



Shadow of a Dark Queen

Raymond E. Feist

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“An epic reading experience.”

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Acclaimed, *New York Times* bestselling fantasist Raymond E. Feist gets his masterful Serpentwar Saga off to a spectacular start with *Shadow of a Dark Queen*. Feist’s classic epic fantasy adventure returns readers to ever-imperiled Midkemia, a breathtaking, richly imagined realm of magic and intrigue, where two unlikely heroes must rally the forces of the land to stand firm against a malevolent race of monsters intent upon conquest and annihilation. *Locus* magazine calls *Shadow of a Dark Queen*, “the place to start for those yet to discover Feist’s fantasy worlds.” For fans of Terry Goodkind, George R. R. Martin, and Terry Brooks—and for anyone not already in the thrall of this astonishing author’s literary magic—that is excellent advice indeed.

Shadow of a Dark Queen Details

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From Reader Review *Shadow of a Dark Queen* for online ebook

Kevin Xu says

This book was better than what I expected to be. This book was really readable that pulled me right in the minute I started reading even though I figure out what was going to happen from the back cover. Great job, Feist in writing a fun and readable book for my return to the world of Midkemia.

Andrew says

The Feistster writes books that are quick and easy to read. Normally very entertaining too. This has been his weakest to date but it's still a decent read. The main guys here are Roo and Erik and they just aren't that captivating, Roo being pretty boring in fact. But there are a few old favourites here to keep interest up and those nasty little green buggers we've met previously show a bit of their evil.

One thing that surprised me was there are a couple of stupid mistakes made in this book, the wrong person is named as dead and some words were repeated in error (often often etc). The first error is appalling and since this novel was first printed in 1997, some sucker at Harper Collins has had more than enough time to fix it. So fix it mofo!

For those of you who want to rush out and read this based on my enticing review, this series really needs to be read in order starting with *The Magician*. Unless you want to have no idea who anyone is, then knock your socks off and read away.

Alex says

(This is a review of the whole series. No spoilers other than what can be inferred from the existence of four books and their titles.)

The Serpentwar Saga is a series of four books set in Feist's Riftwar Universe. I warn you now: if you haven't read *The Riftwar Saga*, then I strongly suggest that you go read that before you even consider this series (a lesson I learned the hard way). That said, *The Serpentwar Saga* is a complete epic in its own right. It tells the story of the Kingdom and its war with an invading army led by the serpent-like Pantathians. None of the books really work as standalones, so once you start you're in for a four-book commitment, which is pretty much how I got sucked into reading all four books.

The series begins with *Shadow of a Dark Queen*. This is the tale of Erik and Roo, two boyhood friends who flee their village after committing a crime and end up becoming part of a band of "desperate men". Good-hearted, hard-working Erik is a likeable protagonist, with his sneaky friend Roo providing a nice foil. If you read this book simply as Erik's story, then you'll be in for a tale of action and adventure. However, if you're reading it for the epic war story, then you're in for a slow start. It takes a long while before we get to the bit about the titular Queen and her army and when you do get there, you know it's only the beginning. Shockingly, there are non-white human characters in this medieval European fantasy, and despite the fact they're minor characters and despite the fact they're somewhat stereotyped (positively at least, I guess), I was pleasantly surprised they existed at all. Thankfully, there is no cliffhanger at the end of the book. If

anything, *Shadow of a Dark Queen* is a prologue or Volume I of a greater work, and should be read as such (if only for your own sake).

Next comes *Rise of a Merchant Prince* and it's exactly what it says on the tin. For that reason, Book #2 is the most boring of the lot as you know exactly how it ends before you even begin. It's Roo's rag-to-riches story and the blurb makes it sound more exciting than it is (the bit about the seductress ruining his world doesn't even happen and Roo's character doesn't really change). One thing I will say is that the book's subject matter is original. It's a rare fantasy novel that focuses on commerce, and I enjoyed reading about everyday life in the city of Krondor. The book is entertaining on a scene-by-scene level, if not on an overall-plot level. If you're hoping to use this as inspiration for your own rags-to-riches journey, then I'm afraid you'll be disappointed. Roo benefits largely from his opportunism, connections, luck, fighting ability and being the smartest guy around in his particular set of circumstances. The commerce jargon, strangely, is only sometimes explained. The Serpentwar plot is reduced to almost nothing, which is unfortunate as it was the most interesting part of the book. The book can be summed up in one sentence, half of which you know already (ie. "Roo gets rich and [Serpentwar plot]"). It also introduces a bunch of new characters who become important in later books.

