



Shadow Queen

Deborah Kalin

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I put out a hand to steady myself as the vision took me. The parquetry floor washed to black...As if sparked by the hard glare, a fire burst and raged through the room, the flames hot enough to crisp bones and raise the smell of marrow burning to cinders. And me in the middle, wrapped in the black shroud of the dead.

Matilde of the House of Svanaten is tired of being shadow queen. Her accession to the Turasi throne is long overdue, yet her imperious grandmother, Beata, is reluctant to hand over power.

When Matilde's mysterious aunt, Helena, turns up for Turassi's most important festival, suspicions abound. Why has Helena - long married into the despised Ilthean nobility - suddenly appeared? And what of the Ilthean soldiers massed at the southern border?

Hard on Helena's arrival, Matilde is struck by a vision that warns of doom. And it isn't long before a powerful enemy strikes at the very heart of power, leaving a trail of death and destruction in his wake.

After narrowly surviving the conflagration that shatters her entire world, Matilde is forced to pit herself against her family's conqueror in a battle not just for the throne, but for her very existence.

Assured writing and an unforgettable main character combine to make *Shadow Queen* a truly unforgettable novel.

From the Publisher (Allen & Unwin)

Shadow Queen Details

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From Reader Review Shadow Queen for online ebook

Jet says

I'm not sure what I thought of this. The main character had an original and compelling voice, but on the other hand, all of the characters behaved erratically. I couldn't work out anyone's goals or motivations, and that made for an unsatisfying read. I didn't feel I knew who any of these people were by the end of the book, which makes it rather difficult to care what happens to them.

Rafe says

One of the worst books I've ever attempted to read. I rarely stop reading a book just because it's terrible, I have to finish things. But still, I got about 3/4 of the way through this. It hits you in the face with a ridiculous turn of personality in the protagonist. It's as if the main character has stockholm syndrome, and it just gets worse from there.

The worst thing, I feel, is that the beginning of the novel lulls you like a siren's song. It is intriguing, addictive, and you don't want to put it down. And then ... and then.

Simply put, don't waste your time.

S.B. Wright says

'A Duethin stands still, Matilde. None among the Turasi will bend their neck to a fidgeter.'

Thus we are introduced to our protagonist, a young woman on the verge of becoming the leader of the squabbling Turasi Clans. To say she is wholly unprepared for the events of the novel is an understatement.

The Tale

Shadow Queen is a pacey political thriller in a fantasy setting. Our protagonist Matilde is to take the throne and rule over the Turasi. Before she can claim it, she is usurped by the leader of a renegade clan and in an effort to survive the slaughter of her entire line, offers herself in marriage. Her life hangs in the balance at almost every decision and forced to make decisions with her naïve understanding of politics, she often ends up getting into more trouble.

Kill your darlings or Oppress them

Kalin is merciless in placing her protagonist in dire straights from beginning to end. A consequence of this, is of course, that while we are constantly on edge we are also screaming at Matilde not to be so blatantly naïve.

I love that our protagonist rarely wields a weapon, or becomes Xena Warrior princess to achieve her aims. It is of course set against a backdrop of impending war, but Kalin has done a great job using psychological tension and the interplay between characters to ensure that neither Matilde nor the reader really have a chance to catch their breath.

If I were to contrast this against Brandon Sanderson's latest which aims to achieve similar things ie female protagonist, more political and psychological tension than grand battles, I'd have to say that Kalin comes out on top.

Story and Character

The world of Shadow Queen is broadly painted. I can see Anglo Saxon influence in the Turasi, Monghols in the Skythe Tribes and Romans in the Iltheans . Kalin gives us sign posts rather than detailed histories. She wants our focus on story and character. Kalin succeeds and the result is pacey and emotionally enticing.

Matilde is believable, a young adult thrust into leadership and woefully incapable of playing the political game. But she is a survivor and one gets the impression that she will learn, if painfully so.

Shadow Queen strikes me as a mature work, not a debut novel. Its pace and ease of reading feels more like the work of a journeyman than a novice. I am looking forward to more of Deborah Kalin.

This novel was provided to me at no cost by the author

Smita Jha says

I kept reading and turning pages. Back story and world made sense and was believable. Matilde herself was unsure and uncertain which matched her age and her situation, but sometimes made you wish she'd get a backbone.

I liked the book enough that I'm willing to keep reading. Some of the history / back story still doesn't make sense.

Helen Venn says

Matilde, heir to the House of Svanaten, is nineteen, of age and more than ready to take her place on the throne but her regent grandmother is unwilling to hand over the reins. But it is not as simple as a desire for power. Matilde has visions of the future and her grandmother's skill at hiding this is all that keeps her granddaughter from being claimed by the church and losing her throne forever. When her long estranged aunt arrives with her young son for a festival, Matilde is delighted until a moment of prescience comes too late and she loses family, friends and throne in one horrific attack. Alone, desperate to survive and eventually regain her throne, she agrees to be bound in marriage to the man who has wiped out her family. Her new husband, though, wants more than a wife and uses magic to secure her loyalty. Matilde finds herself despised by those she cares about as she struggles to subtly undermine her conqueror.

Shadow Queen is in many ways a coming of age story. Tilde may be restlessly wanting her throne at the beginning of the novel but she is also immature and naive and her prescience is potentially dangerous to both her and her throne. When her whole world is destroyed she is forced to grow up fast and, although she makes mistakes - and there are many of them - she learns quickly that the new husband's ruthlessness must be matched by her own.

