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Mercedes Lackey , Larry Dixon

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It is an age when Valdemar is yet unfounded, its organization of Heralds yet unformed, and magic is still a wild and uncontrolled force. Skandranon Rashkae is perhaps the finest specimen of his race, with gleaming ebony feathers, majestic wingspan, keen magesight and sharp intelligence. Courageous, bold, and crafty, Skan is everything a gryphon should be. He is the fulfillment of everything that the Mage of Silence, the human sorcerer called Urtho, intended to achieve when he created these magical beings to be his champions, the defenders of his realm--a verdant plain long coveted by the evil mage Maar.

Now Maar is once again advancing on Urtho's Keep, this time with a huge force spearheaded by magical constructs of his own--cruel birds of prey ready to perform any evil their creator may demand of them. And when one of Urtho's Seers wakes from a horrifying vision in which she sees a devastating magical weapon being placed in the hands of Maar's common soldiers, Skandrannon is sent to spy across enemy lines, cloaked in the protective of Urtho's powerful Spell of Silence.

The Black Gryphon Details

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From Reader Review The Black Gryphon for online ebook

Laura says

4.5 stars

If you're looking for a light lovely read you should definitely consider this!

Why? Because of Skandranon Rashkae, **the black gryphon**, also known as simply Skan

who can fly into terrible rages, curse himself for being a *stupid bird* or forget his tongue sticking out of the corner of his beak at the sight of a beautiful gryphon lady!

Because of Kestra'chern Amberdrake or simply Drake

who despite his well groomed appearance and jazzy clothing provides service as an **experienced empath and healer** So don't you dare go thinking otherwise! :)

and because of Gesten, the hertasi

who will fix your appointments better than any other skilled secretary and will not hesitate to tell you that without a bath *you look like a mop, and if he were a female he wouldn't have you either* .

And most of all because, *no matter what tears were shed or what trials were faced, some things would stay the same. There would always be day and night, stars and sky, hope and rest. There would always be love, always compassion...* and always a good book like this to put a smile on your face!

Happy reading! :D

Stephanie says

This is one of the first books I read in the Valdemar world, and it hooked me quite thoroughly. It is still my favorite of the ones I have read so far.

The characters are engaging, even when they are showing a little flatness. None of their developments are particularly unique - finding confidence, learning to ask for help, learning you can't always have any mate you want all spring immediately to mind. However, they are presented in a unique wrapping, and they are unoriginal because they are nearly-universal. The unique presentation makes it interesting, while the familiarity is comforting. A perfect mix, and very typical of Lackey's Valdemar books.

Lackey's habit of switching between characters' POVs is well done here, but it can be quite distracting if the reader is not used to it.

I never get tired of re-reading this book.

Veronica says

3.75 stars

This was my first book by Mercedes Lackey and, reading it now, it does feel a bit old school but that didn't lessen my enjoyment of the story. It's not super complex - the good guys are good, the bad guys are bad - but it was a very pleasant, calming read.

Kelley Ceccato says

I read this book several years before I became involved with Goodreads, and I'm just now feeling moved to write a review because I saw it listed as one of the "Best 'Strong Female' Fantasy Novels." I'll get the bad news out of the way first: it really isn't, at least to me. I never could manage to warm up to the bigoted shrew Winterhart; even after her supposed reformation, I still found her one of the least engaging of all Lackey's female leads. One female character did capture my heart and wouldn't let go, the "gryfalcon" Zhaneel, who turns disadvantage into strength in a very awesome way and wins the respect of nearly every other character. She's one of the main reasons the book has stuck with me. If she were the female lead, and if she were a little bit more significant at the climax, this book would absolutely qualify for the list. But her part, while important, isn't quite big enough, as evidenced by the fact that the majority of the reviews for this book don't even mention her name.

The book is really a bromance, between the human Amberdrake and the gryphon Skandranon. Amberdrake is okay, but Skandranon steals the book with his badassery and his wisecracking charisma and his way of being completely relate-able even though he is distinctly (and appealingly) not human. When he's in the room, he is what you look at. If you're looking for a reason to pick up the book, he's it.