Things come to a head in the third book, *Rage of a Demon King*. The Queen's armies reach the Kingdom and all hell breaks loose. There are two main plot lines: the first is about the actual invasion and the military tactics employed by each side; the second deals with the nature of the Queen herself and concerns magic and the fate of the universe (of course). In the case of the latter, there's a lot of discussion on the mythos and metaphysics of the Riftwar Universe, which while interesting, can also be a little confusing. Given the different story lines, the point of view shifts quite often, from Erik to Roo to the magicians Pug and Miranda and various others. That said, this was the best book by far. It was an exciting, gripping read with a satisfying conclusion.

The last book is *Shards of a Broken Crown*, which essentially deals with the aftermath of the Serpentwar – namely, how the Kingdom must handle remaining enemies and how it must rebuild. The focus shifts to Dash and Jimmy, grandsons of the Duke of Krondor, though of course the magicians also play a large part. After the high of Book #3, the series now feels a bit fatigued. While it has its moments, Book #4 is less polished than the others. The scenes in this book are noticeably shorter than in previous books and they feel choppy and abrupt. You can almost see the scaffolding of the plot poking through the scenes and the book itself seems to draw out the series unnecessarily. While the major plotlines are resolved, Book #4 still ends with sequel bait. Sequel bait! At the end of four five hundred page books! Also, I'm not sure if it was just the edition I read, but I found a lot of errors in *Shards* - "insure" used instead of "ensure", over-frequent and possibly inappropriate use of the word "ironic", character names being swapped or misspelled and various typos. Normally I wouldn't mention this sort of thing, but in this case the sheer number of errors proved distracting. Tut, tut, *Shards* copy editor and/or proofreader!

Overall, *The Serpentwar Saga* is a fun read, but I did have a number of problems with it, first and foremost being the fact that much of the world was already established in previous series. Had the world been explored further in this series, it would have been fine. Some places are explored thoroughly, and I suspect this is because they are "new". Otherwise, we get a lot of name-dropping of places and events, and only sometimes with a perfunctory description for context. This was particularly irritating given the fact that other things were repeated again and again, things like how Calis is a half-elf and how Miranda says things drily. There are also so many levelled-up badasses in this world – literal living legends – that even without knowing about Feist's body of work you just *know* that there were books about these people before this series. As a newcomer to the Riftwar Cycle, it felt as if I had come late to some party where everyone had

already made friends and developed their own in-jokes. As such, I didn't find their company nearly as riveting as they did and I found my eyes glazing over in some parts of the book. To his credit, Feist always manages to slip in a quick bit of summary or context at the start of each book (in case you'd forgotten things between books) or before some extended discussion of a past event. This allows new readers to follow what's happening, even if you're not having as much fun as everyone else is. To take the party latecomer analogy further, it's like you're at a party where among the guests is a kind soul who tries to include you by explaining all the jokes. So yeah. Thanks.

I gather that each series in the Riftwar Cycle deals with successive generations of characters. For those who have read about Pug, Tomas, Jimmy the Hand and so on, their presence in this series may well be delightful. However, the events of *The Serpentwar Saga* spell the end of some of them, making you wonder whether the characters introduced in this series will meet their end in another (I'm guessing yes). The fact that a character's life is told through different series annoys me as a reader, since I don't fancy having to read through all of Feist's works to get my closure. I'm sure this is a personal preference thing though, since others may think this fact is awesome.

You can totally tell that *The Serpentwar Saga* is written by a dude. The vast majority of characters are men and the books are big on fighting and killing and military strategy. The way the characters are all powered up in different classes (like magician, thief, soldier, etc) also reads like a roster of teenage male fantasies (not that there's anything wrong with that). When female characters are described, there's usually some mention of their level of attractiveness. When someone "admires" something in a woman, that's usually a euphemism for "ogle". Though I guess it's appropriate for the setting, visiting prostitutes is also seen as an ordinary pastime for unmarried men. Also, two of the female characters experience rape, though the incidents are not described in detail and the effect on the victims seems to be glossed over. While this is a minor part of the books, I thought it worth a mention as I know that some of you would rather not encounter such material at all.

