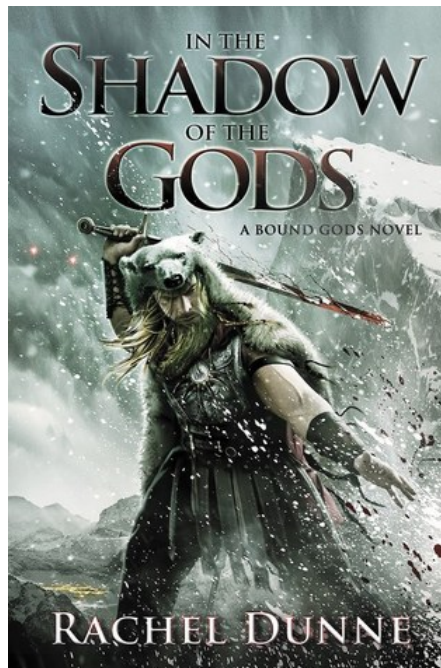




In the Shadow of the Gods

Rachel Dunne

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Rachel Dunne

In the Shadow of the Gods Rachel Dunne

A breathtaking talent makes her debut with this first book in a dark epic fantasy trilogy, in which a mismatched band of mortals led by a violent, secretive man must stand against a pair of resentful gods to save their world.

Eons ago, a pair of gods known as the Twins grew powerful in the world of Fiatera, until the Divine Mother and Almighty Father exiled them, binding them deep in the earth. But the price of keeping the fire lands safe is steep. To prevent these young gods from rising again, all twins in the land must be killed at birth, a safeguard that has worked until now.

Trapped for centuries, the Twins are gathering their latent powers to break free and destroy the Parents for their tyranny—to set off a fight between two generations of gods for control of the world and the mortals who dwell in it.

When the gods make war, only one side can be victorious. Joros, a mysterious and cunning priest, has devised a dangerous plan to win. Over eight years, he gathers a team of disparate fighters—Scal, a lost and damaged swordsman from the North; Vatri, a scarred priestess who claims to see the future in her fires; Anddyr, a drug-addled mage wandering between sanity and madness; and Rora and Aro, a pair of twins who have secretly survived beyond the reach of the law.

These warriors must learn to stand together against the unfathomable power of vengeful gods, to stop them from tearing down the sun . . . and plunging their world into darkness.

In the Shadow of the Gods Details

Date : Published June 21st 2016 by Harper Voyager

ISBN :

Author : Rachel Dunne

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Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Epic Fantasy, Mythology, Magic

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From Reader Review In the Shadow of the Gods for online ebook

Michael Fletcher says

Review to come, closer to publication date.

Laura.125Pages says

Original review @ 125Pages.com

In the Shadow of the Gods by Rachel Dunne is the first epic saga type book I have read in a while that I just could not get into. Basically twins are bad and must be killed, as long ago twin Gods were banished and the fear is that human twins will unleash them and then the sun will burn out. I think that is the gist. This was a very confusing world for me and I did not find a character to latch onto to lead me through the tale. While the author wrote well, and the descriptions were fantastic, I just could not fully follow the story. I know there was a sect of priests looking for twins, a guy wandering about and a young boy and girl living in the streets and just trying to survive. And then there were so many other things going on that I was overwhelmed.

Now I could picture the hubs loving this book, as he really loves delving into the mythos of a fantasy world and discovering all of the little things that tie all of the seemingly disparate parts together, but for me, this was a tough one to get through. Now I have seen some amazing reviews of this, so keep in mind that this was just not for me, but it could be perfect for you, if you can follow along.

I received this book for free from Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review.

Chelsea says

** Review soon to be published on The Warlock's Gray Book

I love fantasy, I really do! I have read many fantasy books in my life, and I must say... *In the Shadow of the Gods* was *disappointing*.

You know what aspect of epic fantasy I absolutely admire? The writing!! I already described it in other reviews of mine, but I'll say it again: elegant and polished prose is my kryptonite, in fantasy. Think Tolkien, or Martin. Their writing is absolutely riveting, and draws us in their world, and manipulates our emotions and perspectives at every page.

Now, what kind of writing did Dunne offer in her book? YA prose, that's what. I'm not saying YA authors write badly; oh no, most of them have pretty decent writing and it's actually enjoyable. What I'm saying is that Dunne's composition doesn't belong in the Fantasy genre. It felt so out of place, that I was immediately turned off. Actually, my turn-off was so definite and complete, that I couldn't find it in myself to even try to like the book. There was nothing epic about it. What would actually put this novel in Fantasy would be the world (we'll talk about this later) and the excessive violence.

