



A Taste for Poison

Aleksandr Voinov

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Even a king gets stung when he reaches for a scorpion.

After barely surviving an assassination attempt, King Adrastes is a changed man—one who mistrusts even his allies and friends. He readies his Empire for war against an enigmatic enemy, the Elder of Vededrin, but not everyone approves. While courtiers dare only to whisper dissent, an outrider called Death foment rebellion in the mountains, aided by a prophecy that promises he'll stop the Black King.

Kendras—former lover to Adrastes and leader of the Scorpions—is sent with his elite mercenary force to bring Death to justice. But when Kendras learns who's hiding behind the mask, he must choose between his lover Graukar, newly-appointed general to the king—and King Adrastes himself.

With no man to call master, the Scorpions could flee the danger and intrigue. But Kendras cannot abandon the man he once loved—or the man he's growing to love—without first uncovering the real threat to the Empire.

A Taste for Poison Details

Date : Published October 13th 2014 by Riptide Publishing

ISBN : 9781626491564

Author : Aleksandr Voinov

Format : Paperback 265 pages

Genre : Romance, M M Romance, Fantasy, War, Military Fiction

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From Reader Review A Taste for Poison for online ebook

Mel says

Just the other day, I was talking to my friend Marco about this series and here's what I wrote him in the end, and find most fitting, just having finished 'A Taste for Poison':

What I personally love about Aleks's writing is that I'm challenged in my judgements, that I never know what he's gonna do, and that he writes character-driven without forgetting about world building and plot.

Sometimes, solving a riddle meant that only more questions arose, and maybe nobody truly knew the answer. Maybe that was what gods were for, in the end.

I am someone who thinks the world isn't black and white, who can relativise everything, who tries to always see the other angle. On the other hand, I don't believe in nihilism and still have opinions, so I am living in this constant unconscious inner battle. I know truths, but not *the* truth.

When reading, maybe, I leave a part of me behind, because I slip into the story and into the story's principles and ethics. I have, of course, the ability to make a stand against a book, against an opinion, but I guess my default is to adjust and fit in. And that is how it works in many books, in most books, because they want to sell me truth and I buy it.

There are only few books and authors who don't sell truth, who instead show me truths, show me how the world really is, and mirror how I really think.

And it exasperates me that I am still surprised when I find such a gem, and I am annoyed with myself that I so often put my guard down and let myself be fooled into buying the black and white of other people's thoughts.

For me, there's never been a person that I loved and admired so much, that I later on was terrified of, and who I then loathed so much I wanted to strike him down with a vengeance: Adrastes

And in the end... now... I want to still hate him, and I do—yes, *don't let the greyness conquer you, Mel*—and I don't and can not, although I want to, because I doubt, because reality, being human, is catching up with me.

"It's just that I cannot obey Adrastes, nor can I fight him. That battle is fought, and I don't feel like the winner."

I am...

Stunned.

Sad.

Grateful.

Powerless.

Empowered.

Confused. Obviously. And contradicted.

Touched, most importantly.

And this is the best :-)

The book—apart from toying with my emotions and loyalties—is breathtaking and suspenseful. Oh my God, is it horrible in parts! I have never had such difficulties reading the next words and sentences. I feared so much. I was terrified. Oh the horror and premonition. I could not breathe.

But there is also so much love and tenderness to be found here:

"Could't love you more, Graukar. I couldn't. I'm no good with words, but that's the truth. Every time I look at you. Every time I touch you. I don't know how to tell you how much you mean to me."

The characters, the world, the plot, they are all fabulous and real... like I can touch.

I have so much respect for Kendras, there is no end to it. On what a journey he went from the first page of 'Scorpion' to the end of this book! I'm amazed. And still... he remains human, he remains with... fault? **Maybe. Maybe he was just like Adrastes now, killing men on a suspicion, breaking the Scorpions' sacred rules like Adrastes broke his own laws.**

I love the ambiguity of this series. I will never forget it. Brilliant and a new favourite.