The writing is far from beautiful; it just serves the plot, nothing more, nothing less. That's beside the point though; you basically read this for the plot and setting. Feist does this very well. He evokes environments well and his world feels lived-in and thought out. Things somehow always manage to get worse for our heroes and the Saga is an exciting read. It was also interesting to see how different characters worked with or against each other. It's not so much personality that distinguishes the characters, but position (being rich, being poor, being a Prince, being a soldier). Most of the characters fall into some sort of cliché, but there are a few bright sparks here and there (such as Nakor) to keep things interesting.

There are quite a number of plot holes and character inconsistencies in this series and these may irritate the discerning reader. For me, the worst ones are first: how there's always some justification as to why the legendary heroes aren't doing more than they can; and second: Prince Patrick's transformation from "blank slate" in Books #1-#3 to "angry idiot man-child" in Book #4. Rather than hating Patrick for it, I became annoyed at the author for treating the character so unfairly. Otherwise, I found the other "mistakes" to be forgivable.

I know I've complained a lot in this review, but I did enjoy the series. While newcomers to Feist's work will be able to follow the plot, the amount of back-referencing is frustrating, and I really wish I'd read *The Riftwar Saga* instead. Sure there are flaws in *The Serpentwar Saga*, but the plot is really riveting and you always want to know what happens next. It's a bit clichéd, but still fun. Feist is good at maintaining a high level of tension and the world of Midkemia feels very rich and well-developed. But yes, if you're interested at all, start with *Magician*.

Chelsea says

4.5 STARS

Mieneke says

Shadow of a Dark Queen is the first book in the *Serpentwar Saga* and takes place decades after the events described in the previous books of the *Riftwar Cycle*. It features an all new cast – and some returning heroes, but with the exception of two of them, they only have limited page time – and an all new conflict, even if it has its roots in the same foe as the previous one. *Shadow of a Dark Queen* introduces two of my favourite characters of the entire *Riftwar Cycle* and also features a third, so I was looking forward to reading it again. And this reread didn't disappoint, even if I had issues with the (lack of) representation of women in this book. It's still an exciting story exploring new ground on the world of Midkemia and setting up for an epic conflict.

As I've mentioned before in reviews I'm a sucker for the Dirty Dozen trope, or to give it its TV Tropes name: Ragtag Bunch of Misfits. Ever since watching *The Dirty Dozen* as a teen and then, shortly after, reading *Shadow of a Dark Queen* for the first time, I've had a soft spot for this sort of story. However, it does mean that the broad strokes of the plot and characters are somewhat predictable and it's the details that have to set it apart. And Feist manages to do that even though he sticks closely to the standard progression for the trope. Our band of desperate heroes is larger than usual and the way they are brought into the fold is very dramatic. I liked the different stages of training – not just the standard boot camp, but later on a ship during transport and on the fly as the mission starts – and the sneaky cloak and dagger nature of the band's mission on Novindus.

The Ragtag Bunch of Misfits only works by grace of the characters that it is comprised of and Feist creates a wonderful set of them. Our main protagonists are Erik and Roo are two of my favourite ever Feist characters. Erik's steady and lovable character combined with Roo's quick wit and just-south-of-decent morals are just irresistible. Their fellow misfits are not beyond redemption, while their officers are beyond reproach. Their captain, Calis, is an old acquaintance and I loved him and his sergeant De Loungville, they are the perfect combination to on the one hand inspire and on the other frighten the men in line. And as a cherry on top of the pie, along the way they are joined by Nakor, who is hands down my favourite Feist character. Together these men make for a compelling band and when, inevitable, some a lot of them die during the mission, it is a sad affair and not just a deserved end. Not all of them die a heroic death either; Feist shows that in war death can be meaningless, accidental, and unexpected despite being in a combat situation. I also felt sadness at the passing of Prince Arutha, since he's so much at the core of the first Midkemia books. I was a bit confused at Nicholas becoming Prince of Krondor instead of Erland. It felt as if there was a distinct lack of explanation for the choice, especially as even several of the characters speculate about the why of it and I can't remember whether we get one later on.

