



The Shadow Dragons

James A. Owen

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The Caretakers of the Imaginarium Geographica are at war. The Imperial Cartological Society, led by Richard Burton, have collected all of the doors from the Keep of Time, and are building a new tower in our world at the request of an old enemy: The Winter King's Shadow. He has a terrible weapon – The Spear of Destiny – that can be used to command the shadows of anyone it touches...including the protectors of the Archipelago, the dragons. With a ship called The Iron Dragon, the Shadow King regains passage to the Archipelago where he uses the power of the Spear and the portals of Time to enlist an unstoppable army of Dragon Shadows. And after the Archipelago falls, he intends to betray the Allies in our world – but not to align himself with the opposition. The Shadow King intends to use the turmoil of WWII to take over BOTH worlds.

All the legendary Caretakers, past and present, come together on a great island in the northermost part of the Archipelago to decide the ultimate fate of the Imaginarium Geographica, as a terrible battle ravages the lands around them. And their only hope lies with a small group of companions who are on the quest for the broken sword Caliburn: the Grail Child Rose Dyson; her mechanical companion, the owl Archie; a mouse with an attitude; a dead Professor of Ancient Literature; and the mythical knight, Don Quixote.

They must sail beyond the ends of the Archipelago in search of the sword, and the only being alive who can repair it: a scholar, who, once upon a time, was called Madoc.

The Shadow Dragons Details

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From Reader Review The Shadow Dragons for online ebook

Skip says

Rounded up from a 2.5. As the Shadow of the Winter King tries to take control of both the Archipelago and the Summer Lands using the Spear of Destiny, the Caretakers and Rose must find a way to fulfill the prophecy that prevents this as well as halting the disintegration of the Keep of Time. With a variety of characters from the past, both literary and scientific, and a new character (Don Quixote), they work to save the two worlds from a terrible fate.

This book was very slow. It took way too long to get to the action, and even when things begin to happen, they happened slowly. Also, Owen got away from using fables and mythology, and did not really develop his characters much.

Mia says

Another thoroughly enjoyable book in this series. This is such a solid time travel fantasy series!! This one involves more classic authors, so many great twists and turns... the end is full of surprises and triumphs and some sad losses. I can't say enough about this series- it's so well-done! I stayed up late finishing this one cuz I had to know what happened- that hasn't happened in a long time. If you like time travel, classic literature, excellent writing and works building, and dragons, this series is a must read! I can't wait to get the next book. :)

Erin Channell says

While I love all of the books in this series, this one really addressed a lot of the questions I ask myself whenever I read them. I especially enjoy the look into the history of the Caretakers and who they are/were.

Amy says

This is such a fantastic series! If you like Dr. Who, this series is for you. Legendary characters and their literary Caretakers in a race through space and time to save the world from the Shadow King. Written for teens, but I enjoyed it immensely. I'd love to go back through and make a list of all the historical and literary figures represented and a timeline of events. My son wishes they would make these into movies. I kind of do too!

Hummingbeard says

Here's the *Imaginarium Geographica* drinking game.

Take a shot every time:

- someone says "this is a fine how-do-you-do"

- someone says something "matter-of-factly"
 - one of the main characters is confused
 - one of the main characters makes a stupid decision
 - one of the main characters comes to a bad conclusion
 - there is hugging and joyful greeting
 - time travel is poorly executed
 - the plot doesn't make sense
-

Mith says

The foreshadowing at the end about my beloved Charles DID NOT PLEASE ME.

breaks down

Nicole says

Review originally posted at Erlebnisse: <https://erlebnisseweb.wordpress.com/2...>

So, this was a really, really fun book to read.

As war breaks out in the Archipelago and then World War II strikes out in the Summer Country--and our Caretakers are the only ones who can even attempt to fix it, considering they are a part of the prophecy meant to save them all--I am blown away by the intricacy of the plot and how everything that is real ties in so well to the fiction created here. To the point where, once again, I question whether or not our reality isn't somehow shaped by this fiction I've been inhaling by the page.

(I realize that, of course, it isn't. Yet can you blame a girl for second guessing and perhaps, to some degree, maybe even wishing it was so? If you've read these books, then you know and understand exactly how this is possible. And if you haven't...well, I'm slightly confused why you're still reading this review, to be honest.)

My favorite aspect of this book, however, was the Tamerlane House.

That is a house I want to board in, only permanently.

