



Thief's War

Hilari Bell

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Knights errant aren't supposed to let the bad guy escape. But Sir Michael and his squire, Fisk, were up to their necks in mayhem (as usual) and Fisk's old mentor, Jack Bannister, quietly slithered away. Now Michael has tracked Jack to the notorious city of Tallowsport -- and it turns out Jack wasn't exaggerating when he said the crime boss he works for runs the town. With the Judicars and the Sheriff working for the bad guys, a lone knight errant aided only by his trusty squire and a pack of ragtag orphans shouldn't stand a chance. But the thing that really stands in Michael's way is that Fisk refuses to see his old teacher hang.

Thief's War Details

Date : Published March 8th 2014 by Courtney Literary

ISBN : 9780985564391

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Format : Paperback 254 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Young Adult, Adventure, Mystery

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From Reader Review Thief's War for online ebook

Small Review says

wow, that might have been the best one yet! But that ending! Aaah I need the next book now!

Originally posted on Small Review blog

Why isn't there more buzz about this series?

The Knight and Rogue series is one of those hidden gem series that doesn't seem to get talked about a whole lot but I'm gobsmacked as to why (except maybe the covers. Gotta say, I'm not a fan of them).

I'm going to try writing this review a little differently because, let's be honest, who doesn't shy away at the sight of a review for a fourth book in a series you haven't read?

But I WANT you to read this review. Not for me, but for the books, so I'm going to avoid ALL spoilers. (Still worried? Fine, here's my review for the first book instead.)

Why you should read the series

Brothers in arms

Michael and Fisk start out as reluctant allies and carry that hate mixed with love thing throughout the series. They're polar opposites, so they're always bickering over which approach to take and worrying that the other is going to get hurt because they're doing something stupid (so each believes).

The beauty is that they're both often right. Michael is the chivalric knight (in an age where knights are ancient history) driven to do the *right thing*, even if it burns him. Fisk is a snarky conman and thief used to looking out for himself. Michael's a glass half full kind of guy. Fisk is definitely the glass half empty type.

They both contribute a lot to their partnership and I love seeing them work together to become a team greater than its parts. What makes it even better is both characters get to narrate, so we get to see everything first hand through both of their perspectives.

Mystery

Each book has its own central mystery and Hilari Bell definitely knows how to write a good mystery. The clues are subtle enough that the resolution isn't totally obvious, but they're also not so hidden that I couldn't pick up on them. They come together at a nice pace, too, so the plot is always steadily building toward the big reveal.

Character depth

Michael and Fisk are the type of characters who feel *real*. Stick them in a random situation and I *know* exactly what they'll say and what they'll do. I could tell you which jokes they'd laugh at and which would fall flat for them. Put them in a tavern and I could point out the lady they'd fall for.

As far as character depth and development, Hilari Bell has written Michael and Fisk a cut above your average character. Each book sees them grow and change and come more fully into themselves.

Not your typical fantasy

These books are set in a kind of fantasy 18th/19th-ish century, but they're not at all Jane Austen. The characters aren't *improper*, but they're not Proper either. It feels more...American, maybe. Whatever it is, I like it.

The world building is pretty different, too. There's a whole system of magic and I like how even the characters don't know entirely how it works. Experiments, speculation, and fear surround magic and discovering how it works is another layer of mystery threaded throughout the books.

Improves with each installment

I wasn't IN LOVE with the first book, but I did like it enough to buy the sequel when it was on sale. I'm glad I did, because I liked that book even better. The second and third are a toss up for me as to which one I like better (maybe the second, but then again, there was that scene in the third...), but the fourth really raised the stakes (*and that ending!*) and now I am dying to read the fifth.

Bottom line

Each book is a solid, stand-alone fantasy/mystery, though they should definitely be read in order. If you're just starting out with the series, I highly recommend giving both the first and second book a shot before making any decisions. I think the story really hit its stride in book two.

For those already familiar with the series but perhaps a little wary because *Thief's War* isn't published by Harper Teen like the previous books, don't worry at all. The fourth book is a worthy addition and well worth the purchase.

