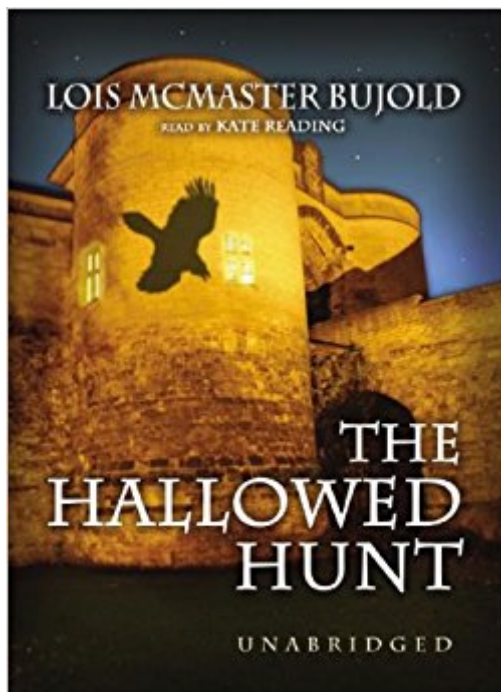


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The Hallowed Hunt



Synopsis

Lois McMaster Bujold returns to the vivid, perilous world of her previous masterworks, the Hugo Award-winning *Paladin of Souls* and Hugo and World Fantasy Award-nominated *The Curse of Chalion*, with this tale of devotion and strange destiny. The half-mad Prince Boleso has been slain by a noblewoman he had intended to defile. It falls to Lord Ingrey kin Wilfcliff to transport the prince to his burial place and to bring the accused killer, Lady Ijada, to judgment. His mission is an ugly and delicate one, for the imminent death of the old Hallow King has placed the crown in play, and the road he travels with his burden and his prisoner is fraught with danger. But in the midst of political chaos, magic has the fiercer hold on Ingrey's destiny, and Ijada herself may turn out to be the only one he dares trust.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. The absorbing third installment in Bujold's epic fantasy series (after *The Curse of Chalion* and the Hugo-winning *Paladin of Souls*) links a disinherited swordsman hero with a beguiling damsel accused of murdering a royal prince in a land worshiping five gods, menaced by encroaching neighbors and swarming with ancient magic and lethal political intrigue. Lord Ingrey kin Wolfcliff, sent by the kingdom's sealmaster to fetch orphaned Lady Ijada to trial, soon learns they both unwillingly bear animal spirits received in forbidden power rites stretching centuries back into the primeval Weald. With the aged Hallow King now dying, Ingrey and Ijada journey toward the king's hall at Easthome, falling into a love that appears doomed, while Ingrey's powerful fey cousin,

Lord Wencel, spins a cunning web of bloodthirsty ambition that binds them to him in an unholy trinity. Though the book's complicated magical-religious structure requires considerable suspension of disbelief, Bujold brings to life a multitude of convincing secondary characters, especially skaldic warrior-poet Prince Jokol and his ice bear, Fafa. Bujold's ability to sustain a breathless pace of action while preserving a heady sense of verisimilitude in a world of malignant wonders makes this big novel occasionally brilliant and not a word too long. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Mass Market Paperback edition.

Here Bujold returns to the world of *The Curse of Chalion* (2001) and *Paladin of Souls* (2003) to show us intrigue and mystery in yet another land. Lord Ingrey kin Wolfcliff has been sent to the estate of Prince Bolesco, the half-mad son of the king of the Weald. The prince has been murdered, and Ingrey is to investigate. The accused is an orphaned young noblewoman. But the prince had been dabbling in forbidden sorcery, it seems, and the young woman lies under an ill-cast spell. Despite his ostensible duty to the royal family, Ingrey is drawn toward protecting the accused from those who want to hang her as the quickest way of hushing things up, as well as from the church, which might kill in an attempt to cure her. Bujold's reworking of a classic romantic situation is distinguished by its setting in a well-crafted world and masterly creation of characters whose fates will keep readers turning the pages. Frieda Murray Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Mass Market Paperback edition.

I see why some other McMaster Bujold fans have been somewhat disappointed in this book compared to her other works, but I think the issue is just a difference in tone. *The Hallowed Hunt* has an archaic and elegiac air, like Mary Renault's oldest stories (*The King Must Die*, *The Bull from the Sea*), or some of Guy Gavriel Kay's works (*Tigana*, *A Song for Arbonne*). As they are read, these stories take on a cool, almost remote grief, because they are told against a backdrop of grave loss: the dying moments of a culture no longer our own, now almost wholly lost in antiquity. (Whether that culture is sourced in archaeology or fantasy, whether it did or will or may exist some-when in the universe, doesn't matter. What does matter is the power of the author's vision, and the depths of our own response to it.) The stories evoke our truest desires. We hunger for their fierce bright certainties, for times when the holy spoke outright to ordinary hearts, when high deeds and greatness might be claimed by anyone with faith to hear and courage to follow their call. But however strongly we feel their pull, we are separated from them by an unimaginable distance of

