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In March 1987, Mercedes Lackey, a young author from Oklahoma, published her first novel, *Arrows of the Queen*. No one could have envisioned that this modest book about a magical land called Valdemar would be the beginning of a fantasy masterwork series that would span decades and include more than two dozen titles.

Now the voices of other authors add their own special touches to the ancient land where Heralds “Chosen” from all walks of life by magical horse-like Companions patrol their ancient kingdom, dispensing justice, facing adversaries, and protecting their monarch and country from whatever threatens. Trained rigorously by the Herald’s Collegium, these special protectors each have extraordinary Gifts: Mindspeaking, FarSeeing, FarSpeaking, Empathy, Firestarting and ForeSeeing, and are bonded for life with their mysterious Companions. Travel with these astounding adventurers in these original stories.

Crucible: All-New Tales of Valdemar Details

Date : Published December 1st 2015 by DAW

ISBN :

Author : Mercedes Lackey (Author/Editor) , Jennifer Brozek , Louisa Swann , Michael Z. Williamson , Jessica Schlenker , Dayle A. Dermatis , Brigid Collins , Angela Penrose , more... Anthea Sharp , Kerrie L. Hughes , Phaedra Weldon , Stephanie D. Shaver , Dylan Birtolo , Elizabeth A. Vaughan , Ron Collins , Elisabeth Waters , Michele Lang , Kristin Schwengel , Fiona Patton ...less

Format : Kindle Edition 352 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Anthologies, Short Stories, Fiction

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From Reader Review Crucible: All-New Tales of Valdemar for online ebook

Joy says

I realized I had missed one of the collections of Valdemar tales when I went to pre-order the one coming out in a week, so picked this up and happily tore through it in a few days. The stories in this anthology were a bit wider ranging than in other Valdemar anthologies, which is both a plus and a minus. Several were new entries following characters seen previously, and most were ones involving new characters and even new perspectives.

The first story in the anthology is "Feathers in Need" telling the story of a blind gryphon and a changechild, and it is a VERY strong story that left me decidedly wanting more, and I hope that the author will continue the story in future anthologies. The story was so good that it left the next few stories gasping a bit to catch up, in my opinion!

Other stories of note include:

"The Note" about how a young woman's Choosing, life as a Herald, and untimely death as a young woman were viewed by her grieving mother - a side of life as a Herald that is often glossed over or not covered. This was simple, powerful, and had a nice ending that didn't feel contrived.

"The Quiet Gift" about a Bard coming into her powers only after she was too injured to use her skills was a delightful way to look at talents versus skill.

"Down the Line" was a creepy story about a greedy man who manages to steal the lifeforce of his very descendants...

"Vexed Vixen" was absolutely delightful about a peevish Healer who is captured and has to set up her own rescue whilst protecting herself.

One thing that struck me while reading this anthology was that while many of the characters and setups seemed familiar, I was often left trying to remember where they fit in for a few pages. The world of Valdemar is vast, both geographically and chronologically, and without a key term or person it's easy to not quite know when or where you are. This isn't always a problem, such as in "The Note" which could've taken place at any time in Valdemar's history, but for other stories where the setting matters or follows established characters, I think it would be beneficial to include a few lines prior to the story indicating when and where it's set along with whether these are new or established characters.

A solid four stars, and another delightful few days of reading in one of my favorite fantasy worlds.

Morgan Dhu says

I've been having a rather rotten time these past weeks, and so it was with some pleasure that I was able to get my electronic hands on a copy of Crucible, Mercedes Lackey's newest anthology of short stories set in Velgarth, the world where the Heralds of Valdemar and the Hawkbrothers and Shin'a'in and other such peoples live.

It's always enjoyable for me to revisit these places - there is, as I have often said, something about the universe Lackey created here that pushes my simple pleasure buttons.