About what Dunne actually wrote, again, it left to be desired. Each chapter relates events set some years

apart, but the author spends so much time referencing what has already happened in previous chapters, that really, I don't see why I even bothered to read every chapter. The reading is redundant, as she repeats the same information over and over again. And the world. Gosh, such an underdeveloped world. The premise isn't bad, okay? The gods, and the missing ones, the Twins, and the religion. I really liked the concept of how all of this affected their world. But, it seems like this myth and its impact are the only thing that ever happened in this universe, which is otherwise lacking a history, or culture, or politics. Everything, from the writing to the world, is just...empty. Nothing to keep my interest, apart from the inexplicable magic.

Joros' character was okay. I didn't really know where I stood regarding him, as I sometimes liked him, sometimes disliked him entirely. I really liked Scal, though. His story is filled with loss and loneliness and revenge, but it is so rich that Dunne could write an entire book about him. But apart from him, I could've used some other interesting characters, some that would spark up some life in this otherwise miserable world.

All in all, *In the Shadow of the Gods* is an okay book for fantasy beginners, as it lacks many things that would make up a great fantasy read.

DJ says

4.5/5 Rating Review first posted at MyLifeMyBooksMyEscape and The Speculative Herald

A new epic fantasy author to look-out for!

*Disclaimer: I received an eARC of this book from the publisher, in exchange for my honest opinion and review.

Many months back, I saw the cover of this book and read the description; I then sent out a request for a review copy a minute later. The Parents must have been smiling down on me, for I was granted that request, and *In the Shadows of the Gods* proved to be among the best books I've read this year. Multiple POVs and compelling characters; intertwining plots, and a story with a large scope; great prose, and a vast world with wonderful and creative world building. **All the ingredient you need to make a epic fantasy trilogy that fans will devour.**

It has been almost 800 years since The Fall – when the Parents exiled the Twins, burying them deep within the Earth. Since then, two religions have formed: those who follow the Parents, and those who follow the Twins. Followers of the Parents, believe the Parents were right in their punishment of the Twins. Because of their faith, twins are actively hunted down and persecuted; anytime twins are born, they are instantly drowned, or if there is no water around, they are burned to death. Followers of the Twins believe the Parents were motivated by their jealousy of the Twins to exile them. Their goal is find and release the Twins from captivity, so they may overthrow their parents.

One of these priest of the Fallen is Joros, and he makes it his mission in life to find where the twins are buried, and bring them back to power. As he works his way through the politics of the Ventallo, to get himself into the position to he needs to be, four other souls – Scal, a Northernman; Rora and Aro, two orphans; Keiro, priest of the Twinss – walk their own, separate paths. Though they all have different goals in life, soon, their paths will come together...

Joros is a priest of the Fall, and currently a Seeker. Returning with him to Mount Raturu are three people, whom he will bring before the Ventallo. Mount Raturu is the mountain *in* which the priest of Twins live. I

say “in” because they actively live inside the dark caves, with no sunlight what-so-ever penetrating, and no flames allowed – unless the flames are turned blue. It can take days to walk up this mountain, and if the walk itself does not kill you, the Sentinels that guard the way up will. When he finally reaches the Ventallo, left with him is one woman – who is carrying twins. With this achievement, Joros is rewarded with a promotion into the Ventallo, as well. As part of his induction, he is shown something that was thought to only a myth: that the Twins were *real*. For in a box, lies an actual body part of a Twin.

Personally, I found Joros’ character arc to be wave of emotions, and an extremely compelling one. When we first met him walking up the mountain, I loved him, and thought he would be a “good” guy. But later in “802 Years after the Fall”, the Raturu and living with the twins growing up, seemed to turn him into a bitter old man, and suddenly I wasn’t a fan of him anymore. But again(!), later, when one certain event happens, and even though had did more to for me to see him a character I didn’t like, I was suddenly feeling pity and even... rooting?... for him.

Rora and Aro have been living together since, what appears to be, they were small children. They are currently living in the Canals, which I can best describe as similar to the sewers of a city. Although not completely underground, the Canals have the same hygiene and cleanliness as sewers, and are prone to flooding. Inside of these Canals, are many different gangs, which if one wants to survive in the Canals, must pledge oneself too. After trying to leave the Canals to thief and rob the uptown, Rora is attacked and beaten to point of death. Aro saves her by finding a man of the uptertown to help. However, he asks something in return for living with him, and this ends up have life-altering affects for the two, where they find themselves talking to the head of a Canal gang.

Rora is extremely head-strong, and confident, and will do anything to protect Aro and make sure he is fed and safe. Aro, by contrast, and is a whining, immature cry-baby, who at times, I was convinced couldn’t be more than seven. Roar is the type to bury a knife if your stomach while starting you in the eye; Aro would break down crying and apologize, if he bumped in to you and you looked at him. These two characters were also equally great, but what compelled me most for their chapters was the seeing Canals and learning the gang government – which Rora and Aro find themselves neck-deep at one point.