I might even go so far as to say it's the best in the series, but then I remember that scene in book two...and that scene in book three...and that other scene in book two...

Originally posted on Small Review blog

Channah says

I was told that the writing quality had gone way down-hill in this book, and the ending made no sense. When I started it, I agreed. The plot seemed weak compared to the others, and the writing seemed to have been barely glanced at by the editor (note: I have the ebook. I imagine that the paper copy is better edited. For some reason ebooks get messed up a lot.)

But then the actual plot develops, the writing picks up, and it becomes just as good as the others. Even better, in fact, because of the character insights. This book was brilliant. Could it have been better? Of course. The plot was a bit weak in places. But the point was character development, and I think that in terms of that the book was a masterpiece.

THERE WILL BE SPOILERS BEYOND THIS POINT

in a way, it was everything I'd known was going to happen and had hoped wouldn't. This was what the series had been aiming for since the beginning. The ending of this book is the moment of truth.

My sister told me that she thought the ending was ridiculous. Fisk would never leave Michael. At first, I agreed with her. But when I reached the end, I saw just how wrong she'd been.

First, Fisk has never agreed with Michael. He thought the entire thing was stupid the entire time. Now, this doesn't mean he's a bad person. Fisk wants to help people as much as Michael. The difference is that Michael believes in justice, and Fisk believes in loyalty. Michael sees nothing wrong with letting someone get killed in the name of justice. Fisk doesn't. Fisk believes in helping, not hurting. He wants to help the old man up the steps, not bring the murderess to justice. We see that from the first few chapters of the first book.

But for the next two books, Fisk comes to trust Michael. And that's a problem, because Fisk believes in Michael, not in justice. So Fisk tells himself that what Michael's doing is right, and for a while he can believe that. He manages to be blind to what will happen to the people he and Michael capture. He tells himself that he's helping people more than harming them.

But in this book, Fisk can't do that anymore. He's stuck between his loyalty to Michael and his loyalty to Jack, and he has to confront the truth: Michael will have no problem letting Jack be killed. And Fisk can't handle being dragged into plots that will put in positions like that. He came for Michael, not for justice. And now he sees that he can't separate the Michael from the justice, and he can't take being hurt again.

So he does a very Fisk-like thing. He leaves.

I don't know if that made any sense written down, but that's how I see things. :)

I can't wait for the fifth book to come out. The author has created a wonderfully complex character with Fisk (I was never really into Michael... he's awesome and all, but he doesn't have much depth), and I want to see how that continues now that Fisk is free of Michael.

Mandi Barber says

One Sentence Review: This book took one of my favorite series and raised it to a whole new level.

Recommended for: Fans of character-driven fantasy that blend humor and grittiness.

Oh. My. God.

This book killed me. It literally killed me. I should have been asleep hours ago, but (a) I had to finish the book. I mean, come on, you expect me to put it down? And (b) I needed a good twenty minutes to process all these emotions before I could actually write a coherent review.

So let's start with the characters. Michael and Fisk have always been this series' main draw. They're hilarious and heart-warming (and occasionally heart-breaking)--and this book is no exception. Michael and Fisk have been together for three years now, and the ways they've both changed from *The Last Knight* are so masterfully done that I couldn't stop gushing over how *right* it all was. (Michael. Being *sensible*. Fisk, you tricky little rogue, how'd you pull that off?)

The magic continues to be both fascinating and inventive. I remember reading the first book and thinking it a fairly straight-forward system, but it's grown more complex as the series progresses--and after this book I'm more in love with it than ever. My mind was blown a couple times just because I didn't realize how much was possible with magica. (And there's still two more books to take it to even greater heights.)

But mostly what floored me was the plot. In terms of story, this book is easily the best yet. Now, don't get me wrong here; I enjoyed the plots of the previous books quite a lot, but the mystery always kind of took a back

seat to the banter. And, honestly, *Thief's War* started out similarly. By the end of chapter two, I figured I was in for another fun, easy ride.

Ha.