Jeremy Preacher says

The advantage to rereading the Valdemar books in internal chronological order is that I get my least favorite ones out of the way first. I do not like the Gryphon trilogy much at all - Larry Dixon's influence is far too noticeable, and while his illustrations are nice enough, the man can't write. The result is a really choppy book, with some good parts - I love the idea of a professional therapist/masseuse/high-class escort, because we all have needs, and they're very much intertwined, I think. And some bad parts - any of Skandranon's internal dialogue. Which there is a fair bit of, since he's the title character. Amberdrake, obviously written by Lackey, is much more bearable.

There's also the larger problem of turning stories that are set up as legends in previous books into actual novels. We know how the war ends, and so the main conflict has to be much smaller in scope. I'm just not that fascinated by a secondary character's bad romantic choices, and she turns from a villain into a hero far too quickly and easily. There's just not that much tension there. I am glad that Lackey has consistently declined to write about the founding of Valdemar for that reason - it leaves the aura of epic adventure around

it, whereas introducing everyone's petty little spats just brings it all down.

Choko says

*** 4.25 ***

The Black Gryphon, first chronologically in The Valdemar series, turned out to be one very pleasant read. The Mage Wars Trilogy is the start of a sweeping through thousands of years series and I decided to follow the reading order recommended by the author. Fantasy Buddy Reads group started reading it this month and I jumped right in.

"...“Inexperience can be overcome, ignorance can be enlightened, but prejudice will destroy you.”...”

The Black Gryphon covers the brewing war between two very powerful mages, Urtho and Maar. Urtho is a creator, described by all as a man with a good heart and only desirous of peace, but forced into the role of a War lord in order to protect his realm and the people and creatures inhabiting it. He is also the creator of enhanced animals and races of magical creatures, all with the purpose of championing the well being of all. The Gryphons are the greatest of them all. At least the very cocky black Gryphon Skandranon thinks so:) He is, in his own words, the strongest, the bravest, and the smartest, since he and his kind have been gifted with similar to human intelligence, fierce and independent in thought and action. Maar, the evil bastard, is also a very gifted mage, but has chosen to put arcane knowledge on the back burner in order to achieve worldly supremacy. He is not as inventive as Urtho, but in the moment the peaceful mage comes up with a tool or a creature to oppose Maar, he is able to copy and pervert those creations and re-purpose them to his own needs. Thus, he too has magical constructs derivative of the Gryphons, the Makaar, and the war in the skies are between those two powerful champions of opposite causes. Maar's only drive is Power over everything and he has already named himself an Emperor.

"...“You are human and mortal; we are the sum of our weak moments and our strong.”...”

The main human protagonist of this book is the very interesting combination of a healer/beautification specialist/personal therapist/empath/massage therapist/sometimes pleasure specialist and all together healer of all ills and pains of body and soul, the kestra'churn Amberdrake. He makes sure that the troops of Urtho are in top shape to fight for what they all feel is right and also happens to be the gryphon's Skandranon and the hertasi (a lizard-person creature) Gesten's best friend and their roommate. Their trio shares a beautiful and very enjoyable friendship, and I as a reader wished that we all could be as accepting and loving as those three. As the book progresses, we add the Gryfalcon Zaneel, a very abused and shunned Gryphon based on a Falcon species, and the human trond'irn (a caregiver to the Gryphons) Winterhart, who each become very dear to our guys. However, my favorite of all, after Gesten, is the misborn child-like Gryfalcon Kechara, who made me both sad and happy every time she was on page.

"...““Why would you want to make them happy?” Amberdrake turned back to his little friend, and sat with a sad smile on his face. “Because they are bitter, unhappy people, and very little else makes them happy. They say what they do out of envy, for any number of reasons. It may be because I lead a more luxurious life than they, or at least they believe I do. It may be because there are many people who do call me friend, and those are all folk of great personal worth; a few of them are people that occupy high position and deservedly so. Perhaps it is because they cannot do what I can, and for some reason, this galls them. But they have so little else that gives them pleasure, I see no reason to deprive them of the few drops of enjoyment they can extract from heaping scorn and derision on me.”...”