Scal is an orphan northman (a feared barbarian-like people from the north), who is found in the snow near a prison camp as a child. Soldiers first thought to kill him, but is instead brought to the prison’s priest (of the Parents), Kierro. Kerrio tried his best to raise, and talk to Scal, and while he doesn’t not yet talk, he follows Kierro around like a shadow and listen to mostly everything he says. The first time he does hear Scal talk is when fighting with a new boy in camp, Brennon. But it was night a fight of anger, it was because the two boys are having fun. From then on, Scal looks to Kerrus as mentor/father, and Brennon becomes his best friend. Scal and Brennon’s release day is soon, but one day while Scal is out, a pack of Norhterman attack the prisoner camp...

Scal was my favorite character and POV chapters to read. He is the characters on the cover (or, at least, that is the attire of a northman). His story is one of pain, love, loss, rage, vengeance, and loneliness. The journey he takes, the places he sees and goes, his thought and actions, and what he has to live with and through – I could have a read whole book devoted solely to Scal! Throughout his story, he always reflects on his time with Brennon and Kerrus, and often quotes lessons that Kerrus had taught him. I love when stories do quotes like this. Kerrus doesn’t have the most original, but they are unique enough that they don’t feel clique. It is also in Scal’s story that we meet Vatri, the the book’s back cover alludes to.

As the back cover mentions, Scal’s and Vatri’s, and Rora’s and Aro’s paths, all do eventually lead together with Joro and Andyyr. However, there is one other POV character who remains off, doing his own thing: Keiro.

Keiro is also a Seeker, like Joro once was – except he doesn’t have the same luck. After witnessing two

twins drowned right before his eyes, moments after they are born, he returns to Mount Raturu to have his eyes removed, for he can no longer stand to see a world like this. As he is half way through the act, he *sees* something that changes him: the twins that Joro saved. Keiro is banished from Raturu for not completing his sacrificed, but is allowed to keep preaching his faith of the twins. If he is to ever comeback to Raturu though, he will be executed.

Keiro was an interesting character, because as we approached the end of the book, I could see the other story lines, slowly coming together – but Keiro was off wandering the lands, and I was waiting to see where this would take us. Where it took us was to a far off land, and Keiro's POV chapters end up being, arguably, the most important of all in the book.

Things I love about epic fantasy series, such as *A Song of Ice and Fire*, are not the number of POV characters, but the *locations* of these characters. **Each and every POV character in *In The Shadows of the Gods* takes place in a completely different locations.** Joro is in the dark Mount Raturu, where the priests of the Twins live, in complete darkness, playing political games with each other to gain power and respect; Scal is the frozen north, growing up and marching along with the Northmen – who murder without a second thought, yet hold very true to their morals and respect – and is living in the cold and snowy hell as a mercenary; Rora and Aro are living the Canals – the slums of the slums – and they have to to survive, learning to manipulate and play the games in the gang underworld; Kerio takes us all across the map.

Since this was an eARC, I actually didn't read the book info before I read it (I did before requesting the review copy, I had just forgotten). Because of this, I had NO IDEA that Joro “gathers a team of disparate fighters,” and when it did happen, I was a tab bit bummed out. They do not come to together until all most the very end, and them coming together like that, with what the ending this first book is, did feel slightly rushed. And because three out of the four POV characters are all together, in the same location, and on same storyline now, it did take a bit of the excitement of changing POVs away, for me. Particularly at the end when there was a scene where I would have preferred to seen something through another character's eyes. Up until that point though, this was an effortless and absorbing read!

Each character hooked me from the beginning, and all of their separate plot lines were just as compelling as the next. The pacing of the novel is excellent as well! Very fast paced, the only thing I wished was that at the chapters were longer, or another chapter or two, was added for each POV. As I said earlier, I love reading in different locations, and Dunne did a magnificent job in world building, with each locations have different dialects, mannerism, and ways-of-life, but I feel the novel could have benefited from extending a scene of two in each. This would have allowed readers to spend more time in those regions, with the characters, creating a greater picture of the fine details of the world, and also developing the characters that little bit more that they needed for me to say they were also complex.

