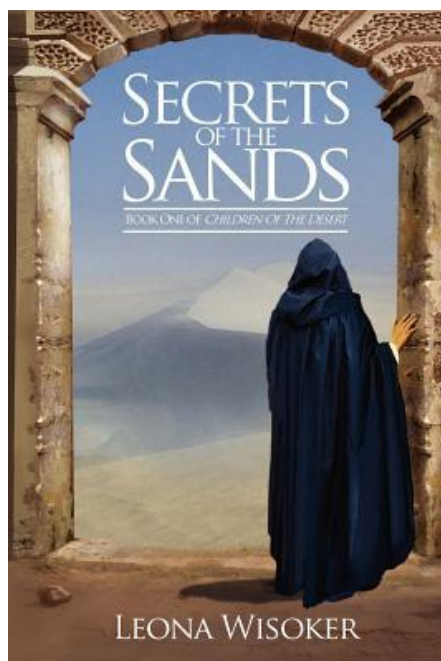




## Secrets of the Sands

*Leona Wisoker*

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# Secrets of the Sands

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## Secrets of the Sands Leona Wisoker

Cafad Scratha, a powerful desert lord with a persecution complex, believes everyone is lying to him. When his obsession collides with the king's efforts to rebuild the shattered realm, the orphaned street-thief Idisio and the king's emissary Alyea become pawns in their multilayered game. The secret world into which Idisio and Alyea are drawn will not only change their lives: it will change them.

NOTE: This book was originally published through Mercury Retrograde Press; it is currently housed with ReAnimus Press.

## Secrets of the Sands Details

Date : Published March 1st 2010 by Mercury Retrograde Press

ISBN : 9780981988238

Author : Leona Wisoker

Format : Paperback 388 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Epic Fantasy, High Fantasy, Fiction

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## From Reader Review Secrets of the Sands for online ebook

### Maureen E says

Opening: *Hee-ay, hee-ay*: the cry of the water-seller in the broad and the narrow places; *shass-shass-shass*, the warning signal to clear a road for noble blood, be it one or many together...To Idisio's sensitive ears, the cacophony wove a melodic pattern that steered him, unerringly, to the best possible target.

*Secrets of the Sands* is a richly textured fantasy, weaving together the narratives of three main characters, Idisio, Cafad Scratha, and Lady Alyea. The world it inhabits feels full, with political intrigues, geographic and historical splits, divisions between classes.

I picked this book up after seeing that Tamora Pierce recommended it and really, really enjoyed it. (Which makes Pierce two for two on her recommendations--The City in the Lake was one of hers as well.) There was nothing outstandingly original about it, but the characters were both fun and sympathetic, and the whole story seemed very solid. I never found myself rolling my eyes, or thinking, "Oh, come on," which makes for a nice change. And the worldbuilding, which is pretty much always important to me, seemed to be not just good, but effortless.

I especially enjoyed seeing the contrasts between the different cultures, that at court and that of the desert lords, and the way all three main characters have to chart a tricky course somewhere between the two. It's also a good old fashioned coming-into-power story, with all of the testing and training that implies. While sometimes multiple character narration doesn't work for me, here the fact that it was actually limited third person helped to make the whole story cohesive. And the background of the characters (Idisio is a street thief, Cafad a desert lord, and Alyea a court lady) gave a different flavor and insight into the events.

All in all, this was an extremely enjoyable fantasy, combining known elements, but with a special flavor that kept it from feeling boring or derivative. I found it compelling and readable. There's apparently a sequel, which I want to get a hold of.

Book source: ILL from my public library

Book information: Mercury Retrograde Press, 2009; adult

Recommended by: Tamora Pierce

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### Tamara says

Couldn't finish it. The story and the characters wore out their thin welcome by having having shorthand personalities moving through a boring and seemingly nonsensical plot. A lot appears to rely on pathos and charisma, but the mysterious seem constipated, the charming annoying, the spunky irritating. Rare moments of interest come balanced by bits of active badness, to arrive at a pleasing average of total meh.