I suggest you get a copy and get the books and enjoy :-)

Update at 100%:

First: A full review is to come, but I need to sort through my thoughts and feelings first.

This was brilliant, but also—or maybe because—'*Damn, I don't like it, but I can't come up with a better idea.*'

Update at 58%:

Take them, Aleks! All my stars. You've already earned them!

***** Buddy Read with Tina *****

My review for Scorpion

My review for Lying with Scorpions

♣ Irish Smurfétté ♣ says

Five Star Reviewage on Prism Book Alliance

When I finished reading this book, I was joking with some people that I had something like ten pages of notes. Most reactions were like, what?! I had to explain: when I read about Kendras, Graukar, Runner, Widow, Selvan, Shadow, Amrash... I get happily lost in their world. If was going to write a review that was more than just me contentedly sighing and heh'ing all over the place, I had to take notes. So I did. I promise I pared them down, for all of our sakes. ;)

This third book in the Memory of Scorpions series picks up right where Lying with Scorpions left off. I was rapt and ready to play from page one. Kendras, Runner, Adrastes, Riktan, Dev, Lady Protector, Widow, Graukar, Shadow, Amrash, the gang's all here and so am I.

An early aside: Selvan. He's so smart, sees all and tries to make sure Kendras does, as well. He tries to take care of all of the Scorpions. He, along with Amrash, is one of the best well-drawn supporting characters I've been fortunate enough to hold in my heart.

Ok, back to bidness...

Widow at her side bore his usual habitual faint grin much like a blade bore its glint.

I mean, c'monnnnnnnnnnnnnnn! Brilliant. That's Widow. Through Kendras's wary eyes.

Another aside: just know you'll see Kendras's name throughout this review quite often. He deserves the attention paid.

Now then, Kendras and Graukar are at a place in their relationship where they're sharing more of their personal thoughts, especially about how things are between them. It's simply delicious to have a maturing couple portrayed as such, while still learning things about each other and us about them.

The usual suspects provide welcome humor in Shadow, Dev and Kiran. Kendras needs to be teased now and then to bring him out of his overwhelming serious side. Oh and Graukar is good at this, too. There were many times I found myself smiling while reading.

When the writing is this good, there is no separation, no barrier between me and the characters, the mood, the dirt and fear and desire, all of it. Every word has purpose. Yet this exacting nature doesn't overshadow the story, it's exactly what great writing does: fulfilling the purpose of these characters and what the author interpreted them to be. This makes me feel secure while in the hands of an author and their words. One hundred percent the case here.

Conflict conflict conflict. Voinov does conflict. He does characters making decisions that lead to complications with not always easy solutions. Changing allegiances, keeping secrets, risking deadly consequences for conspiring about which they feel are the right things to do in order to survive.

Another clever way of progressing a story is to allude to what could have led to overly long passages describing treks or discoveries that take place over days and weeks, and instead giving us the effects of the

torture or heartache or relief. That's what we want to know, to feel, how the characters are affected by things both in and out of their control.

"Just because it has never been done doesn't mean it shouldn't be."

Risk and reward. That's what it's like reading Voinov's stories, especially when fraught with all that I've described and more. If you survive the risk, you are definitely rewarded. This goes back to feeling secure with him as an author. It's not security in that I won't be greatly affected by his words but that I know I can trust what he'll give me by way of them. Humor, heart, unpredictability and unbreakable bonds, among so many others.

Amrash. I could write pages on just this one character alone. Highly intelligent, kind but can be ruthless, calm, playful, and forceful in a way that makes the other character feel as if they made a decision all on their own.

Runner. She's me. She's me sometimes. Smart, strong and loyal. She wants to contribute, to pull her own weight, to be connected and respected. The continually growing friendship between Runner and Kendras is one of my favorite things about this story.

This is adventure at the ground level. It's intimate, down and dirty, weighted in emotion with a long memory that stretches far back in time. Escape is difficult but not impossible.