The best way I can think to describe *In the Shadow of the Gods*: a perfect epic fantasy for beginners. I mean that 100% as a complement! There are multiple POVs, but not so many characters to loose track of; intertwining plots, but not super complex where you have to re-read sections; excellent world building, but not so vast that we get bogged down with details; and mythology (of the Parents and the Twins), that is basic, but details of it are revealed slowly and appropriately, adding to the mystery and suspense of the story. **It has never been so easy and effortlessly for me to read an epic fantasy story, that had this compelling of a plot and characters.**

Here is a fun-fact for you I learned after reading the book: *In the Shadow of the Gods*, was a semi-finalist for the 2014 Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award, and was then picked by Harper Voyager.

4.5/5 Rating

-DJ

Lynn Williams says

3.5 of 4 stars

<https://lynns-books.com/2016/06/24/in...>

In the Shadow of the Gods is the debut novel by Rachel Dunne that brings to us a world of divided religion and bound Gods.

Many years ago the land of Fiatera was created by Gods now known as the Parents. In later years their children, The Twins, added their own creations to this world and as a result were cast out of Heaven and bound to earth. Since The Fall (as it became known) the people of Fiatera predominantly worship The Parents however there is a small, cult like faction who still worship The Twins and believe that they can be restored to their former glory. This first instalment takes a look at a number of characters that will eventually either cross paths or will play a role in finding these bound Gods.

I think this was a very entertaining read with solid writing and a cast of characters that are interesting to read about. It is an ambitious story and, without wanting to sound critical, is clearly a book that plays the role of 'set up' for the rest of the series.

The story is told from a number of POVs which is a great way to bring to light different aspects of the world. We visit the cold North where the climate is so harsh that only the Northmen seem able to survive there. They're a hard race of warriors with their own brand of honour – reminiscent of Vikings – they have no qualms about raiding other villages and killing and pillaging. The capital city of Fiatera is virtually split into two with those unfortunate enough to have fallen on hard times seeking refuge below the streets in the Canals. The Canals are rife with crime and run by gangs, all warring with each other for supremacy. Away from the Capital is Mount Raturu, home to those who follow The Twins. These followers, priests and seekers literally live in the darkness beneath the mountain.

So, to the characters. We are introduced to Aro and Rora. Being twins they are lucky to have survived as followers of The Parents down all twins at birth to prevent the Bound Gods being resurrected. They have spent the majority of their young lives barely staying alive, one step ahead of discovery and eventually seeking refuge in the Canals. Aro is an odd character, quite a weak boy who needs the protection of his sister Rora – although to be honest I have my own suspicions about Aro that I won't elaborate on for fear of spoilers (plus, lets face it, I could be massively wrong :D). Rora is fiercely protective of Aro and puts herself into any number of difficult and dangerous situations to prevent him from being harmed. Scal is a young boy – either abandoned or orphaned – and found near a prison camp on the edges of the Northern territories. Clearly of the Northmen race nobody is keen to take him in until a Priest in the camp takes pity and provides Scal with a safe home. We have a former seeker now turned priest – Joros. Joros lives beneath the mountain and has ambitions. He plans to rise to the top and his ambitions leave him with a morale compass that lacks a few of the nicer character traits. Joros is reluctantly accompanied by a Mage called Anddyr. I say reluctantly because Anddyr seems to have been captured by one of the priests and reduced to a shadow of his former self by being forced into a drug dependent state that leaves him desperate for more of the foul paste that binds him to Joros. Along the way we make the acquaintance of a priestess (Vatri) who, badly disfigured by fire, claims to be God chosen and sent to follow Scal on his travels. Finally we have Keiro. Also a former follower of the Fallen Keiro has been cast out of Mount Raturu. He now wanders the land, still preaching to those who will listen and relentlessly searching.

The story arcs for most of these characters, barring one, eventually come together and an unlikely alliance is

formed.

Whilst I do have some niggles with this book I think that Dunne has successfully written a story that will hook most readers and make them keen to continue the journey. She has created a world of ambiguity really. We're not really totally sure about who are the good guys here. Were The Parents very harsh for throwing their children out of heaven and binding them so cruelly – or were their actions justified and necessary in order to protect the world. Are the followers of the Twins right to seek their resurrection? There are certainly elements to their form of worship that give me pause for doubt – not only about their methods but also maybe their sanity! What about the characters. I'm not overly fond of most of them. I liked Scal and could definitely read much more about his life but he still needs to be injected with a little more 'something' that I can't quite put my finger on. The Twins – well, again, they're just lacking a little bit of spark that would take them from being good to read about to a winning combination. Joros and Vatri are definitely not my favourite characters at the moment – they're both quite obsessive characters who don't have many redeeming streaks. Keira, I like the journey that he takes us on and found his travels really interesting. I'm a bit puzzled about what he's got himself into though – time will tell.