Hell, I'd even be content to read a book just about the day-to-day conversations between the people who live there and the paintings that make it possible. It has to be so fascinating, even if they usually don't come out, except for extreme emergencies. But by far and large, I thought that was the one of the best parts about this book as we progressed to the fourth book of the series. That, paired with the Trumps, the continuing complexity of time travel, the reassurance of old characters, the journey over The Edge of the World and that last chapter, where we see the beginning threads of a very uneasy alliance between the Caretakers and the Imperial Cartological Society...

Well, I'm really glad I can jump right into The Dragon's Apprentice, the last book I've read in this series and can treat as a reread before I finally read the last two for the first time. It's going to be a very surreal feeling...

Read on!

An Odd1 says

Tried to re-read. Like Alice following rabbit into Wonderland, the Caretakers fall into unrelated strange situations. Name dropping is wasted when I don't recognize who they are referring to or why. Everyone is just shadows who come and go without meaning or developing depth. I find bits of prophecy are vague and annoying. If you like those mysteries and references then you could appreciate this book more than I did.

Ginny says

super excellent
learned some new things about some old authors and their characters.
Just plain fun

Molly says

The characters that Owen has created in this series, or I suppose the more accurate thing would be to say, the characters he has elaborated on, really came to life for me in this fourth book. I have grown to love the interactions between those of the Summer Country and those of the Archapeligo.

I enjoyed the past caretakers, and the lead into the more modern caretakers. I am interested to see what happens to the Archapeligo and the Summer Country in the books to come.

I thoroughly enjoy this series, and feel that this author is being very creative with his use of myths and expansion on reality. It has been very intriguing for me, and I hope that he continues in this fashion with the next few books.

Graham Bradley says

I just re-read this, and I'm glad I did. There's always so much to remember in these books, and I have to read the fifth one.

Em says

The Shadow Dragons, the fourth book in James A. Owen's *Chronicles of the Imaginarium Geographica*, felt like a repeat of *Here, There Be Dragons* on a bigger scale—and in this case, bigger is not better.

A time traveler named Alvin Ransom whisks the Caretakers and Rose forward in time to 1943, where they must make a final stand against the Winter King's Shadow, who has the Imperial Cartological Society and the Spear of Destiny at his disposal. The Caretakers' only hope to defeat him is a broken sword that can only be repaired by the Winter King himself.

Although the basic good-against-evil plot is reminiscent of *Here, There Be Dragons* (view spoiler), *The Shadow Dragons* suffers from an overlong opening act stuffed with exposition. Watching J.R.R. Tolkien (John), C.S. Lewis (Jack), and Charles Williams (Charles) interact with a house full of the world's greatest (white, male) minds should be exciting. Instead, it's mostly frustrating, for several reasons.

The exponential expansion of the cast precludes any character development. Everyone from Uncas the talking badger to Don Quixote de La Mancha has a character arc, but they simply don't get enough screen time for the emotional beats to land. What is the point of bringing together a young, time-displaced Nemo with Jack (the man responsible for his death) and Stephen (the son Nemo never knew) if their interactions are limited to battle strategies?

Additionally, the overabundance of allies puts the chips too squarely in the Caretakers' favor. As a result, the plot dumbs down its characters to create drama. ((view spoiler)) It doesn't help that all of these supposedly brilliant people are being pitted against a one-note villain who is a definite step down from the version of Mordred we saw in *The Indigo King*.

Even amidst this bleak backdrop, Owen still delivers a few moments of levity that, unsurprisingly, involve Charles. In most series, there's one sidekick who is relegated to comic relief. Charles certainly fills that role, but Owen breaks the mold by making Charles the heart of the series as well. Whether it's getting a back tattoo, breaking the ice between dead intellectuals, or raising Baby Groot (view spoiler), Charles steps up (even if it is with a clunker like "So, Jamie, what happened to your dog after you died?").

With most of the loose ends tied up, it's not certain how much more story there is left to tell for this batch of Caretakers. The (view spoiler) instated at the end of the novel doesn't leave much time for at least one of them. More than its predecessors, *The Shadow Dragons* alludes to the current Caretakers' futures, which include C.S. Lewis's tenure at Cambridge in the 1950s (the badgers wear black armbands to mourn the occasion) and Charles Williams's death in 1945 ("Apparently I don't do anything controversial at all in the 1950s," he ironically quips). In this way, the novel feels like a series finale, albeit an unsatisfying one.

While I'm wary that subsequent novels may end up retreading ground, much like this one did, I have a feeling that the Nameless Isles aren't the only place the Cartographer left out of the Imaginarium Geographica. There are still many unexplored possibilities in the world Owen created. It would be a shame to go out on a low note like this.