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### Brian says

It started off good for me, but then flagged somewhere later on as it shifted focus more into the realm of science fiction / religious fantasy, and also shifted more focus onto a somewhat dull storyline and a character

I felt was somewhat dull (the lady noble). My problem with her character and the related storyline later in the book is that it seemed to me the author was creating a false sense of grandeur and import for the character and the events and people around her, and basically trying to make the character seem brave, impressive, special, etc. but I wasn't buying it, I found myself saying, so what, no big deal, not impressed. I guess she was supposed to be a "strong female" because she could face "sexual" and other adversity and she didn't really do anything impressive or anything to earn my respect, for most of this storyline as she was "overcoming obstacles" I was pretty much thinking it was not really a big deal.

One more thing, pretty much everyone in this book was sexually abused at some point in their lives. I guess it's potentially realistic enough, and I don't have a problem with that, but it was really so common that it seemed almost humorous to me.

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### **Lori says**

This was surprisingly good! Good enough to send me immediately to a library not in my neighborhood to pick up the next in the series.

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### **Song says**

I loved it - so much that was different and not a book (or the series) to skim through.

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### **Gwennie says**

excellent!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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### **Crystal says**

"Secrets of the Sands" is a great adventure story, one of the more entertaining reads I've picked up in awhile. The story follows two main POVs, both of which are entertaining enough that you don't find yourself wishing the author would just switch to the \*action\* already. The plot is unpredictable, enough so that what the characters think they'll be doing on their journeys is constantly getting screwed up by actual events. There's also a hint of destiny about what's going on, though it's fairly subdued and nothing so irritating as an actual prophecy.

I always try to think of something negative about a book (because no book can be perfect) and the main thing that was bothering me about the book was the quality of the villains. They're so... *villain-y*. They appeared to have no particular reason for doing evil things other than that's just the way they *are*. Luckily, the motivations of the villains were all resolved by the end of the book, adding complexity to all the characters in a perfectly satisfying way. Plus I love the ending... it's not clear cut, and it isn't easy, but at the same time it isn't completely disheartening either. Great job, Leona! Looking forward to more!

## Erin says

First half was good, 4 stars. Second half, not so much. The plot began meandering a lot...2 stars. Averaged it out to 3. Could have missed the Alyea parts and just stuck with Idisio to be honest.

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## Tanabrus says

Il libro parte molto male, con delle situazioni assurde che avvengono "perché si".

Il desert lord Scratha viene quasi borseggiato da un ragazzino di strada, e questo prima viene costretto a seguirlo per essere interrogato con comodo dall'uomo sospettoso e timoroso di complotti a ogni incrocio, poi viene nominato suo servitore.

Ci può stare che il poveretto, vedendo che il suo "signore" è in termini colloquiali col re, decida di dichiararsi lui stesso come il suo servitore. Ci sta meno che l'altro resti al gioco elevandolo davvero a questo status. O raccogliendo chiunque sia in difficoltà lungo la strada.

Ah, ovviamente la cautela a ogni passo, la sfiducia nel prossimo e il timore di complotti a suo danno non si rivedranno più, servivano solo per costringere Idisio a restare con lui fino al palazzo reale.

Poi... per quella disputa tra Famiglie (che poi in realtà sembra non fosse neanche tale) il re manda Idisio a fargli da storico reale per redigere un bel tomo sul suo regno? Davvero?

E che dire di chi lui manda per farne le veci? Una ragazza nobile, sveglia sì e in passato sua occasionale amante nonché sua alleata nella salita al trono, ma di città. Una che non ha mai visto o saputo nulla sul deserto del sud, e che viene spedita senza la minima preparazione in un gioco di tradizioni e intrighi enormemente più grande di lei, con due "assassini" come consiglieri.

Altra mossa geniale e ben pensata.

Per fortuna, a quanto pare, l'autrice aveva solo degli enormi problemi ad avviare la storia come voleva lei: Alyea verso il sud, Scratha in una sorta di pseudo-viaggio di formazione (che in realtà non è neanche tale, ma per sbaglio inciampa nella notizia che gli cambia la vita) con il giovade ladruncolo Idisio e la stalliera Riss.

Tralasciamo poi sulla rivelazione relativa a Idisio, che fa pensare "mamma mia quando si dice il caso, eh?" o alla trovata imbarazzante di far diventare per il prossimo libro, tra una dipendenza involontaria a una "droga dello stupro" e un effetto collaterale di una prova segreta, le due donne del libro praticamente in calore, avvertendoci fin da ora che avranno impulsi sessuali fortissimi e quasi irrefrenabili.