As usual, Lackey's contribution "Vexed Vixen," was one of the ones I enjoyed the most. Others that stood

out for me were Fiona Patton's "Before a River Runs through It," Jennifer Brozek's "Feathers in Need," Stephanie D. Shaver's "The Highjorune Masque," Elizabeth A. Vaughan's "Unresolved Consequences," and Dayle A. Dermatis' "Never Alone." But all of the stories were, in their own way, fun. Lackey knows what she wants in these anthologies, and she gets it from her contributors.

*Of the 18 short stories in this anthology, 15 were written by women, two by men, and one was a collaboration between a man and a woman.

Kelly says

This was a fun, quick read, but to be honest, only one story touched me and that was The Note by Phaedra Weldon. It tells the story of a Companion and her Chosen, but through the experience of the Chosen's mother. It's a story full of sadness, bitterness, anger, and ultimately, redemption.

Lady-Erin Mason says

A fun and entertaining book full of short stories about Valdemar and the heralds. They were just long enough to be interesting and short enough to keep your interest until the very end. Some of the tales I'd have liked to read more about and maybe in future books they'll continue. Some were funny, some sad, and some exciting. I enjoyed the variation.

J.L. says

Favorite story: "The Note" by Phaedra Weldon. While many of the stories in this anthology rated between 3 and 4 stars for me and were cute and enjoyable but not amazing, this penultimate tale punched me right in the feels. There are so many things about the life of a Herald that are explored in this tale, even though the story's point of view is the mother of a (deceased) Herald. Reading this story is worth the cost of the anthology alone.

Story that I wish would be expanded into a novel: "Never Alone" Dayle A. Dermatis. Valdemar has been my go-to escape world since I was 12 years old, which is over half my life at this point. Though the books are marketed as adult fantasy, there was so much that spoke to my teenage and young adult self that definitely shaped who I am as a grown-up. But as an adult today, it was lovely to see the tale of a very nontraditional Herald in the form of Herald trainee Syrriah. The story itself is sweet and delivers a strong message in itself, but the underlying implication that it's never too late for any of us to be Chosen is what stayed with me.

Phyllis Griffiths says

Whatever happened to those delightful characters who appeared in the previous Valdemar short story anthologies? Vixen the healer is but one of those whose continuing adventures can be found in Crucible. As a bedtime reader these stories make it easier to close the book at a story's end, with the call of the next story

promising another good read. This book has joined others on my "Read Again" shelf. A very good read!

Sctechsorceress says

I enjoyed this collection of stories. I'm still a fan of Mercedes Lackey's Valdemar series, because they are just plain fun to read. These stories are written by several different authors, and all of them are good. This is not serious reading, or a deep mystery, and I will not compare it to that kind of book, but it is enjoyable, and that's why I read it. I was just what I wanted.

Ryan says

Valdemar is my second home. For some of you it's Hogwarts, others get lost in Narnia, and some of you like to wander around Middle Earth. Don't get me wrong, I like those places too, but there is something about Valdemar, and it's surrounding lands, regardless of the time period, that feels like home. It's the place I go to when I just need to hunker down and recharge.

When I'm not in the mood for a full length adventures, it's the anthologies that I turn to. They are filled with quick little short stories so I don't have to invest a lot of time, seeing a long story line through to the end. I can read one, or a few of them at a time, getting in my fix, but not taxing my busy schedule. I hate when I get to a really good, or intense part of a book, to only be forced to put it down due to time constraints. Nothing, and I mean nothing, is more frustrating when it comes to reading.

In the past, I've recommended these anthologies to people who are unfamiliar with Valdemar and it's denizens, but I think I'm going to change my mind on that one. After finishing the last story in Crucible, I realized a couple of things, or at least I put two and two together. These books really are for the fans. Fans who are already familiar with the timelines, peoples, and lands mentioned within their pages are going to get more out of these. The stories jump around too much. There is not sense of time or place among them, so if you aren't already familiar with the basics, you will quickly get lost. And being lost in a foreign land, is never fun.