The story goes slowly, because it is mostly character driven, but despite that it is a very fast and enjoyable read. There is a gentleness to it that seems a bit much and unrealistic, but it also adds some very tender note to the whole composition, which makes you yearn for harmony and acceptance. This is mostly led by the very deliberate and thoughtful approach to accepting people as they are and trying to help them be the best they can be channeled by Amberdrake. His willingness to be the best he can be is contagious and soothing not only to his clients and friends, but us as readers as well. The predominant thematic of the story is learning who you are and who those around you are or want to be, and how can that help us all achieve some amity. Living up to our potential and overcoming the psychological blocks we learn to live with through our personality development. Only secondary comes the battles and the magic.

"...“There are no excuses,” he said at last. “But there are reasons. Reasons why we are what we are. Reasons why we do not have to stay that way.”... ”

Overall, I really enjoyed this book and am looking forward to the rest of the series:) I think I can easily recommend it to all readers of all ages and persuasions:):):)

Now I wish you all Happy Reading and may you always find what you Need in the pages of a Good Book!!!

Alana says

Mercedes Lackey has to be one of my favourite fantasy authors ever. Her talent for creating believable magical worlds and elegant, mystical creatures shines in this book. It's a gripping read from start to finish.

Diana says

This is the novel that started me on my love affair with Mercedes Lackey and her Valdemar series. I decided to re-read this after being able to meet the author and her husband Larry Dixon who did the art for the book. This trilogy in the series is a bit different than any other sequentially later books. This is really the only time gryphons are the focus of the series. Skandranon who is the main focus is a smartass "bird" with a huge ego, and for me, it makes him funny instead of annoying, especially when he gets taken down a peg or two. This book is the first in the Mage Wars trilogy and gives you the background of why Valdemar functions the way it does in later books.

Re-read 2018

I still love Skandrannon, his attitude is very well written. I've been re-reading quite a few books in this series and decided to just re-read all of them. I believe there are 40 in it now, so I have quite a few to go.

Rhapsody says

I used to read a lot of Mercedes Lackey a long time ago, I guess in my early teens. I really loved her various Valdemar series. Recently, kind of because I don't read as much as I used to and am tired of books that just

don't engage me, I was thinking maybe I should try falling back on some authors I used to like. Lackey was basically the one at the top of my list since I remembered her books as being so enjoyable.

I wouldn't say I liked *The Black Gryphon* as much as some of my other favorites by Lackey, in particular *The Last Herald Mage* trilogy, but yes--this book was definitely fun. It's hard to describe the plot of the book because most of the book is really about the interpersonal relationships between the several main characters. The overall setup is that there is a war between two powerful mages: Ma'ar, who has been steadily conquering country after country, and Urtho, who didn't want to get involved until Ma'ar conquered everyone else and brought war to his doorstep. This situation is the setting, with the real focus on the day-to-day lives of a small cast of protagonists. These characters form friendships, go on small adventures in the camp, and fall in love, etc. There are two romantic subplots, and Lackey is really good at making these subplots satisfying without letting them take over the story.

Lackey creates really rich and believable alternate worlds. Her writing is also very descriptive, so that you can imagine exactly what everything looks like. She knows a lot about birds, so she's able to write about the gryphons and other bird-species realistically (but not so much that it gets annoying). What always impresses me about her though is that the real focus of her books is always on her characters and the relationships they have--not just romantic ones, but also friendships, bonds between parents and children, teachers and students, etc. So her stories are very feel-good.

I guess the feel-goodness of her writing also maybe a weakness. I don't recommend these books for just anyone. I don't consider them "epic" fantasy novels like Tolkien or Martin or Jordan, even though they're all "fantasy." But they're enjoyable reads for anyone who likes a) fantasy and b) for a story to focus on its characters and relationships between them.

Molly says

This was my first Mercedes Lackey book, all the way back in High School. I have read it soo many times since. I love the "civilian perspective" that this book gives to a war. So many fantasy books focus on the battles and "great deeds". You only see three battle scenes the whole book and one of them is more of an afterthought of a battle. The true focus is on the downtime in between the battles and how the fighters and their support go about their lives in spite of the war. I LOVE the characters as well, Amberdrake's insecurities... Skandranon's grandious front that hides his genuine feelings... Winterheart and Zhaneel and how they overcome their broken spirits. It is one of my absolute favorites. As an old friend, this is a book I love to revisit.

