is.

In the end, I found Shadowbridge to be unsatisfying and irritatingly slow. Nothing really happens until the end, at which point there is a cliffhanger and a tease for the next book. Disappointing.

Stephen says

2.5 to 3.0 stars. This is a tough one to review because of all the "potentially" great things about this book. The problem is that, with rare exceptions, the potential was never realized.

BRIEF SYNOPSIS

The story concerns a young shadow puppeteer, Leodora, who travels the world of "Shadowbridge" performing stories for audiences based on the myths and legends of the world. Shadowbridge itself is a huge

series of bridges (each span individually named and having a different culture).

THE GOOD

Gregory Frost is a good writer. His prose is elegant and descriptive. In addition, the world of Shadowbridge has the potential to be one of those memorable creations like Jack Vance's "Dying Earth" or Gene Wolfe's world from the Book of the Long Sun. Finally, myths and legends when told in the book (i.e., the stories within the story) are mostly excellent and very well done.

THE BAD

Much of what is bad in the book is directly a result of what I think was a mishandling of what is good. First, the world of Shadowbridge is only hinted at and hardly described or explored at all. Beyond a few enticing comments, there is no back story, info dumps, or explorations of this incredible creation of a world made up entirely of bridges. Second, the "stories within the story" are far to few and FAR to long in between. After the first 30 pages in which there are two myth stories and I thought the book was going to be great, there is an 80 page flashback to Leodora's childhood that is DRY, BORING AND COMPLETELY STALLS THE PLOT. After a brief advancing of the main plot, there is YET ANOTHER FLASHBACK, this one focusing on the other main character, a god-touched musician named Diverus. This flashback is shorter and more interesting, but still leaves you feeling like the plot is meandering and getting nowhere.

Now I have not read the sequel, Lord Tophet: A Shadowbridge Novel, which I understand really should have been combined with this novel to make one complete story. Given the quality of Frost's writing and the promise of the world he has created, I will certainly read the sequel and hope that this promise is finally realized.

Shannon (Giraffe Days) says

One of the most remarkable and unique fantasy books I've read in a while, *Shadowbridge* is about a watery world where a giant bridge goes on forever, branching off into different spans and spirals, held together by an unknown magic and the whim of the Edgeworld gods. No one knows where it ends, or if it does in fact end, or even how it came to be. There is some land - islands, hills suddenly appearing - but the people on the Shadowbridge care nothing for how their food gets to the market, or why some spans are blessed and others are left to rot.

Across the spans travels Leodora, daughter of the famous puppeteer Bardsham. She grew up on an island called Bouyan, raised by her overbearing uncle, until he pushes things too far and she escapes to the bridge with her father's old friend Soter and two large cases of shadow-puppets. Like her father before her, she collects the stories of the spans and performs them for large crowds, all under the pseudonym of Jax because women aren't so welcome here, or anywhere.

She has a mysterious Coral Man in the bottom of one case that for years called to her from the bottom of the sea. Soter is harbouring secrets about her parents, both gone now. Their new musician, Diverus, has been blessed by the gods with the ability to play any musical instrument put in his hands. And two 'men' on a scary black ship are hunting Leodora.

This is the first half of a two-book story, to be concluded in *Lord Tophet*. It is so well written, you wouldn't

be able to edit out a single sentence. I'm quite in awe. The characters are well developed and interesting; Leodora especially is engaging, quick and brave. Diverus I'm sure we'll get to know better in the next book, but I've already got a sweet spot for him. All sorts of creatures populate the spans, from all sorts of mythology, including Asian, and the architecture is just as wildly imaginative - such as the candy-coated homes of one ancient span.

I don't usually care for stories within a book, they tend to bore me. But the stories in *Shadowbridge* are wonderful. I particularly liked the one about how Death met his bride. There are still many unanswered questions about this world, but everything is carefully revealed and paced, and it's so well written (I just have to say that again) that it's hard to believe one man came up with this from his own imagination. I loved this book, and I highly recommend it.

Michael Fierce says

After reading his wonderful short story, **The Comeuppance of Creegus Maxin**, in *The Beastly Bride: Tales of the Animal People*, edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling, Gregory Frost instantly became a writer whose work I wanted to track down and research thoroughly - to the point of obsession! - to find more books by him with hope I would find one or more I would love at the same level.