I think the world building could do with adding to. At the moment it all feels fairly generic and the only thing that comes across is the religious aspects. That being said there's plenty of time for this to be developed and I suppose it stands to reason that the religious aspects would be primarily focused on for this type of story. I would like a bit more background both for the places and the characters but again, I think it would have been easy to make this into a very wieldy book. As it is I think this works very well as a set up book. There's plenty going on and no lack of pace and it will give readers a perfect platform to move onto the next instalment.

On the whole I think this is a promising start to a series I'm keen to find out more about.

I received a copy courtesy of the publisher for which my thanks. The above is my own opinion.

Grace says

You can check out more reviews [HERE!](#)

I received a copy of book from Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review.

That's the **first time ever** I've said those words! My very first review copy! What's more, an alluring plot about gods. WHY EVER NOT?!

Premise

Twin gods cast down from heaven and bound by their parent gods. Worshipers of both the Twins and the Parents. Societal twin hate. A plot to free the twin gods.

After the twin gods were subdued by the Parents, twins became an abomination and any newborn twin must die. Although the Parents are worshiped as the main gods, the Twins still have a group of cult-y followers in the mountains with a mission to find the twins and wake them from their sleep.

Character

The cast for this book is big! We get to see the broader picture from almost all of the characters' perspective. The main characters are:

Joros

A priest for the Twins, but who defected and made it his mission to prevent them from being freed at all cost. He's violent but cunning.

Anddyr

Joros's slave/servant who is bound to him by a highly addictive drug that renders him completely obedient to Joros. He was originally a mage (wizard) and has the ability to find the bound Twins, so his service is especially valuable to Joros.

Rora & Aro (twins)

Twins who escaped detection and had a chance to grow up. Rora, the sister, is the stronger, smarter one of the pair while Aro is the baby brother. I wonder if the saying about twins being complementary is true, that when one is strong, the other is weak. This is definitely the case with Rora and Aro. Rora has a responsibility to take care of Aro and make sure he stays alive and well. Rora & Aro's storyline is the most interesting for me, and Rora is my favorite character among all the others, because she is strong-willed, keen, and street-smart. She's never a slobbering fool like her brother (sorry, Aro).

Scal

A northern boy who grew up in a southern prison camp. He is deeply influenced by a priest for the Parents and a childhood friend, and a raid from the northern folks that killed the priest and the friend changed Scal's life. Even when captured and trained in the Northern tribe, he swore to avenge their death. He's a strange combination of tough mercenary hulk and proverb-spouting sage.

Vatri

A foul-mouthed priestess for the Parents who's disfigured by fire during a session of fire divination. She found Scal through her divination, and joined the rest of the crew. She's an adamant hater of twins and Twin worshipers, and frequently spit at Joros, Rora, and Aro, whom she believes are evil abominations. I think I would have liked her if she were less bent on being so spiteful and prejudiced (and I love Rora).

& Keiro

A priest for the Twins who's saddened by the annihilation of human twins and who's on a pilgrimage to find the twin gods. His storyline mainly exposes how the society in Fiatera mistreats twins and isn't the most...interesting? However, it really picked up at the very end of the book, so it's all good.

Setting

The fantasy world of Fiatera is not clear-cut like those in most other fantasy stories that come with maps. It is divided into North & South, and only a handful of places stood out to me. One is the mountain Raturu, where Twins worshipers live deep inside the darkness. Another is the Canals, a criminal-infested place Rora and Aro found a home with a gang. I loved the glimpses of mafia rivalry, secret missions, and gritty reality the Canals represents. I think Keiro eventually arrives at a place reminiscent of Africa, with dark-skinned people and deserts. There's also a magic school where mages go to study, but sadly it's only mentioned in passing and isn't developed more fully.

The world-building is nonetheless quite skillful, with nasty issues like twin genocide and all that bias against Twins worshipers. I'm surprised by how prevalent and believable twin executions are in this book. When a pair of twins are born, the midwives burn them or take them to a nearby river and drown them, while the villagers and family look on impassively. It's gruesome and terrifying to even think of killing little babies, yet it's no far-fetched thing; people sacrificed their firstborns to Moloch in the olden days. I'm satisfied by how the book treats these issues so far, and I'd love to see how it's finally resolved in books to come. In

short, I want to see more the world even fuller developed in the next book!

Pacing

The pacing of the book is slow yet manageable. A multiple-POV story has both its advantages and disadvantages; even though the pace of the book is not fast, it encompasses many sides of the story. I feel like the author is setting the scene and putting pawns in place for a huge chess game. Hopefully the next book will have even more action and twists than the first one!