Voinov makes the right choices when constructing a story. Instead of giving us the obvious scene or focal point, we get the much more interesting conversation or turn of events that make our heads turn, leading in a brand new direction. Again, unpredictability. It's a treasure to me when reading a book. This book is a treasure. He left me wanting more while at the same time feeling like this was a wonderful place in which to end the story of Kendras, Selvan, Graukar and all of the Scorpions and what the future may hold for them.

Recommended. Get thee to a smithy and start forging a Scorpion blade of your own.

Lisa *-* GiViNg It To YoU * LoCk StOcK & TwO SmOkInG BaRrELs says

5 DeAdLy StArS

MIND. OFFICIALLY. BLOWN.

Stung..... I knew I would get **STUNG** ...my pulse quickened, *as the honeyed poison run's through my veins*I'm sent into a delirious dream-like state.

The flickering embers of the fire help stop the shivers running through my body....

I see nothing but mountains, like the other Scorpions that were brought here by Kendras and Adrastes before him.

....and in each desperate dying ember of the fire...I see the *final part of the Scorpion story unfurl, told through Kendras's eyes.*

Your heart is as vast as the mountains"

Masterfully written, beautiful flowing words that captures your mind and takes you to a world beyond.

Where I lived, and breathed in this fascinating world, ***filled with fascinating characters - from my beloved Graukar, to the mysterious Widow!!***

A world filled with choices, mistrusts, honor, rebellion, all intricately woven to make the complexity of this amazing series.

My favorite part of this book/series....are you kidding me.... ***it was ALL OF IT, every last word I devoured.***

My all time favorite series EVER!!

KENDRAS

When lightening strikes, half it's power is in how quickly it moves"

The above quote from A Taste for Poison is what happens when you read a Voinov novel.

Awe has rendered me speechless....Mr Voinov, quite simply does it for me!!

I didn't want this to end... ***in fact Alek's can we have some more please!!***

Thank you to Riptide Publishing and Netgalley for providing me with an ARC of this book.

***P*u*r*p*l*e* Masochist says**

[n

Lucy says

Kendras & Graukar 4ever!!!!!!! <3

Wonderful conclusion to an amazing series. I loved this book! The scenes between Kendras & Graukar were out of this world terrific, so tender and emotional. This is an honest to God terrific fantasy series. This book isn't just a m/m romance and I hope it finds a larger audience outside of that niche.

While Kendras and Graukar were my favorites, I also enjoyed Shadow and wish we could have seen a bit more of his relationship with Runner. I'm not going to lie I was totally rooting for Adrastrates to (view spoiler)

I'll miss Kendras and Graukar, but I know I'll be re-reading these books again.

Lila says

Great conclusion to epic story.

So, you know how book #2 was all about politics and court intrigues as Adrastrates took over Dalman? Ultimately, his plans to rebuild old empire were clashing with what Kendras wanted for himself and his Scorpions and in third book all of this finally came to a blow.

I always thought that setting of Shara was particularly intriguing. Three cities are trying to keep autonomy, but the only way that's possible is if they keep unsteady piece. The moment two cities have the same ruler either by alliance or conquest, the third one is danger and chances to stay independent are very slim. So when Adrastrates pulled that move in Scorpion, he changed the political picture of entire region. The difference is, that we saw these effects in book #2 more on internal scale as he was dealing with taking over Dalman as a conqueror and here we are getting more global, bigger picture. Beside rebuilding an empire, he has to deal with attempt on his life and mysterious rebel Shadow.

But, this is Kendras's story and he was never a character who felt the need to look at bigger picture, to concern himself with anything but consequences of Adrastrates's plans on people he cares about. This is my first and strongest feeling about this book: Kendras really, really stood up. His character developed so much over course of three books; he became more independent and sure in his decisions as Officer and as a man. He was never foolish or stupid- every time I think I know what's he going to do next, he would turn everything around and come with better solution.