L'ambientazione sarebbe interessante (e per me la vera forma delle creature è draconica... il risentimento al Muro è dovuto all'essere una prima generazione), la storia potrebbe anche esserlo. Ma l'inizio e alcuni sviluppi della trama sono davvero imbarazzanti. Dòla sufficienza perché comunque è scritto bene.

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## Cindy says

When I first started reading Secrets of the Sands I wasn't sure what to think. There was something around page 80 or so that snapped my attention and I literally could not put this book down (I read it while I played computer games, walked and talked it was that bad).

The characters were interesting, and the world that Wisoker creates is very detailed and enjoyable to read about. The world is a bit dark at times with drugs, sex and violence but it's the way the world it brought to the reader that really makes it pop throughout the plot.

I don't want to spoil anything but I loved how she eventually brought both character POV's to one. The amount of political intrigue really kept me reading.

There is a bit of humor at times in this book, but not so much that it's overdone or stale. There were parts where I found myself chucking or laughing.

I found myself growing to love and truly care about every single character in this book. It was as if the reader saw the characters grow, and change right before their eyes and that was really fun and amazing. I am proud to say that I will gladly be reading the second book, I wish it were out right now I'd jump right into it.

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## Andrew Hiller says

Leona Wisoker's Secrets of the Sands unfolds slowly, its layers revealing a rich world full of politics, spirits, obligations, destiny, and duty. From the first page, the reader finds themselves immersed in a world that feels fully realized and much deeper than the events of the story. In fact, the weight and import of history underpins every action in Wisoker's tale. Better, the characters are not made of cardboard. Even the minor characters have shadow, light, weight, and girth. You empathize and root for them. You hiss at the unfairness of their predicament and how they are tossed about so unprepared for what is about to befall them.

The story takes place on two tracks that inevitably weave together. Normally, I don't like this mechanism, even though it is a mainstay of fantasy... and to be fair, there were times when I groaned when I had to leave one character's narrative to resume another. Still, the stories came together in a satisfying way and the way Wisoker crafts the story allows the reader sees the puzzle pieces coming together so the disappointment is minimized. The story does follow some classic tropes of the genre. The hero is orphaned (actually, from one perspective all three heroes are), he discovers his origin and special nature as the tale unwinds, and is tested. That said, this is not a simple story that follows the heroes' journey. It thankfully follows its own branch and thread.

The only real frustration in Sands for me is that the conclusion of the story felt too much like a set up for the next book. This is mitigated by the fact that the next book is available, but I would have liked this story to conclude with more of a musical crescendo and less of a bridge into the next movement.

Overall, I really liked Wisoker's Secrets of the Sands and I think readers who enjoy epic fantasy ought to give it a shot. I think they will be in for a fun ride, a thoughtful excursion, and an exploration of identity. I'll gladly continue reading her work and look forward to discovering how are heroes develop.

Minor Disclaimer: I received this book as part of an author's book swap as Mars Con. I didn't know Leona previous to the event, but did sit on a panel with her. I found her as delightful as her literary work.

## Forgottendreamr says

While there was nothing stunning or original, Wisoker managed to sidestep a lot of the cliché pitfalls I was worried about. Good enough that I will probably read the second.

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## Mav says

An epic fantasy that actively and frequently addresses matters of sex, gender, sexual violence, consent, and rape culture while giving us a great story with adventure, mystery, suspense, and political intrigue. Plus, the setting in pseudo-medieval Europe! This book needs to be rec'd to every female fantasy reader tired of the same.

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## T. Bakutis says

Leona Wisoker's "Secrets of the Sands" is an excellent traditional fantasy read, and I was surprised by how quickly it caught and held my interest. The world introduced in this book is dangerous and complicated, its politics more so, but Wisoker struck a good balance between moving the plot forward and explaining the intricate political dance of northern kings, desert lords, and inscrutable beings far older than both. I was never confused about why things were happening, nor did I get lost in exposition. Everything was revealed or explained right when it was needed, and never in excess.

The two POV characters, Idisio and Alyea, were relatable, interesting, and believably flawed, and the rest of the cast (including Cafad Scratha, Idisio's mentor, and Deiq, the inscrutable thorn in Alyea's side) ranged from powerful to mysterious while retaining obvious quirks and weaknesses. The book keeps you guessing (Alyea's journey, in particular, is a dangerous game of Who Should She Trust) and though it tackles some darker topics (including the inevitable reality of Idisio's life on the streets) it does so with tact and subtlety that were well thought out. Even the darker elements of the world (and some of them are pretty dark) are never glorified or watered down. They are justified pieces of an interesting story.