Denise says

First of the trilogy about the "pre-history" of Valdemar. This entails the story of the Mage wars and how the people were scattered in order to save them from the threat of Ma'ar and his evil hordes. The people are aided in their efforts by gryphons...flying carnivores that speak and think in human language. They are raptors but constructed on a larger scale by their beloved Founder Urtho. The Black Gryphon is the main character and the best friend of Amberdrake, a kind of professional counselor with the "gift" of empathy. Their troubles and triumphs flesh-out the plot by running from humor to terror. My favorite character though was little "Kechara" (meaning "beloved")...the mis-born gryphon of Urtho who has the mind of a child (in a small adult body) but a hidden mental power that is yet to be unleashed.

Jen says

I like it. But I always like Mercedes Lackey.

For the first half of the book I thought Skan and Amberdrake were gay interspecies lovers. Then I found out they were just really close, and interspecies lovers don't exist in Valdemar, duh! Well how was I supposed to know, Mercedes is always pushing some socially progressive sexual tolerance in her books, I thought maybe she was taking it to the next level... ;)

Love Zhaneel. And I want a kestra'chern massage. :P

Betsy says

A friend lent me the Mage Wars trilogy, which is a prequel trilogy in Mercedes Lackey's Valdemar world. I love Mercedes Lackey's Elemental Masters series to bits, so I've been keen to read Valdemar books for a while. This friend is a massive Lackey fan, and offered to lend me the first Valdemar book, so of course I accepted!

The only snag is that The Black Gryphon is the internal chronology first Valdemar book, not the publication order first :/ I am usually super pedantic about reading series in publication order. I probably should have been more specific about that when talking to my friend. Oh well! I had it in my hands and this is what he gave me when I asked for the first book, so I started reading.

It took me a few chapters to get into it and get my head around the world. I don't know if that was actually because it's better to read it after having read the Valdemar books that were written earlier, or whether it was because I was a bit paranoid that there were references I was missing because I haven't read earlier books.

Once I got into the characters, however, I was totally captivated and stopped worrying about reading order. There were bits where I could tell were foreshadowing of things to come, but the book was just so lovely that I couldn't mind too much.

Like every other Mercedes Lackey book I've read, it's just plain fun to read!

I really like how, while the book is set during the height of the massive war, most of the main characters are support personnel rather than combatants - counselors/therapists and healers, mainly. Also, gryphons! All of the characters are just so nice (but also sufficiently complex) that you can't help loving them all.

I was reading it on the train home last night and I missed my station because I didn't look up until I finished the book. If that's not a good sign, I don't know what is.

After I read this trilogy I will definitely read the publication-order first book next, but I can live with having read this trilogy out of order.

Kirsti says

Revisiting another of my favorite Mercedes Lackey books found me smiling in remembrance; I hadn't marked this as 'read' in my time on Goodreads, but the instant familiarity means it must have been one of the last books I read before I joined this site. I knew I had read it, but it was so familiar that it can't have been that long ago I read it.

Like with many of Lackey's books, the war is only secondary to the relationships of the characters. There is rich history here, and the stories all interconnect eventually. I love Amberdrake and Skandranon especially, because Skan is everything you could hope for from a Gryphon. He is proud, ruthless, vain and yet charming. He is more human than some human characters from other fantasy novels!

The Mage Wars set off a fraught era of Valdemar's history, in which many events are influenced. It is a great starting point for the series, or just a revisit on events. Always a fun read, five stars.

Lisa (Harmonybites) says

I love Lackey's Valdemar novels, and this is set in the same world a thousand years before that country's founding, in the midst of a cataclysmic war referred to more than once in that series.

One of Lackey's strengths is her world-building, and that's certainly on display here, with magical races like the gryphons developed in interesting ways, and I liked the title character, Skandranon. The novel kept my interest, was a fairly enjoyable read, and I did go on to read (and mostly enjoy) the next two books in this trilogy, which is why I felt it was fair to give it 3 stars.

It doesn't get more than that, because unlike other Lackey books in this world, I can't imagine I'd ever reread it; I don't think it's among Lackey's best, and I wouldn't ever choose these books as an introduction to the author. So if you love Lackey and her Valdemar books already, I think you'll like, even if not love this book; but if you're new to the author, try *Arrows of the Queen* or *Magic's Pawn* first.