But, the thing that everyone is wondering about is, of course, the whole Kendras/Adrastrates/Graukar situation.

To be frank, I was never a Team A or a Team G. I was always just Team Kendras. Basically, imo, Adrastrates was the lover Kendras needed when he joined the Scorpions, but Graukar was the lover he needed after he

became the Officer.

I read first version of Scorpion 3 years ago and I remember I loved Adrastes. Then I read Lying with Scorpions last year and I was not such a big fan of him anymore. I reread both prior ATfP release and some things became more clear. Adrastes was never perfect: in first book we got to read how great Officer he is, but he was the one who made a terrible deal with king that decimated Scorpions. It's just that we are looking at him through Kendras's eyes and we are wearing the same pink glasses as he is. His ambitions and cruel nature became more obvious in second book, but we can't really say he didn't care for Scorpions. I feel like two sides of same character reconciled in this novel. Adrastes didn't change drastically, he was always the way he is, but Kendras changed and I think big part of that was the responsibility that came with his leadership role in Scorpions. Here comes Graukar- he is exactly what Kendras wants at this point. And their love is just beautiful.

I noticed this and maybe it's a deliberate move from Voinov, but there is considerably less sex scenes here than it was in first two books. What we have here are these subtle signs of love like how Graukar's face would lit up every time Kendras comes in the room or Kendras's admiration for man Graukar is...It's just right and nice and beautiful.

I will say that always and everywhere, but in this series, representation of what are traditionally considered weaker characters is praise worthy. Female characters are strong and fierce, the most dangerous man in trilogy is partially castrated and the smartest character is gender-fluid. Respect.

So, my only concern is that this is it. No more.

I know there was some talk about Widow prequel and I hope this is true; that glorious monster is one of my favorite Voinov's characters.

I am also wondering about Adrastes... And Amrash. And Runner.

And, Selvan... sweet Selvan. The best background character ever...

Kristie says

Yeah, this was damn good. The whole series is wonderful, but the last was so great.

Everything that Kendras went through, all the hard choices he made, decisions that made me so sad, situations he was put in, and the way he handles them... they all made him the amazing character I fell in love with. Yet again, Aleks wrote a story with amazing characters. People you want to know more about. I'm floored. I'll remember this one forever.

Karen Wellsbury says

In ToP Kendras has almost fully become the Officer, and the bond that he shared with the previous officer, now King Adrastes has almost disintegrated. As Adrastes looks to war, the depleted band of Scorpions needs to grow.

My first thoughts when I read this book was how can the bigger picture plot be concluded while ensuring that all the characters get resolution? (and the resolution that I want!) Then the adrenalin kicks in as the action starts and while this idea is there in the back of your mind, the epic storytelling takes over.

The advantage of reading a series is that there is the time to develop characters gradually; layering back

stories and anecdotes, and this is done so masterfully. For me the dynamic between Kendras and Adrastes is fascinating, as Kendras grows and develops he challenges not just Adrastes as a king, but the whole nature of their relationship. While the primary relationship on the previous books, for me, was between Kendras and the rest of the Scorpions, in ToP it's the epiphany of love, and choice versus old loyalties.

There isn't a one dimensional character, and all of them stand out in certain scenes. For me the two I would like to learn more about are Amrash and Selvan, as they are the two who have remained more constant than the others throughout. And Widow, who is an enigma with his own agenda – whatever that may be.

The first two books used sex as a currency and for power, which added to the mercenary/ medieval nature of the books, but ToP softens this, and here mainly the sex is linked to love.

The cleverness once again is apparent when you finish reading, a chapter, and all the subtle layers start to filter through.

The ending is kind of a beginning knowing when to stop is one of the greatest skills in writing a series, knowing when to leave the reader satisfied but wanting more, job done.