There's no way to fully express how amazing this book is without getting into spoilers (something I staunchly refuse to do, particularly for a book this good.) So I'll just say one thing. Atherton Roseman is one heck of a villain, and a worthy challenge for everyone's favorite knight errant.

Not to mention the ending. (Oh, *God*, the ending.) I saw it coming, and it *still* packed a punch. Is *Scholar's Plot* out yet?

But in all honesty, this book was everything I could have hoped for and then some. If you've read the series, you need to get your hands on this book right now. (And if you haven't read the series, go find *The Last Knight*, because you don't know what you're missing.)

[Disclaimer: I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.]

Josiphine/Tessa says

Certainly the weakest of the series--Michael and Fisk are best together and they were separated for nearly the whole book. My heart bled for Fisk though. Talk about a rock and a hard place.

Like the other books, this was good fun but not really good literature.

Reread: January 27 2016

I was only going to read the first chapter but I accidentally read the whole book.

Rebecca Williamson says

Charming! What makes this book so much fun are the characters, who are a delightful cross between Don Quixote and Robin Hood. The story switches back and forth between Michael, who considers himself a "knight errant" whose mission is to right wrongs, and his sidekick Fisk, a lovable rogue and a thief. Both of them are outcasts in a magical land where they are in search of adventures. And they find plenty of them in the form of trouble when they go up against the nasty villain who controls the port city along with Fisk's traitor mentor, a legendary con artist. The odds are overwhelmingly against Michael and Fisk, but they are clever and brave and loyal. Besides, a rag-tag band of orphans is on their side. How can they possibly lose? The cast of fun characters includes a guard dog that doesn't guard and a horse addicted to brew. Highly recommended!

Mara says

A copy of *Thief's War* was provided for me by the Author. I was not obligated to write a positive

review. This is my full and honest opinion.

Cover Blurp: Yes or No? Oh yes, I love the cover. It's simplistic and pretty and intriguing. And it's in keeping with the series theme.

Characters: What can I say – I'm a big Fisk and Michael fan! Michael is gallant and honorable and always trying to do the right thing and help people in distress. He's so nice that it can be labeled a flaw as well as a virtue, but I can't dislike him for it. If Fisk weren't there to balance him out, maybe his gallantry would get old – especially when it gets him into trouble. But Fisk is there, to question peoples' ulterior motives and whether or not said person really even deserves help. He's there to do what needs to be done when unlawful actions are necessary, and he's there to save their skins when Michael gets them in deep. And of course – Fisk is also there to offer his customary sarcasm. The two complement each other and make for a great duo to read about. I had mixed feelings about Jack. I didn't dislike him, though I certainly didn't trust him. I was with Michael that Jack needed to be brought to justice, but I understood why Fisk still felt like he owed Jack something – even though he didn't. Jack may have taught Fisk everything he knows about surviving the streets, but Jack has also used and abandoned him time and again. Jack never made his dastardliness a secret, though, so I can't exactly fault him for lying to Fisk, because he didn't really. But then there's the villain – Roseman. It took me a while to fully appreciate his villainy. When first meeting him, I didn't think much about him either way; I think the story had absorbed me too much for me to really analyze anyone at that point. Toward the end of the book, though, it suddenly hit me how creepy Roseman really was. Take Charles Augustus Magnussen from BBC's *Sherlock* and put him in a medieval-based world – you have Roseman. Seriously – the guy was that creepy. A blackmailer, criminal, murderer, intelligent, and above all: polite. You could never accuse him of being rude; just creepy. He, in fact, may be what pushed *Thief's War's* rating from 4 strawberries to five. But this section would not be complete without mentioning the street urchins! I just love street urchins in books, and the Author utilized them so well in this. Both adorable and believable at the same time, I totally understood Michael's love for them. These aren't just urchins who are in the story to play the usual role of urchins; they've lived a very hard life, they're not innocent (no matter what Michael says; who knows what they've had to do to survive), and they're haunted. Whoever knew that they would actually end up being the darkest part of this book?

The Romance: There isn't any!