Crucible is the ninth such anthology, and I've read every single one of them. The first three were devoured preblogging days, so there are no reviews for them, but I'm such I'll correct that over time. Like any collection of short stories, Crucible has some that I like more than others, but they all collectively add to the richness of Valdemar. As in previous collections, there are stories that continue form earlier anthologies, and a whole host of new characters to explore. Each of them, including the ones I didn't fall in love with, makes my second home, all that much more real to me. Each story, each character, adds another layer, another thread, shaping Valdemar into a more concrete place in my imagination, which in turn makes it an even better place to escape to.

annapi says

As with most anthologies, the good and the bad balance each other out and overall rating ends up a 3. I really enjoy these anthologies of stories based on Lackey's world of Valdemar with its Heralds and Companions. One failing of this particular collection is that it had more than its share of stories that started out well and fell short at the end - just left the story hanging when I wanted to know more about the character and the

story. As usual with these collections, the story penned by Lackey herself is the best.

Jan Niblock says

All of the stories in this anthology were great. It brought me back to the days when I first discovered stories about Valdemar and that world. I have really missed those stories but these were a welcome read.

My favorite and the one that moved me the most was "The Note" by Phaedra Weldon. I had tears in my eyes entire time I read it because it was such a moving story and the end was awesome.

If you miss Mercedes Lackey's Valdemar series, this is defiantly a book you need to pick up.

Charlie says

A very mixed bag. Some reasonable stories, but mostly no better than so-so. No one story was a real winner, and too few of them were even 3 stars, so the overall compilation? 2 stars. And I'm being generous.

CatBookMom says

Part of the 5yr read-along. See books #5 & 8. Particularly like the stories about Lady Cera and her Rethwellan estate. Several other good story lines carried from one book to the next.

Hilary says

It may be all-new tales of Valdemar, but for the most part I found myself in only a vaguely familiar landscape. I never managed to get into the Mage Storm books, which didn't help, and the dearth of familiar characters was another impediment; even a major inconsistency I spotted in a later story. I was halfway through before I found one that *felt* like a Valdemar story to me, albeit without Heralds.

So I didn't get on with it as a Valdemar extension, but otherwise the stories themselves were quite good. There were stories of healers and bards, of love and fear, of the trapped and the lost, of new twists on Gifts, of revolutions and rogues. So a variety, but not quite my cup of tea.

Disclaimer: I received a free copy from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Mary Goldsmith says

This book was very good. I enjoyed the stories and could see why Mercedes Lackey put all of these particular ones together. They were all prologues and epilogues to their own stories. Each book left me with the feeling that there was a new story waiting to be told...and at the same time, the story each had its own

ending. Kind of a story within a story, if that makes sense. I turned the page at the end of each story expecting to read more. And yet, each ending was a good ending. To write a short story is different than to start and end a story in the same length as a chapter. That takes talent. But I do see the possibility of a lot of story ideas coming from this. I did miss more about the Heralds and their companions. But, they were alluded to in most all of the stories, and, you got the "feeling" of Valdemar.

Dee Eisel says

Mercedes Lackey has had a really rough year, so when I found out she had a new book out I knew I needed to buy it new for maximum royalties to go to her. Crucible is a book of short stories, one of which is by Lackey, the others by different writers.

I enjoyed each. We have the usual stories of Choosings, Healers and Bards, with a few of Shin'a'in and Tayledras for seasoning. I'm a sucker for telepathy stories, and Mindspeech factors in quite a few of these, so that makes me almost unreasonably happy - especially when it's used in unexpected ways. I do enjoy when Heralds aren't the main characters. Lackey gives me a lot to like here, with many Healer stories to get into. Am I the only woman in the world who never wanted a magic horse? I might be, but the use of Heralds mostly as supportive characters and the focus on others appealed to me.

The best part of this is that you don't have to know anything about Lackey's world of Valdemar to enjoy the book. It helps, of course, but these stories stand on their own and work quite well as bite-sized introductions to the world. If you're looking to jump into Valdemar but don't want to commit to a trilogy or figuring out where to start, I recommend this collection as an option.

Five of five stars, highly enjoyed!