Bucletina says

Esta reseña es sobre el libro y sobre la mano que le dio vida. No un despliegue ego-maníaco sobre la "importancia" de un lector en las decisiones del autor. Dicho esto voy a lo que me cabe:

Maravillosa conclusión para una aventura que se mantuvo siempre en los estándares más altos. El puntaje de esta tercera y (por el momento) última parte refleja mi calificación a su desenlace en particular, porque la saga en su totalidad merece un completo 10. El segundo libro y nudo de esta historia -Lying with Scorpions- sigue estando entre los mejores que he leído en mis 32 años de vida. Mi sensación es que el desenlace quizás disminuye un poco en intensidad en relación con las otras partes, y cierra todos los hilos con cierto apresuramiento o con demasiada prolijidad. Puede que se deba a que soy un poco masoquista y amante de las tragedias, pero me esperaba un final menos "ideal" o cerrado para todos.

Voinov tiene una enorme facilidad para entregar historias de altísimo nivel, sin tener necesariamente que incluir en ellas los ingredientes que el sistema editorial exige para considerarla "comercializable". Es un autor que se impone a cualquier barrera gracias a su gigantesco talento y a esa fuerza que lo impulsa a entregar historias que se salen de la media. Scorpions es un ejemplo de esto. Pero hay muchos más de la mano de este autor. Queda descubrirlos.

Aleksandr Voinov says

Note: This is being re-released on 23 December 2018.

Ezinwanyi says

In the last book, Adrastes and his lust for power morphed his passionate relationship with Kendras into a contentious one. And Kendras formed a stronger bond with his fellow scorpion and sometimes lover Graukar.

After the assassination attempt failed, Adrastes grew even more suspicious of everyone around him. That includes his former lover and squad The Scorpions. Kendras was forced to get involved in political intrigues to solve the mystery of those trying to kill Adrastes, in order to restore the Scorpions to good standing.

I finally accepted that Adrastes personality change was permanent. But I enjoyed the new and more matured love between Kendras and Graukar. I also really relished the character development in this book. Kendras grew into The Officer's role and into a leader that rivaled Adrastes with the Scorpions. There wasn't as much fighting and sex in this book as the prior books, but the complexity of the plot made it just as entertaining.

The love that bloomed in this book elevated everything for me. I started off hoping for a change of heart by Adrastes, but ending up preferring Kendras with Graukar.

*Special Thanks to Riptide Publishing via Netgalley

Kat ? says

Rating & review removed.

Sonia ~Ruber's fiancé in Crystal Court universe~ says

"Even the hand of a king is stung when it reaches for the scorpion."

This ~~last~~ third book in the series was **EPIC!!** All this awesome, twisty and crazy stuff happened that kept me on the edge of my seat. I absolutely adore the world Mr. Voinov created and I was constantly asking myself: How does he come up with this stuff? It's simply amazing.

Important stuff:

- **Kendras:** Dude you're f*****g badass, you are **The True Scorpion, The officer** who valued his men above all else and **The Wonderful lover/partner** to Graukar! [Tara is your slave forever and I shall I always keep you in my heart (*looks at Tara *in a platonic way of course)]

- **Graukar:** I think of you as the **Perfect Man and Lover** anyone could ask for. Man, the way you look at and react to the world around you is simply beautiful. (Favorite moments -> Graukar explaining to Kendras what love is and Graukar making his speech in front of his men)

- **Adrastes:** You went a little crazy didn't you? Asshole!! I shall never forgive you for that moment! Yes, you heard me, you know what you did! Though you did manage to escape my eternal wrath at the end, but I'm watching you mister!!

Mr. Voinov I present my respects for your stunning work and I shall commence stalking and reading everything year ever wrote! Also, if you would be so kind as to write more about this awesome characters? Yes? You agree? It's settled then! :D

READ THE BOOK!

Tina says

“Even the hand of a king is stung when it reaches for the scorpion.”

What a book! *deep sigh* The first two books of Aleks Voinov’s Memory of Scorpions series were amazing but the last one of the trilogy was exceptional... Kendras’s purpose in life and maybe even his predestination has come full circle.