Final thoughts

Things I'd like to see in the next book:

1. More action from the gods. So far, I've only heard whispered and vague instructions and one short exchange by the end of the book. I want to know more!
2. More world-building. As I've said before, Fiatera has some intriguing places, but I'd love to read more about its cultures, places, and traditions.
3. Explanations! I know this is a series, and the author would eventually tell us everything, but I wonder why Joros needs the twins Rora & Aro for his mission to destroy the Twins. I don't think it's explained (or if it was, it's not emphasized). Why did he need them?
4. More food??? I know this isn't all that necessary, but I'm a foodie, and reading about food draws me nearer to the imaginary world and enriches the cultures depicted in the books.

That's all I can come up with for now, but I'm waiting for the author to pleasantly surprise me (or whack me on the head with awesomeness. Can't decide which is better). *In the Shadow of the Gods* has a compelling premise, a cast of mismatched, refreshing characters, and the potential of becoming a great series!

Aristea says

First and foremost, let's empower women who write (good) dark fantasy! Well done Rachel Dunne! I am really looking forward to your next activities - and book 2 in this series!
It is a great start! A 3.5 stars!

The book itself is a debut novel - and there are some elements I love that are missing in this case. For instance, the world building is almost absent. In my opinion, there is very little knowledge and discussion about the world itself, the only element sort of developed (but not really) is the religious structure. For instance, there is no referent to political (and other) systems.

The story telling is interesting, (view spoiler), the characters are fairly interesting.

From time to time, it felt the book being a bit slow and it left me wondering when the characters will be meeting and developing the story.

The one thing I really wished was a map at the beginning of the book; I have developed a taste for them in the books, it helps me understanding what is currently happening!

If you love fantasy (and dark fantasy specifically) you might want to give this book a go!

Reggie Kray says

There was never a point in this novel where my interest was not piqued. A superb dark tale with an awesome fluidity to it. Hard to believe this was Rachel's debut. This young lady has mad talent! All in all....a KICK ASS story!

[redacted by S.H.I.E.L.D.] says

Note to self: avoid books that describe themselves as grimdark in a non ironic fashion.

Calleaghn Kinnamon says

I was blessed to stumble upon an advanced copy of this book and was immediately hooked. I'm a huge fantasy fan and always looking for mature, interesting, richly dressed out worlds to explore. Rachel Dunne has created that here in spades. The cast of characters is varied and engaging, complicated and very believable. I got so attached to some of them, I actually found myself talking out loud to them at times (yeah, I'm that reader...) and even tearing up some as I witnessed their struggles.

Add some healthy doses of philosophy, religion, relationships, politics, and plenty of surprises, and this one has all the ingredients of a winner.

If you don't like violence or dark edgy stuff, this might be too strong for you. Of course, that's like talking about "hot" salsa- everyone's taste is subjective and hard to describe from the inside in a meaningful way. I like my fiction edgy and somewhat dark, in an intelligent way that's somewhat realistic without being gratuitous. I think Ms. Dunne has captured that sweet spot perfectly here. It's edgy enough to give it that messy human grit, but not overly so, and with plenty of heart to keep the story balanced and and light in places as well.

I'm in love with this book. I rarely write letters to authors, but when I turned the last page I couldn't help it. I was desperate for the next in the series and needed to tell her how much I loved it and find out when the next one is coming. Now I know I'll have to wait a bit, but... worth it! Worth it.

For what it's worth. :)

Calleaghn

Harlee says

I'm not quite sure what I think of this book. It was a bit slow but the characters and their different stories were interesting. My favorite perspective was probably Scal but Joros was interesting too. He's a difficult character to understand. I think the characters' story arcs came together a bit suddenly but I guess this book's purpose was to outline them and get their individual backgrounds laid out.

I bought the second book when I was about halfway through this one and I think I will start it tomorrow.

Bookwraiths says

Originally reviewed at Bookwraiths.

In the Shadow of the Gods announces a new voice in the fantasy field. Rachel Dunne setting off on an epic journey with this opening salvo in her *Bound Gods* series; the story promising divine beings, conflict and betrayal, personal angst, and more than enough combat and magic to satisfy.

The world setting for *Shadow* is an interesting one, dominated by a perpetual state of religious strife. Two faiths vying for control over the masses. The dominant force is that of the Parents; the creator gods who brought the universe and all its inhabitants into being. The rogue faith is for the Twins, or the Fallen; these divine children of the Parents having rebelled against their progenitors; their punishment to be cast down upon the world, where their bodies shattered into pieces – but they did not die.

The eternal bone of contention between these two faiths are the Twins, specifically their rebirth. For, you see, the faithful of the Fallen are eternally working to either recovery and reassemble the bodies of their gods or use newborn twin babies for their gods' spirits to inhabit. Something the followers of the Parents oppose, going so far as to kill all twin babies at birth and stone to death any missionaries of the Twins.