Plot: After defeating the gang of wreckers, Michael should feel pretty good about such a feat. But one of the ringleaders – Jack – got away, and knights errant simply don't let the villains escape. Now, Michael wants to track down Jack and put a stop to him and the mysterious "boss" he works for. But in this quest for justice, Michael and his squire Fisk are at odds. Fisk will help Michael bring Roseman down, but he won't touch Jack – his former mentor on the streets. As Michael and Fisk investigate Roseman further, they begin to realize just how powerful this man is, and how far reaching his influence is. Roseman may be one man that they just can't touch. But Michael and Fisk have never backed down from a challenge, even if Fisk has wanted to. Two words: loved it! It has all of the mystery, danger, and dark humor that I've always loved about the *Knight & Rogue* series. *Thief's War* picks up where *Player's Ruse* left off. When Michael and Fisk are hired to rescue a young man from debt labor, it brings them to their first opportunity of tracking down Jack and Roseman, and possibly putting a stop to Roseman's corrupt rule of the neighboring noblemen and town officials. But they aren't prepared for this battle, especially with Fisk refusing his 100% cooperation. They get into very sticky predicaments – their stickiest yet, I believe. And no, it isn't fun seeing Michael and Fisk at odds. For the most part, Fisk helps Michael – he has no choice, if they're both going to survive. But as soon as he has to betray Jack, he won't do it, and it's painful to see their friendship hit this rough spot. *Thief's War* is less of a mystery than the others and more of just "bringing the villain down." Which is fine – every series needs to have its "different flavored" volume. *Thief's War* is not disappointing at all. And there is still some mystery. Roseman is clearly after something, and we don't know what. While Fisk is looking for a way to bring about his demise, he also discovers Roseman's "master plan." It's awesome. There isn't a dull

moment in this book, and it moves along at a perfect pace.

Believability: Not applicable.

Writing Style: First person, past tense. Each chapter alternates between Fisk and Michael's narrations. It's a lot of fun reading their thoughts. Michael has a very proper way of narrating, and is always expounding on gallantry and the dastardly deeds of villains. Fisk offers a much more sarcastic, "bitter facts of life" narration. This not only creates two very distinct narration voices, but indicates a lot about their personalities. I really enjoyed it.

Content: 1 s-word

Conclusion: It wasn't rushed exactly, but the pace definitely picks its feet up (though it is in no way slow), and dives into a rousing conclusion. Roseman loses his dignity briefly, but he still creeps me out. The worst part about the conclusion? (In fact, the only bad part about the conclusion, because it was a great ending.) Michael and Fisk's fight. I really want Book #5 right now, because I cannot live with this! I won't say anything else about it – spoilers! – but it's bittersweet. *Thief's War* is an excellent addition to this series; a great plot, an awesome villain, and of course, more Fisk and Michael! It won't disappoint any *Knight & Rogue* fans.

Recommended Audience: Girl-and-guy read, fifteen-and-up, great for fans of fantasy, be it heavy or light fantasy, and mysteries!

Rach says

"Fisk closed his eyes, like a man facing some terrible accident he can't prevent. 'I see it coming. It's not as if I can't see it coming'."

You and me both, Fisk.

Thief's War was ... intense. It has all the humor and charm that makes the series and the characters so memorable, but this time around the stakes are higher. The plot also has a bad habit of whipping around and sucker punching you right in the gut, just to make sure your feelings are still flowing.

It starts off innocently enough – Michael drags a reluctant Fisk into a new adventure to help save a young lad who got himself into a spot of trouble. The not-quite cliffhanger to Player's Ruse feels like the pink elephant strolling alongside our heroes. It was mentioned, but just barely in the first couple of chapters. At first I questioned that decision, but it really sets the book up for the tense tone that laces it way through all the events.

By the third chapter the plot takes off and doesn't stop. It places Michael & Fisk into levels of crazy they have never faced before against a truly terrifying villain. The danger to our intrepid heroes is tangible in every scene. Objectively, I should have realized that there are more books to come and thus, the characters would probably come out on top some way or another, I genuinely could not see how that would happen and feared for their lives and safety more than once. Plus you mix all of the feelings into that, with the boys being their beautiful, flawed selves trying to deal with the fallout of the situation and ... ugh. It's really tough to put down.