My Leisa-boo purchased this for me for Christmas and I started reading it the day it arrived.

It was nothing like the unrelated short story I read, being very different in tone, and not at all lighthearted like I was expecting.

Very challenging content-wise and nowhere near your more typical Fantasy stories we are all familiar with - a great deal of which I honestly love.

After the first few chapters I wasn't sure if I was going to like it or not tbqh.

There are no stereotypes, and initially, I thought quite a bit too much reflection off of modern day evils going on in the day-to-day world for my taste, which contrasted greatly with why I read Fantasy in the first place! - **TO GET AWAY FROM ALL THAT CRAP!**

bUT.

I must admit, the nearly unlikeable characters started casting a spell on me and I found myself caught up in their stories, on the edge of my seat to know more, and really came to feel for each and every characters internal struggles and the journeys on the road ahead of them.

And luckily, to help you through some of the harshness, there was a lot of cool stuff going on around these complex figures that was very fantastic, Frost being very skilled at presenting original takes on nearly every Fantasy trope you are used to coming across ~

Ghosts, Dragons, Witches, Wizards, Afrit (basically, Efreeti who are kin to Djinn/Genies), Death and more.

~ An evil Afrit - kin to Djinni/Genies ~

All that and yet the story really centers on Leodora, an orphaned 16 year old girl who is a gifted puppeteer and storyteller, who is forced to hide behind a masked identity as she travels under and over the spans of Shadowbridge. Her travelling companions, an aggravating drunk mentor, Soter, **and Diverus, a former slave, blessed with god-like musical abilities, are both a part of her puppeteering act, as they move along the spans in fear from the figures of their recent past.**

~ The neverending expanse of Shadowbridge ~

All in all I wasn't sure if I was going to end up rating this a 3 or a 4 enjoyment-wise and settled on a 4 because of these 4 reasons:

1. It's no doubt a compelling read
2. It is written by an extraordinarily gifted storyteller
3. It really does have some absorbing, remarkable, Fantasy creatures

and most importantly

4. It gets much better as it goes along - which is a rare quality in *more challenging books* imo!

I look forward to reading the sequel and presumably final book in this series, Lord Tophet, to see where all this goes, which btw is unpredictable as all Hell, so far.

*Further, if you want to read an example of what **I think** is his BEST work, that I've read thus far, check out the short story in The Beastly Bride, I mentioned above.

**Also really want to read his book, Attack of the Jazz Giants: and Other Stories.

*****Recommended!** and very nice cover art by Thomas Thiemeyer.

The Flooze says

I'll preface this by saying that I don't generally do well with epic, sweeping tales of fantasy. If you do, then by all means, take my commentary with a grain of salt. The story is lyrical, but I can't get the beat.

Shadowbridge is an epic sort of tale, and within it are the yarns of different cultures, different civilizations. All of these stories are collected and held dear by a young puppeteer named Leodora.

Frost creates here a world filled with myth and magic and the blessings of the gods. He begins with Leodora's history, her childhood and early womanhood, telling us how the puppeteer came to her craft. Her parents are mysterious figures, of whom she catches glimpses through the stories of her aunt and of her father's old manager, Soter.

The story is slow-moving, as most epic tales are, until she meets the musician Diverus. The tempo picks up and curiosity is almost peaked.

But there aren't any resolutions to be found in this part of the story. Instead, we're left with lots of questions. And under that deluge of questions, it's hard to muster up enough interest in the answers. Frost gives us a taste of the *possibly* sinister machinations at work, but doesn't give us *enough* info to make us long for the answers.

There is a second part to the story, called Lord Tophet, and perhaps if both pieces were one volume, the reader wouldn't feel so lost, so confused. At the end of Shadowbridge, we're left with no clue what the hell is going on. And without that clue, I for one don't really care to find out more.

All that aside, the world-concept of endless spans of bridges is interesting-but without the cover illustration, it's sort of hard to conjure a mental image. The avatars of the gods are the most interesting characters, and seem far more full of life than the protagonist. The tales that Leodora collects are fascinating, especially those told by Kitsune and the Ondiont. The follow-up story may be worth reading merely for more of these captivating myths.

Ava says

Captivating

A well written story with new imaginations. The characters are attractively complex without being overwhelming. The shadowbridge world has me curious as to how it came to be.

I try to avoid series but this one has me intrigued.

I will follow it along and see where it goes.