Into this quagmire of strife, Ms. Dunne weaves her tale through the viewpoints of five distinct characters. Each of these individuals living in the same general area of the world but as different from one another as people continents apart.

Readers first encounter Seeker Joros. This missionary of the Twins returning to his faith's secret sanctuary in Mount Raturu, which lies at the very edge of civilization. His purpose is to return several new converts to his outlawed religion; one pregnant female, in particular, is vitally important as she might be carry unborn twins. Joros' hope that the delivery of this pregnant woman will prove his worth beyond question and open the way to him becoming a member of the ruling elite of the Twins.

Meanwhile, in the snowy wastes of the Northlands, a young Northman is taken in by Parrokerrus, priest of the Parents. While the wild lad is silent and appears a brute savage, Parro is determined to raise him, teach him the truth of the Parents, and help him find a place in the harsh prison colony of Aardanel.

Seemingly a world away, siblings Aro and Rora eke out a minimal existence in the "Canals" of the city of Mercetta. Thieving and begging, hiding and killing as necessary to survive the inhuman slums ruled by rival gangs, but as long as the pair remains together they are willing to brave any hardship.

Lastly, there is pure-hearted, devoted Keiro. Where Seeker Joros sees his faith in the Twins as a path to power, Keiro views his life as one of pure devotion to a true and noble cause. His desire to convert the misguided lost to the side of the Twins. His spirit constantly seeking divine guidance. His every action tailored to reviving his gods and initiate the creation of a new paradise upon the world.

Once all these individuals are introduced and fleshed out, *Shadow* actually skips forward in time. Each character having their lives shattered by some unexpected event; a new path forced upon them. The fallout of the destruction placing all but one on an seemingly inevitable collision course, while that one brave soul finds himself on a solitary quest of discovery.

Like most opening volumes in a series, *In the Shadow of the Gods* puts its best foot forward, wooing a reader

with its new ideas, cast of characters, well-thought out world, and promises amazing things to come. And there are a lot of things to like here.

The foremost of them being the world itself with its very believable and combative religions. The faith of the Parents and the Twins are different, interesting, and nebulous enough that the author can go any number of places with the ongoing tale without breaking any established lore. Where it all ends up, whether the Parents or the Twins are evil, whether they rise again, and whether Joros or Keiro's vision about their true nature is correct is definitely compelling enough to encourage picking up volume two of the series.

The other element I enjoyed was the character Scal. This Northman really resonated for me. His unknown past, his deep respect for his foster father, and his life journey once tragedy strikes making him a conflicted character whose every choice felt important and worth following closely.

To be fair though, just as *Shadow* had many positive elements, there were a few stumbles, and I feel I should at least mention them for those who are attempting to obtain a clear picture of this novel.

First, the time shifts. There are two of them. Not a few days or weeks or months, but five years the first time and eight years the second time. Lots of life events skipped. I'm sure this was done because nothing important was happening, but if that is the case then it is odd that the characters reappear as changed people whom a reader has to get to know all over again. And, unfortunately, I don't enjoy having to reconnect with characters over and over again in a story. It could be a personally foible of mine, but I prefer linear stories where I get to follow along and experience my characters growing and evolving, not turn a page and be told they are now different in this way or that way. So, time shifts were a big turnoff for me here.

Second, the book felt too long. Many times it drags badly. Certain scenes and sub-plots seemingly irrelevant (though they could become important in future books) to the main story, serving as mere filler material. These lulls in the momentum of the tale bothering me immensely from time to time, and I felt that many of these section could have been left on the cutting room floor without having impacted the story at all.

But should you give this book a try?

Absolutely. There are a lot of very cool ideas and themes explored here. Definitely enough fresh and clever twists on epic fantasy to differentiate *In the Shadow of the Gods* from other fantasy offerings and help me recommend it to other readers. Plus, this is the first installment of the *Bound Gods* series, so I'm sure Rachel Dunne will gradually tweak this narrative, finding the perfect course to carry the tale to an epic conclusion that none of us will forget.

I received this novel from the publisher in exchange for a fair and honest review. I'd like to thank them for allowing me to receive this review copy and inform everyone that the review you have read is my opinion alone.

Zach says

I got this one from a Goodreads giveaway, which I feel a little bad about, because I think this book will appeal a lot to the right audience, but I am not that audience. I really, really want to like epic fantasy as a genre, and yet...