There are so many reasons to read these series, but at the top of that list would have to be the characters.

Michael and Fisk are treasures. The way they have grown and developed as characters was really apparently, especially when you stop and think of who they were in *The Last Knight*. Michael is still the gallant knight who just wants to help people, but he has a more pragmatic side now and at times seems manipulative. Fisk is more open about how much he cares, but with that comes a tendency to be more reckless and to make poor decisions. Fisk's motivations for everything he does are revealed better than they ever have been.

Roseman is amazing. Is it wrong to say I loved him as a villain? He was so evil and yet so brilliant. He clearly outmatched Michael & Fisk which made this story all the better. But I guess only having to try and stop one villain would have been too "easy", so Jack showed up. Oh Jack. How I have wondered about that man, ever since I picked up *The Last Knight*. It was nice to finally get a look at the man who made such an impact on Fisk. After so many hints and questions, it was really fulfilling to have the opportunity to despise the man properly.

The secondary characters did not stick with me, but boy did their actions and decisions make a lasting impression. For example, I did not have many feelings about any specific street urchin, but their outlook and mentality on life was brutal. The way those children behaved and the choices they made were so realistic, given their bleak existence, and man did I feel for them. I would have liked a little bit more from Lianna, since she was the only real female in the story to get more than a few pages, but that's a really minor quibble because it was really hard to focus on the secondary characters through the haze of plot and feelings anyway.

If the series is new then you definitely need to pick up the other three first. While the others work passably as standalone stories, this book really highlights the character development in greater detail, and you'll miss the dramatic oomph it brings by starting on this one.

You need to read this book. It was worth the wait. The ending, though. Oh, that ending...

*Apparently it's proper practice to point out that I received an advanced copy of this book but that it did not affect my review. Meh. I pre-ordered the book a couple weeks before I got the ARC & was planning to review it anyway, so all the ARC meant was I got my greedy little hands on it a bit faster. But hey, consider this properly disclaimed.

Aurora Dimitre says

Okay. Okay, this book.

So, I have been waiting for this book for a while. A few years, at least. And wow did it not disappoint.

The book started out in typical Knight and Rogue fashion - Michael and Fisk are wandering around, doing their knightly/squirely duty, when they come across something... not quite right and maybe more than a little corrupt. And, in typical Knight and Rogue fashion, they decide that they need to help out.

This time, this 'not quite right' thing is a man named Tony Rose who has seemingly taken over an entire town - and while this is tough enough, none other than Jack Bannister/Markham/whatever, Fisk's old teacher, is helping Roseman out.

The best thing about this book, like all of the others, is the relationship that Michael and Fisk share. It's the most adorable thing in the world (my favorite line from the first part of the book being "Michael clapped me on the shoulder, and his smile was like the rising sun." because apparently Fisk is a poet now), and I love their interactions. There aren't as many interactions throughout this book, but they do manage to keep in

touch, even though things to turn... well, not ideal for the two of them in the middle of the novel.

This book definitely did gain liferuin status, though. I was totally fine until those last twenty pages, and then I just sort of. Laid there and cried for a while. But it's a good book. I just need the next one desperately.

The plot was solid, overall - I was wondering how they were going to pull it off and, as always, it's interesting how they managed to do it. Hilari Bell is amazing at getting them out of impossible situations, and I love it.

Just, overall, this is a great addition to the Knight and Rogue series and a great book overall and I need the next one.

Jennifer says

The Knight and Rogue series is probably one of my favorite fantasy series. While this wasn't my favorite installment (the first book definitely maintains that position) it was still an enjoyable read. As usual, I love the characters of Fisk and Michael. Their interactions are fantastic, though I appreciated Hilari Bell's choice to have them separated for a good part of the novel. We've really never seen how they would interact with the people around them without the other one, so it was interesting to see. The ending created a whole new dynamic and I'm looking forward to seeing how Bell plays that out over the next two books.