Littlebearries says

The Chronicles of the Imaginarium Geographica
by James A. Owen

Story Title: 5/5

Plot: 5/5

Characters: 5/5

Ending: 5/5

Synopsis:

John, Jack and Charles, three young men from Oxford, find themselves called to duty to care for what is possibly the most well protected book ever, the Imaginarium Geographica.

Character Likability:

John: The Principal Caretaker of the Imaginarium Geographica, John is logical, wise and patient. He's not only likeable, he endears himself to the reader with his compassion and at the same time, with his mistakes. He owns them, and does his best to live by a moral code he deems worthy. As the series goes on, John becomes more and more of an adult, and it's evident in the disregard he pays to the children in the story. He is in no way unlikable, but he is no longer quite in touch with youth. It's not that he disrespects children, not in the least, more like, he overlooks them.

Jack: Younger, brash, fighting against the powers that be, in the first novel, Jack comes close to being downright annoying. He is the second caretaker of the Imaginarium Geographica. He's the one chosen to make the stupid mistakes, the one who has to rebel against his own youth and desire to do the right thing. As the series progresses, Jack grows, and it's easy to see why he was chosen as a caretaker.

Charles: Possibly my favorite caretaker, due to his great affinity for the animals of the Archipelago, Charles is a bit of a third wheel once you discover who the first two caretakers are. Historically, he's not as recognized, but in this story, he's quite the standout character. If not him, then some alternate dimension version of him. He believes in travel through both time and space, and studies that intently. Possibly the most down to earth of them all, and certainly the one most prone to mistakes without meaning to (for Jack, it always seems to be a choice, to pick good or evil, for Charles, well... let's just say, accidents happen).

Mordred: The big bad in practically all of the books except *The Dragon's Apprentice*, Mordred (yes, the Arthurian Mordred) keeps showing up in one form or another to ruin the caretakers' day. This may sound dull, or contrived, but let me assure you, Mordred becomes one complex character who I truly enjoyed reading about.

Merlin: Another character who pops up through the books, the story of Mordred and Merlin is captivating (and takes place largely in *The Indigo King*), setting up quite a bit of what occurs in both previous and future books.

Tummler: A character pulled from *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Tummler is a badger who is also a printer, making a mock Imaginarium for distribution, as well as guides to the histories of the world, as well as practical things, like how to get out of a binding, in a book called *The Little Whatsit*.

Samaranth: The greatest of the dragons we know, he's often a source of knowledge when the characters don't know where else to go. Unfortunately, he's fond of not speaking clearly, so they spend a lot of time trying to figure out what he means.

Fred: The Grandson of Tummler, he is a constant companion from *The Indigo King* onwards, and becomes the first animal to become Caretaker to the Imaginarium Geographica. He's another of my favorites, with his animal loyalty and ability to sniff out danger or quell it with a well placed blob of tapioca.

Bert: In it from the beginning, he is mentor and guide to the three new caretakers, Jack, John and Charles.

Aven: Daughter of Bert, future queen of the Archipelago.

Arthur: The "Arthur" character, be he the original, or a descendant (In this series, "Arthur" is the title of the kingship, not an actual name) shows up often. Their noble bloodline allows them to do things others can't, such as summon dragons.

EVERYONE ELSE: Honestly, these books are packed tight with historical figures, be they real or mythical... everyone from Lovecraft's Ancient Ones to Benjamin Franklin show up... and always with good reason.

Writing:

The books actually started out catering a bit more to children than I preferred. There were "big reveals" at the end of almost every chapter, and it started to wear on me as a reader. I understand that these books are, in fact, for children, but the "reveals" were starting to get out of hand... especially since the characters being revealed wouldn't really mean anything except to adults or children who had learned about them. They weren't often explained historically, and without the background, for kids not in the know, the reveal was meaningless. There was also one point, in particular, where a specific historical figure was eluded to... but one of the characters in the book said the equivalent of "Ah, never mind about them," which... was actually

really annoying... to introduce and then just as quickly dismiss a historical icon.

Other than those brief complaints (and the "big reveal" issue lessens as the series goes on, either that, or Owen has gotten better at making them less blatant), the writing is entertaining, the words flow and action is constant.