A Taste for Poison is truly Kendras’s story... torn between his duty to be the officer of his Scorpions, his loyalty to Adrastes (his mentor, his life saver and his king), and his love for Graukar... he has to make some tough decisions, and we readers have the honor to accompany Kendras on that rocky road.

I adored Kendras and Graukar, our two brave warriors... their love for each other was just heart melting to watch.

“Wisdom. Sacrifice. Tenacity. Purpose. Duty. Loyalty. Honor. Courage. Discipline. Nine virtues of the warrior. “The tenth virtue is unknown, but we are tasked to find it, in ourselves and others.”

“Wouldn’t that be comradeship?” ...

Graukar turned serious. “Love.”

Kendras lost his breath. “What does a . . . a warrior have to do with love?”

“It’s the tenth virtue. The one that holds all others.... “Love inspires, Kendras. It enables us to live the other virtues, if we know we are loved and love in return. It allows us to bear the hardships of war.”

I loved the supporting characters. To name but a few: Runner, Shadows, Dev, Kiran, Riktan, beautiful Selvan... and Amrash, the transgender Jaishani ambassador. Adrastes was a different matter... first I hated him, what he did to Graukar was beyond cruel, later I felt conflicted. We all are human beings, we all make mistakes, can I really condemn the king for what he did? I still wanted to loathe him but at the end I went along with Kendras. Our wonderful hero called a truce and even helped Adrastes with finding the real traitor.

I can only emphasize what I already wrote in my reviews for the previous books: The Memory of Scorpions series isn’t a ‘trivial’ M/M romance, it’s a gritty fantasy adventure with a romantic subplot. The focus is on the brutality of the war, the political drama and the betrayal, but also on courage, loyalty, honor, friendship and last but not least love. So much love!

A Taste for Poison isn’t for the faint of heart, it’s brutal, honest, captivating, stunning, and devastatingly beautiful, it’s the kind of story Aleks Voinov can tell like no other. I’m in awe... as always after reading one of his books. I can’t recommend it strongly enough.

I would love to accompany Kendras on his way back to his roots as the firstborn of Jerasha of the Jaishani... it was a wise decision to follow Amrash’s advice, who opened his long-hidden memory. Kendras is going to find his way, I’m entirely sure of that. And he has Graukar at his side, so what can go wrong?!

“You don’t need teaching, Kendras. You’re strong and brave. Your heart is as vast as the mountains.”

Thanks Mel for the awesome buddy-read.

Tamika♥RBF MOOD♥ says

I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review

"Couldn't love you more, Graukar. I couldn't. I'm no good with words, but that's the truth. Every time I look at you. Every time I touch you. I don't know how to tell you how much you mean to me."

In the third installment of the series power plays have been made. Friendships, and loyalty's have been tested. Love has been granted, and Kendras has finally stepped into his true self in this book. Aleksandr Voinov have written two characters now who has left a mark on my reading history one is Vadim Petrovich Krasnorda from Special Forces and Kendras.

Kendras has to make hard choices in this book. He has to decide if he wants to choose the lover of his past or the lover of his future. I felt like he was getting pulled in multiple directions this book. He wanted to stay loyal to Adrastes and maintain his sense of self. This was way different than the other two, this might have lacked the passion that we've seen between these gentlemen in the other two, but the plot overtook the entire story.

I am no longer in love with Adrastes we meet, an anger, scared tyrant in the book. His actions at times seemed right but one action blew me away. I would have like the last time that Kendras and him met for some resolve or knowledge that once upon a time they met something towards each other.

Shadow, Amrash and Widow I don't know if I can trust these people or not but they make some good characters.

Last but not least Graukar showed some vulnerabilities in this book that I appreciated. I think he's always had Kendras best interest but the next book we'll finally see how they come into play with each other.

I really enjoyed the story, can't wait for news of a next book. Kendras finally gets to go home to Jaishani and learn about his culture.