My one major complaint with this book, and with the series as a whole, is the lack of major female characters. I'm not even talking about love interests. I'd be fine if this series ended with both Michael and Fisk single. But besides from Kathy and Lady Ceceil in the Last Night and Fisk's sisters and Nettie's Ma in Rogue's Home, there's been a sad dearth of complex and nuanced female characters. In Player's Ruse, Rosamund's biggest character trait was being beautiful. When she's mentioned in Thief's War, she's referred to as being silly and beautiful. Thief's War's only major woman character was Lianna, who had her moments, though she mostly functioned as Michael's helper while Fisk wasn't around. I really hope that this is corrected in the the next two novels. Hilari Bell writes fantastic characters and I would love to see Fisk and Michael interact with a woman who is in every way their equal. Bring back Kathy and Lady Ceceil!

Eon Ice says

Wow

Just wow. BEST book yet, hands down!! Suspenseful and amazing all the way through! You can really see the culmination of all Fisk and Michael's years together and the whole of it just SHINES <3

D.L. Morrese says

Fisk is still Michael's squire, but his first mentor was a thief and a conman. Despite being untrustworthy, Fisk feels he still owes him some degree of loyalty despite the fact that he knows the feeling is not reciprocated. In this installment of the Knight and Rogue series, that mentor is in the middle of some very nefarious goings on, and Fisk must decide what he owes to whom.

This book possibly marks the point at which the series turns from being ostensibly 'Young Adult' to being general fantasy, since the two lead characters are now in their twenties. As far as I can tell, the age of the

protagonist is how the genres are normally separated, although it hardly seems a legitimate genre defining detail to my mind. A lot of great fiction has young protagonists. In this case, the characters have grown and matured with each new book. They remain interesting, engaging, and likable. It continues to be a joy to follow their adventures.

(NOTE: The first three books in this series were published by Harper Teen and were available from my local library. Book #4 was published by a micro-publisher and was relatively difficult to find. I ended up purchasing the Kindle edition. I don't know if the switch was the author's choice or if her previous publisher made some kind of horrendous mistake by not continuing with the series.)

Patricia says

I have to admit to it being perhaps a couple of years since I read books 1-3. I have to admit that other than remembering that I loved the series, that it involved a Quixotic knight errant and his "squire" who was really his friend, that at times it was funny, and how the two of them went around trying to do good deeds, I did not remember much of anything. I have noticed that other reviewers talk about this being darker than the other books. I do not remember the series being dark (I actually thought it was fairly lighthearted--I am not usually drawn to dark--so I would have to agree that this was dark even if I don't recall the series' details. I think the darker side to this has to do with Fisk's recollections of his time with Jack, Rose's absolute ruthlessness and evil, and that there are "orfinks" involved who have very sad lives. I hope there will be more in the series.

This book seemed so much thinner than the other books that I wondered if it was intended as a novella? "Everyone" seems to be jumping on the novella wagon. Novellas often give back stories like this did about Fisk's life but perhaps it was just printed differently. I read a paperback of book 4 and the others were hardback. Perhaps that is where the difference comes in with thickness.

I did like this story, although I did not have the "euphoria" (haha) that I usually have with a 5-star book nor the "this was almost a 5 but not quite" feeling I get with a 4-star book. I recommend this series all the time but, if this book were standing alone, I am not sure if my recommendation would be as hardy. I did not love this book as much as I recall loving the other books. So I would say this is perhaps a 3.5 and I rate it 3 rather than rounding up.

Yasaman says

4.5 stars, rounded up to 5 because I love this series too much.

First of all, I'm so glad I read this one while the other two installments are already out because I *could* not have been able to cope with anything ever until I was sure I had my hands on the next book immediately. The ending of this book has one of the absolute worst cliffhangers I've ever had to endure, and I'm not sure whether that's a good thing or a bad thing; on the one hand: OHMYGOD, feelings! And on the other hand: OHMYGOD, feelings!! You understand.