Ending:

I have to admit, at the end of the first book, when I reached the "BIG REVEAL"... I chucked the book across the room in disgust, and refused to pick up the next one... it took me a year to pick the next one up. I had no desire to read the series after finding out who the characters were at the end of the first book. For whatever reason it just annoyed the hell out of me. Perhaps because it seemed like such a gimmick... at the end of the first book, there seemed, at least to me, little point in having the main characters be who they are (I'm being vague on purpose, so as not to ruin the surprise), but as the series went on, it became evident that there was in fact a reason, and that the story was an interesting, well thought out one. I'm glad I picked the series back up... and the ends to the future books in it have been much more satisfying.

Plot:

The stories follow the adventures of the Caretakers as they try to keep balance between two very different worlds. I really don't want to elaborate too much, for fear of giving away something important.

Believability of World:

The way this series ties in to real world events makes it a believable bit of story telling. It is a wonderful flight into a million "What if's" concerning bringing some of the greatest literary minds together... and you get swept up in the energy of it.

Overall Grade: A- Stick with this series. I did, and it's become complex and twisted.

Samantha says

To be completely honest, the time travel is getting to be a bit much. The third book I thought was fantastic with the various moments in history traveling back to learn the truth about Merlin and Mordred. They traveled back into the past and then had to see how their influence changed the future/present. That I enjoy. I am not as big a fan of traveling into the future (unless we're talking Michael J. Fox and Christopher Lloyd). Therefore, this fourth book is harder to follow with the caretakers traveling seven years into the future. It's just such a specific number and how it relates to WWII makes it difficult to understand or appreciate the intricacies this time around.

Not to mention, time travel is harder to follow when I don't have all the dates of when authors died and published their work. I know the authors and the names of their works, but I do not have dates memorized. Therefore, I cannot keep track of which authors are alive or dead. Some are obvious, such as knowing Shakespeare is not alive in 1943. However, what throws me for the loop is the author's use of time storms--pockets or time portals popping up as the Keep of Time crumbles that allows for characters to appear decades after they died because it is the version of them from decades ago. It's just becoming a bit too much. I won't go so far as to say Owen's use of time-travel is becoming as redundant as Supernatural's use of angels because it's not there yet, but it could get there. There are still three more books to read and if they are all related to the aftermath of time-travel then I am not sure the series will hold as much magic as the first three books did.

Don't get me wrong. I still love this series and I still say it is currently my favorite series. However, every

reader has a book in a series they're not a fan of. It would seem that we're reaching the point in the story of the Imaginarium Geographica that I am not as much of a fan of.

There are still parts I love. For example, I really enjoy the relationship between Charles and Fred the badger. Charles appoints Fred as his caretaker apprentice and it is the sweetest thing to have our very first "Child of the Earth" as a caretaker.

However, there is one crucial element of this book that I love so much that it is enough to save the book in my eyes, even with the "wibbly-wobbly-timey-whimy" mess. And that key ingredient is: EDGAR ALLAN POE AND OSCAR WILDE (IN REFERENCE). Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is my all-time favorite book, while Edgar Allan Poe is one of my favorite writers. Therefore, to have Poe as the owner of the secret home of the caretakers, where Basil Hallward paints the moving portraits. That means two of my favorite writers and my favorite book have finally made it into the series!

We are introduced to the Nameless Isles where the Tamerlane House, owned by Poe, resides. This house is the final resting place of all the cartographers, who have portraits painted by Basil that allows them to still communicate. This is a writer and reader's dream--sitting around a table conversing with some of the greatest writers and literary characters in existence, but it is unfortunate that Owen has not chosen more women to be caretakers, though perhaps it's just the time period since it's still the 1940s. These scenes are crucial, because in the third book we learn the truth behind the cartographer, while in this fourth book we learn about the respectable history of the caretakers.

Even with all of this though, it is still difficult to follow, because we finally get Jules Verne as well and other characters who it is not clear if there are multiple versions of them walking around, if they're immortal, if they're dead and it's a past self, etc. It gets more confusing when you remember that Bert/H.G. Wells is supposedly from the future and in the four books we've read we have never met the current Wells.

I really hope the fifth book unwinds this time-travel knot, but I fear that it is just going to continue because once you set foot in the time-travel world, it's nearly impossible to escape it. Thank you cause and effect.

Beth says

That's more like it. This is a much better match in style and tone to the first two books than the third was. If you haven't read those, go pick up "Here there Be Dragons" post haste. If you have, then this what the first three books have been building to. Escalating conflicts with the Winter King, evolution of our characters, some nicely closed time loops, and... well, OK, some of the time travel gave me a headache. But we get to explore much more of past caretakers and hints of future ones (and not just the ones listed in the authors' notes at the end.)