For my subjective critique, it would say that I did notice the book was sharply separated into two threads—there's usually an Idisio chapter followed by an Alyea chapter, and so on for the duration, with no real interaction or obvious crossover until near the end. It was not initially clear to me how these two threads were going to intersect (or why I kept hopping back and forth) and I found this a bit off-putting at times. However, the connection and inevitable endgame do become obvious near the end of the book, and once I saw where their two tales would meet, I found myself really looking forward to the climax. I do think I might have enjoyed the book a little more if I'd seen this connection earlier, and if I'd been able to remain with Idisio or Alyea for more than a chapter at a time.

As another plus, Wisoker's prose is extremely clean and easy to read—this is one well written tale. While the first book in the series certainly leaves room for a sequel (cleverly foreshadowed in the final pages) Secrets of the Sands remains a complete story in its own right. I look forward to the next book.

In summary, Wisoker's introduction to her larger "Children of the Sands" series is a well-written, well-paced, and fascinating tale of dangerous politics and subtle magic told through the eyes of two sympathetic

and enjoyable POV characters on separate (but eventually intersecting) paths.

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## **Bastard says**

<http://bastardbooks.blogspot.com/2011...>

Secrets of the Sands is Leona Wisoker's debut novel, first of the Children of the Desert series. Book came out last year in 2010, and it's published by Mercury Retrograde Press. Secrets of the Sands was one of my favorite reads last year, and if there's one book out there that I think should be read, or at least tried, by more people it's this one.

The most important aspect of this book is that it was quite evident that Leona Wisoker is a very talented and skillful writer. But don't take my word for it since where it really matters, I don't know shit about writing. Yet, when you stumble upon a skillful writer you can just tell they're good. The second most important thing of this book is that once you're done with it, you can tell that a lot of care has been put into it's creation. The paperback felt of high quality, and at the end of the novel the author includes a bunch of extra material to enrich the world building.

I don't know if the offer is still there, but when I bought the paperback, it came with an option to "buy" a free electronic copy of the novel, so that should interest some.

Don't have much more to say at the moment since I read it last year and the details are quite fuzzy, but here's a better detailed review by Fantasy Book Critic which should be more useful. In all, the book should have something for everyone a bit of action, a bit of romance, some political intrigue, magic, mystery, suspense. And while the plot itself might not work for everyone, I think I can almost guarantee that at the very least you will go away thinking that you read something well crafted in some manner.

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## **Paul says**

DNF at 20% , this wasn't the story I expected I thought I would get a desert setting where life is harsh not taverns with all sort of food being severed like pheasant, and have Sultans not kings and nobles in the story but what really annoyed me was the thief boy that the lord employed as his servant the boy with no education telling the lord how to behave in local villages. If you want to read a story set in a desert read the killing moon by N.K. Jemisin.

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## **Valerie says**

One of my main complaints about epic fantasy is that it's often not character-based enough for my taste, but that wasn't a problem here. There were only two points of view: a street thief who tries to pick a desert lord's pocket and ends up serving him, and a noblewoman sent to take care of that lord's desert fortress while he's away. While I always wanted to read whoever's chapter I just finished reading (and the book switched oh-so-faithfully between the two) I wasn't frustrated with the back and forth between POVs because both were enjoyable.

I know that introduction is dry, but I don't want to say too much: books are always their own best

advertisement. One thing I really liked was the sense that the characters were scarred, but they didn't dwell on it too much. There was a sense of moving past the grisly detail of the past, which I enjoyed.

Furthermore, *Secrets of the Sands* has a theme (plot point?) I love and haven't seen done often enough, but it takes a while to get to it so I don't want to spoil anything. If you're okay with hearing a theme that only really shows up halfway through (though of course it's led up to), here it is: (view spoiler)

It was great to get lost in this world for a while. Very enjoyable book that I'd recommend to any epic fantasy lover. (view spoiler) I'm looking forward to reading the next installment.