The author keeps a tight grip on a complex story of politics and psychological manipulation that reveals itself slowly as Tilde learns more about herself, her family and her kingdom and its enemies. The characters are

well-drawn with a blend of strengths and weaknesses and, often, surprising sides to them. As it should be, no-one is perfect in this world where betrayal is commonplace.

Shadow Queen is gritty fantasy set in a realistic quasi mediaeval world and should appeal to those who enjoy novels by Jennifer Fallon and Glenda Larke. There are no elves, fairies or vampires but there is magic - and it's powerful, dark and dangerous.

Paula says

This has come thru from the A&U Arena imprint which has been taking a much-needed punt on new fantasy authors (see my reviews on the Kira Chronicles books). This one tethers between being young adult and adult but it's still a good read with a strong female character.

Worth a read.

Jessica Smith says

Loved this book. I think this is the first time I've read about a strong woman, a truly believable character who possesses *flaws*, and overcomes them despite everything. Characters like Matilde have become far too rare.

Isobel says

I don't know what to think of this book. It was an easy read and I think I enjoyed it but I didn't understand any of the plot and I couldn't relate to the the main character. Everything happens so quickly, if the writer had decided to write more prose instead of something different happening each chapter that would be great.

Also do the characters in this realm have multiple-personalities because that's what it felt like. One second you would know what a character was like, then it would change and keep changing. Especially with Dieter. That drove me nuts.

There is a sequel but I'm not interested

Trina says

An easy to read, engaging story that is not bogged down in excessive description. Relatable characters and an interesting plot; something difficult in a highly competitive genre. I love reading Australian authors, especially when their writing is clean and neat. I look forward to seeing Kalin's work in the future. I have moved on to volume two, 'Shadow Queen'.

Celia says

I enjoyed this tense, dark fantasy, about Matilde, the heir to the throne, and the considerable political upheaval that takes place in her land. I was a bit concerned that the story was edging towards a falling-in-love-with-a-captor thing, which is one of my pet hates. It ends ambiguously - there's clearly a lot more story to come, and ends in a fairly dark place - and so it's not clear whether Matilde's feelings (whatever they are, and even she is not sure) are the result of a sort of Stockholm syndrome.

I like the uncertain nature of this novel, Matilde's desperate attempts to regain and secure power, the desperate sense of how much is at stake. It's not a cliffhanger ending (not a happy end, but not really a cliffhanger) which is nice in a series where you have to wait for the next book to be published.

Ballerinble says

I found this book quite hard to get into. Firstly, there were several names and terms in the book that needed greater description. Secondly, though Matilde is a strong and at times engaging character, I feel that her magical abilities were an after thought. She needed to be developed more in this way. Lastly, the story got more interesting about half way through the book. That is why I finished it.

Jess says

I found Shadow Queen quite fast-paced and refreshing to read. I think the author achieved a good balance of detail for the readers to visualise the story's setting and characters without over doing it like many other books in the same genre. The protagonist, Matilde, is a very believable character and I found myself empathising with all that she endured.

I recommend Shadow Queen to anyone who is after a quick and easy read, filled with a good combination of action, suspense, politics and magic. Readers would find it hard to put down this novel – especially in the last half of the book.

Looking forward to the rest of the series!

Jennifer says

First thing that struck me was a problem with the cover art and banners (obviously two artists and one wasn't paying attention).

It was an easy, not unenjoyable read, but I disliked her (mis)treatment of the golem legend and the description of the people who use such said arts. I don't enjoy books where the heroine falls in love with her captive, even if it's through dark arts, and that point bothered me. Things were let poorly explained if explained at all and the division among the tribes left me politically confused. Still, the first chapter was a gripping one.

Not sure I'll bother with the second book.

Lola says

I really liked the beginning of the book, and I was enchanted with Matilde, cause she was so strong and determined and then something happened that she turned submissive and kind of weak and, the whole story lost the fast pace and just lost my attention. Maybe it was because despite the bunch of characters the only one that seems to develop through the story is her, leaving the other like merely incidental ones.

Despite that, story is not that bad, in fact it is really interesting, but I felt like is kind of difficult to follow at parts specially cause there are lots of names and places.

To sum up, it was a nice reading, but nothing I'm really looking forward to continue.

Larissa says

Matilde is a young woman on the cusp of becoming Queen, if ever her grandmother would relinquish the title. It is a role she was groomed for since birth. It was hers by right and she waited impatiently for it. However the arrival of her exiled aunt sets into motion a series of events that would see her fight to keep control not only of her position but her very life.

As Matilde's world fall around her she finds her every turn bared. She may have escaped with her life, for now, but she is trapped in a cage of her own binding, and undermined and manipulated by those who have secured her in both mind and body. It was only a matter of time before those around her decided her life was no longer useful.

In a time where no one can be trusted and danger lies with one wrong move, Matilde must navigate the treacherous waters of diplomacy, assassination and war in order to gain back that which is rightfully hers. Every step she makes leads her closer to her goal, but brings with it unwanted allegiances and danger. In the end will her actions justify all she is able to win back, or has she just lost all to the most deadly enemy of all.

Shadow Queen introduces a world that is ancient and ominous, steeped with tradition, history and magic. It is a story as mysterious as it is complex and will have you hooked from the first, surprising you at every turn. Matilde is a character both honest and empathising; although questioning her own motives for the best way forward, she is able to read others recognising their motives. A book for any fantasy lover. Looking forward to Book 2.