The hook here is that some 800 years ago (a far cry from the "eons" described on the book cover) the two gods who created the world (the Parents) cast down their children, the Twins, for overstepping their bounds,

although we're never quite sure which pair was in the right (the one bit of subtlety about the book). Worship of the Parents is still the dominant religion, which entails drowning human twins at birth, while the cult of the Twins is tolerated, if not politely accepted. This divine casting-out isn't a bad place to start, but it appears to be the only thing that has ever happened in this world, which is otherwise entirely lacking in a sense of history or place or culture or politics, aside from general unrelenting misery. It's a vaguely generic European setting, with Viking analogues to the north and some "plains tribes" to the south, and warring gangs of wretched orphans in the canals under the capital city (only city?), but that's about it in terms of the sense of the world that we get. The mountain stronghold of the Twins cult, shrouded in darkness and lit only by blue flames, is an interesting creation, but it never really came to life for me. At any rate, our motley crew of POV characters (an apostate priest, a barbarian, a pair of twins, and another fallen priest whose story never intersects with the others) will play a central role in the struggle between the two religions (vis a vis unbinding the bound Twins), but not in this book.

As is so often the case in epic fantasies, this is essentially a prologue for the actual story that will unfold in the later volumes, but what's particularly strange about this one is that it's structured as a series of prologues spaced years apart, and each one spends so much time referencing what has already happened that there was no real reason for the reader to be present for the actual unfolding of the earlier ones. This is particularly galling because once these endless origin stories are out of the way, the story picks up steam rapidly and becomes much more compelling in the final 50 pages or so... and then it ends, hooks (theoretically) set deep enough that you won't be able to resist the next volume.

I would say this is YA-ish, except for the consistent and excessive violence present throughout (someone literally explodes on the 3rd page). The author never tells you anything that she doesn't tell you half a dozen times, characters can tell if someone is good or evil based on the way they smile, half of the POV characters are children, everything is very on the nose, etc etc. Prose-wise we're in pretty average territory for an epic fantasy, I guess, although we veer into outright clunkiness from time to time, as with the first sentence of the novel: "Mount Raturu lurched above the forest like an ugly thumb, throwing its broad-shouldered shadow over the trees." I know I'm being overly nit-picky here, but most thumbs don't have shoulders, nor would I say they ever really lurch.

Some of the clunkiness is structural: I did not at all understand the scene where a man kind of laughingly invites one of the main characters to murder him, which she then does. Said character's twin brother is an inexplicable void, present but never *present*, and I wasn't sure if he was supposed to be developmentally disabled or not. An ideological shift on the part of another character, on which the entire series would appear to hinge, also left me scratching my head, and the climax of the novel brings back a character for no apparent reason aside from the fact that the author needed him to be there to resolve a subplot. This is, of course, in addition to the larger existential clunkiness of a book sold to sell future books.

All of that said, there was some promise here - the underlying conceit of missing gods still affecting the world is a good one (although, between this, Robert Jackson Bennett, and Ben Peek, it does appear to be the theme du jour), and I do appreciate that Dunne set out to make as dark a world as possible without ever relying on sexual violence (in fact, as far as I can recall, gender inequality isn't an issue here, which is refreshing). She also does a good job of making magic an otherworldly and inexplicable force, although I think not having it tied to twins at all was a missed opportunity.

Anyway, like I said, I'm not really the target audience for this. Interested in pretty clear-cut fantasy narratives about kids growing up so that they can go on adventures in other books? Have at it.

Brandi says

Rachel Dunne's "In the Shadow of the Gods (Bound Gods #1)" is an original story centering on the fantasy world of Fiatera. On Fiatera, twins are sacrificed in order to prevent the young gods known as the "Twins" from rising again. Overall, I would rate this book a 4.7 out of 5.

Characters include Joros, Scal, Vatri, Anddyr, Keiro, and twins Rora and Aro. Rora is definitely my favorite character; her brother, Aro can be kind of irritating. All the characters are developed well, as is the setting for the story. Dunne's storytelling is engaging, easy to read and hard to put down. I definitely look forward to the future installments of this series.

My copy of this book was obtained from the Goodreads website. I appreciate the opportunity to read and review it.

Rob says

There were things to like about this one but as a few others have said - it felt too much like a pre-amble, and at that, too dispersed between different characters with iffy motivations. I'm not going to bother marking the following mild stuff as spoilers but read on with caution:

The main priest guy blew hot and cold, the hollow mountain or whatever felt like bad CGI, and I couldn't have cared less about the itinerant preacher or whoever that was. On the other hand, the writing around the kids trapped in a creepy house was good (but the bit about street gangs, whatever), so was the kid growing up in the wilderness inc. a kind of Moorcockian relationship with the barbarians, and there was more potential once they'd started bringing the gang together at the end of the book. The religious elements just rang false throughout, sadly.

I wasn't sold on the overall world by this novel but clearly its biggest problem was that you have to really squint to locate it in a greater whole. It felt like a very street-level background to a possible series.