time and diminishment. We no longer expect the gods, dressed in their mysteries and terrible glory, to intrude upon our daily lives; the seasons have lost their meaning, and the places of the earth no longer drop us to the ground in awe and trembling. MINOR SPOILER: The distance in time also makes it harder for us as readers to fully enter into the characters' personalities. Their assumptions, expectations and choices are often very much removed from our own, especially for modern women. I sometimes find myself getting furious at a female character's reaction to some injustice, like Ijada's rather calm acceptance of Prince Boleso's intent to rape her, but I've come to realize that the problem doesn't lie in the character's response, but in my social and cultural expectations. I'm wanting the character to share my outrage at her plight and react the way I would, when my anger simply indicates that the author has done a very good job of writing a character who's living in a very different culture or era, or just doesn't think the way I do. For Ijada, what bothered her most wasn't the prospect of being raped, as that seemed common enough in her society that she'd already thought about her options and decided how best to react. Rather she felt betrayed by Prince Boleso's broken vow to protect her and her rights as his liege; she was furious that she had to imperil her soul by defending herself violently against him, and she was horrified and outraged at the impiety of his attempt to bind her will while she lived, and prevent her soul from reaching her god once she died. None of those things would bother many modern people, because we don't think this way anymore. We too seldom value our honor or oaths very dearly, most people see self-defense as completely justifiable, and few people believe anyone else could control them completely or prevent their souls from moving on to whatever existence is to come. We don't share Ijada's experiences, culture, religion or belief systems, so we also may have a hard time understanding many of her reactions or those of the other people in the book. We just aren't those people, maybe we couldn't ever be those people--or maybe we've just forgotten how. Maybe we've just lost the way of seeing the world as they do--and yet stories like this can remind us of them so clearly that, even as we live in the story, we also feel the pain of knowing that there is no way back to that time or place or way of being human. It has already vanished and once the tale is finished, we are left clinging only to a few fragments of its history, or the power of the author's imagination. Thousands of years ago, great writers were believed to carry a divine spark, a gift of the gods that burned with their truth. That fragment of light was seen sometimes as stolen, like Prometheus' fire or Raven's orb of sun, and for human beings, its light was both joy and suffering for everyone involved--and though the joy always seemed to just edge out the pain, both cut deeply into the soul. The best books are like that, and McMaster Bujold has written one here.

If you like fantasy with a little of the supernatural stuff thrown in, then this is a pleasant read. The ending seemed rushed with a bunch of people suddenly showing up somewhere somewhat out of the blue. OK

This book starts out strong with some good world building and an interesting mystery but the last quarter of the book gets lost in details explaining the fictitious religion in the book and the solution to the mystery turns out to be a huge let down. Bujold has definitely written better works.

One of the Chalion series, set before "Curse of Chalion", "Paladin of Souls" and the novellas "Penric's Demon" and "Penric and the Shaman", the latter set in the Weald as well. The main characters are engaging and the villains tragic despite or because of a megalomaniia driving them. Ms Bujold's writing always seems imbued with the premise that whichever deity is present he (usually), has a strange sense of humour. It's a strange world landscape but follows a logical progress to a satisfying conclusion even if not all as the characters wish, People seldom do get everything!.

The Hallowed Hunt is not at all a sequel to The Curse Of Chalion or Paladin Of Souls ... and yet the new reader would almost certainly be missing quite a bit without having read those two books. The world of these books is something similar to but not quite like medieval Europe. But the religion is based upon a theology of five gods. And so is the series of books (the first one for the Daughter, the second for the Bastard, and this one for the Son). There are no common characters or even settings, as Chalion is a far-off land, barely known by the people of this novel. (So calling this the third "Chalion Book" is something of a misnomer.) But in a sense The Hallowed Hunt is a direct descendent of the other books. The first one introduced the five gods and the concept that they can only work in this world when people give up their free will and let the gods use them. The second introduced something called "demon sorcery," in which a demon (an entity of concentrated chaos) is controlled by (or controls) a human being. And this book uses those two ideas and adds another kind of theology (magic is not quite the right word to use in these novels). What really sets Hallowed Hunt apart from the other two is the scope of the tale. The others involved a story of human politics interwoven with the divine, while the current book focuses nearly the entire plot on the supernatural -- the political machinations of the court and the temple are somewhat of a minor complication if not a complete red herring. Instead, the book is partially a ghost story and partially an examination of medieval philosophy. What really was the "divine right of kings"? If you take it seriously that a king is

annointed by the gods, then what does that mean about their responsibilities to the gods and to their subjects? When something goes wrong and the gods need a helping hand, what must the king be willing to sacrifice? Unfortunately, while the theological mystery and wonder is much more complex than before, the book lacks the wonderful secondary characters that made Chalion (and to a lesser extent Paladin) really come alive. This is mainly because the three key characters interact mostly among themselves (partially due to a need for secrecy, partially because the plot demands it, but mostly because the real story takes place in the divine realm where these three interact but ordinary mortals cannot usually comprehend). As with the other books in this series, the world is convincingly medieval, the characters are convincingly human, and the romantic plot (which all of them have) is convincingly mature. Because of the shift in focus to center almost exclusively on the supernatural, The Hallowed Hunt has a very different feel to it. I would rate it approximately equal to (but very different from) Paladin Of Souls, and not quite as good as Curse Of Chalion. But then, Curse Of Chalion is one of the very best novels I have ever read. This one is, perhaps, only "quite good".

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