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## Neil says

It's a bit nerve-wracking when you read a book by a friend. What will you say if you don't care for it? As I read through the usual slow build of the first hundred pages of an epic fantasy series in *Secrets of the Sands*, that anxiety was raised. But when the two lead characters--Alyea, a minor noble sent on an errand by King Oruen, and Idisio, a young street thief traveling separately with the mysterious desert lord Cafad Scratha--enter the exotic desert south lands of this book, I knew there was nothing to worry about. I was reading something good, being transported in the way that I desire when I pick up a fantasy.

The characters are strong here. Alyea is plucky, but doesn't cross over into the Mary Sue zone. She has self doubts, but never gets whiny like Robert Jordan's characters did. Scratha is mysterious but not completely impenetrable (a trick many fantasy authors to raise suspense, but at the cost of believable behavior). These are distinct voices written with good balance. Another hallmark of good fantasy for me is that the villains are at least a little sympathetic--you can understand why they might act as they do--and this book succeeds on that level as well.

But the best thing about this book is the detailed and unusual climate and society of the desert world, which is brought to life as vividly as that in Frank Herbert's *Dune*. Whether it's the complex linguistic system, or the intricate set of political rules and social mores that drive the story forward, I found this world compelling and believable.

The plot and pacing are also ably handled, with the two strands of the story progressing in ways that connect them satisfyingly but remain separate until the story's culmination. There are plenty of surprising twists to keep things interesting. If you pick up this book, be prepared to pay attention: sometimes the cultural rules or character interrelations are challenging to follow, but then good fantasy is not stupid, it should make you interested enough to sweat the details, and this book does just that.

Congratulations Leona, and well done: this is a cut above the average epic fantasy, an impressive entry from little Mercury Retrograde press. I look forward to continuing the saga.

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## Bill Blume says

I will preface this review by saying I know the author. I had the pleasure of meeting Leona at RavenCon many years ago where she massaged my cat (I promise, it's not as dirty as it sounds)... but I digress.

At the time, I did not even realize Leona was a writer. Years later, I learned of her book *SECRET OF THE SANDS* being published. Leona was then invited to speak at the James River Writers Conference with which

I'm affiliated.

Since I knew I'd be moderating a panel with Leona as one of my speakers, I finally read the book. Reading a book by someone I know is always daunting. The fear is that I'll hate it (sad to say, this has happened to me in the past), and it creates a horribly awkward situation.

I quickly discovered I had no reason to worry with Leona. Her book is a great fantasy epic that stands apart from so many. She delivers a world with some uncommonly strong Arabian influences, and the way in which she leads the reader to understand the many foreign cultures is handled very well. Leona hits all the key points for a story of this scope with strong and likable characters, plus a very well-constructed plot. This book also stands on its own, despite being the first book in a series.

Just be warned, this is not a thin read. You're in for a hefty book, but this is more of a strength within the fantasy genre.

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## **Liviu says**

A novel I found more or less by chance - the cover (not the one above though as of the day of the review) intrigued me and then I liked the excerpt - which turned out to be a big positive surprise as well as quite different from what I expected. While it starts as a traditional fantasy, it twists and turns quite a lot and it goes into quite unexpected directions.

There are two threads: one that follows the semi-exiled desert lord Cafad Scratha and his accidental servant and former street boy Idisio as they try to do a good faith accounting of their mission from new king Oruen to research the history of the northern (non-desert and dominated by an intolerant religion) part of the kingdom until they stumble on unexpected happenings, people, facts and conspiracies that will change a lot what we think we know about the world of the novel. This one is a traditional picaresque adventure to a large extent, though the twists and turns make it quite unpredictable

The second one follows Alyea, a young girl of mid-nobility who happens to be a one time lover of the king and current protegee of his but with a dark and violent past in times when the Northern Church was dominant in the capital too and she was branded as a "heretic"; she is sent to administer the Scratha domain in the name of King Oruen; though her two mysterious and seemingly at odds "advisers" Chaq and Micru are supposed to "instruct" her in the way of the desert until another mysterious character, ultra-rich merchant Deiq makes his interest in her known too; this thread is just superb end to end, a thread of exploration, intrigue, magic, initiation rites and much, much more

Of course the two threads converge though again not quite in a conventional way and the novel gets to a satisfying conclusion with of course the big picture to be explored further.

Secrets of the Sands is also quite dark in an understated way, with a world in which slavery, rape, and killing are facts of life and it all depends on whom does it to whom as "justice" and the "law" are concerned

Highly, highly recommended, both a haunting novel and a page turner and an A+ as an average of a solid A thread and an A++ thread

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