I loved this book, and I find my heart breaking more and more for Fisk as the series progresses. I just want to curl him up in a blanket and hold him forever. And Michael, *god* ...in terms of angst, this one surely outdoes itself. (So far in the series, that is!)

Now, addressing the subtracting .5 star:

I just think in comparison to the last 3 books in the series, this one isn't as brilliant in terms of both plot and bantering. For the bantering, well, there weren't any with regards to the circumstances. And I dearly missed

that because, for me, one of the strongest points of this series is the bantering. As for the plot, I love how the book starts and I love the *idea* of the plot, but I just didn't think it is executed that well. It somehow feels too grand in scopes of Fisk's and Michael's adventures, and I wouldn't have minded, had it not been dealt with so easily - though I think Fisk would object. But still, there are way too few pages covering *how* exactly they manage themselves out of this one. I understood the strategy, but I wanted to read about it, not have it summarized.

I wonder if this shortcoming was due to Bell wanting to get to that cliffhanger at the end, which, by the way, I'm glad she did (while at the same time being conflicted with the way it manipulated the plot, but that's another point.) It tore my heart out at the way it plays out, but Fisk's character development needed this. His character is too precious to be neglected in favor of fluff, happiness, and laughter.

I also wonder if Bell had any other drafts of the ending of book 3 and this one. (view spoiler) Looking at the four year gap between the publication of the 3rd and the 4th book, I could see why Bell and/or the editors, etc. wouldn't want to leave the 3rd book's readers with a cliffhanger like that - but this is all *if* my theories have any right directions.

Anyway, off to read on the next one!

LadyArwen says

This book did not grip me like the others. The mystery and plot were a bit more straight-forward and easy to figure out. The characters conflicts were a bit less interesting, though I had been waiting for Fisk to go up against Jack. I was disappointed with the Rose, who I was told by many characters was a very shrewd and clever villain, but ended up being outsmarted constantly (and by children no less).

Kylie Underwood says

First off, I gave this book a lower rating than the other two because it's lacking in the thing that makes the series great for me. That is, the character interactions. Michael and Fisk are apart for most of the book, but even beyond that, we hardly ever see either of them dealing with anybody recurring who isn't a die-hard foe, and it gets a bit draining after awhile. Similarly, while the stakes are much higher now than ever before, the fact that they both feel so isolated makes it harder, personally, to become invested in what's going on. Besides that, there's a lot that is dragged on, and I can't help feeling the whole book (especially the rather thin beginning) exists simply to provide fluff for Fisk's discovery in the office, and the last scene. Which, considering this book is the shortest so far, is a bit of a disappointment. (And for me the ending was unsatisfying for various reasons, largely that it felt rather out of character.)

Now, on to the good.

The villains, the Rose and Jack last-name-up-to-preference, are absolutely wonderful. There are others of course, one or two named, most not, but these are the main players, and the best. Jack is a great way of investing us in the conflict due to his personal relationship with Fisk, and he's so perfectly indifferent that one cannot help but hate him (at the very least, just now and then). The Rose, however, is outright sinister, and arguably more crafty, but he is casually cruel, a trait that often appears in Bell's villains, and he shines above the lot.

The background characters are for the most part sort of shabby, but there's a gaggle of orphans who are about as terrifying as Roseman, even though individually none of them is exactly striking as a character. Their impact on the story as a whole is done perfectly (and chillingly, yikes, kiddos), and helps to soothe some of

my annoyances about the ending. I wish we could have seen more of them, instead of so much time lolling about in the various mansions with nameless guards, but the bits we do get are golden. And, of course, there's the Jeweler, who while not overtly original, creates some interesting world building, and about a thousand yet unanswered questions (as well as a convenient excuse for Fisk's ending up at the university in book 5, I'd venture to guess).

Now, while the past books were mysteries, this book tells you what's going on almost from the beginning, then wacks you brutally in the face with a brilliant plot twist. Don't be picking it up if you've not got time to spare, because you'll want to bolt through the whole thing in one emotionally turbulent, and amazing, sitting.