My one gripe with *Shadow of a Dark Queen* is its disappointing representation of women. There's Gamina, who's only identified as Duke James' wife, not even named. Rosalyn and Embrisa only seem to be there as victims to spur Erik to action, while Erik's mum is just as much a victim, although in a somewhat different way than Rosalyn and Embrisa. The elven queen, Aglaranna, makes an appearance as the beneficent ruler in a cameo. We hear about and see from afar the awful, bitter daughter of the Duke of Ran who had to marry Erik's father. And the Oracle of Aal is female, but incidental to the story. And of course, the Dark Queen,

whose identity I won't spoil, but again she's a distant character. The rest are just nameless, or as good as nameless, background filler. So our only speaking parts are victims, shrews, whores, or aloof figures of power. The only really large, rounded-out female role is that of Miranda and while her role is pivotal, her page time is limited. Hopefully, in the next book, which will have a more urban setting there will be more room for well-developed female points-of-view and roles.

Still, despite that big disappointment, I loved *Shadow of a Dark Queen*, if only for the presence of Erik, Roo and Nakor. Also, the Ragtag Bunch of Misfits trope will get me every time. Feist succeeds very well at painting the camaraderie between the men, having them come to care for each other and in their wake the reader does so as well. I really liked this jump forward in time and this new set of characters. It also allows for readers to jump into the Midkemia world without having read the previous books. I'm very much looking forward to the next book, *Rise of a Merchant Prince*, especially as Roo is the titular merchant prince.

This review is part of my Midkemia Reread, in which I read all the books Raymond E. Feist wrote, set in the world of Midkemia. For more on the why and how of this series of reviews, check out Midkemia Reread: An Introduction.

Jon West says

This fantasy series is set in a world with multiple races and a threatening doom. So far it sounds like many other sword and magic fantasies. However the quality herein is in the story telling and it is quite good. We are given a pair of principal characters that are well developed and relateable . This is my first experience with the author and I will certainly be reading more of his work.

My rating system (* = star)

1* couldn't finish book

2* finished book, but didn't like it

3* a good read

4* a very good read often with a novel concept or unusual plot

5* an exceptionally good read, a prominent example of the genre

James says

A sub-par fantasy book by my standards. The plot was relatively boring as long as it concerned the main characters (who were also boring), and the more interesting parts of the book involved minor characters with a completely different plot thread. It's sad that I didn't have much interest in the main point of the book, but I just don't think it worked. It felt a little forced together in some parts. The "climax" at the ending wasn't even that compelling either.

Apparently, I lot of people like this author/series, but for me, its like eating an undercooked hamburger patty from Walmart after eating a nice juicy steak. The people who enjoy this author, may be referring to his other series and not this one, I'm not sure.

So why am I going to read the next one? Good question. I want to give the author a chance to redeem himself before locking him away in a dark closet. I think the main storyline will continue, but I also am hopeful that it will be more interesting, and that there will be different characters than in the last. Probably so, because the characters in this one seemed to get knocked off in succession like they were in a cheesy horror movie, until not many were left standing.

Ojo says

A breath of fresh air.

I can never tire of this type of fantasy, the fantasy without multiple POVs, grey characters, and multiple subplots.

It's always refreshing to read fantasy with over the top world building. These days, with the rise of the Grimdark subgenre, most fantasy works tend to be character driven. We're left to figure out the world on our own.

But not with this book! The world building is top class! The world of Midkemia is vast, both in geography, and in the range of cultures. Staring at the map of Midkemia is enough to get me daydreaming about dangerous and exotic lands, unique cultures and strange peoples. It's a really sweet feeling.

The storyline is linear, rather than broken up into multiple subplots that follow many different threads to a climax. It makes for easy and quick reading.

The author also does a good job of building up each character, even while moving the plot along at a rather fast pace.

It's not the most remarkable of stories. It's basic at best, as it's quite predictable. But the world building makes it more than worth it.

Clare O'Beara says

This may be the most accessible of the four tales in this series. A young man named Erik is growing up in a village, unacknowledged son of the noble. After an incident he and a friend Roo are sent to be hanged and instead told they will be spared if they train as special soldiers to fight an unknown menace approaching from another continent. Not much of a choice but they accept.

An evil magic-using force on another continent is pushing an army to take over cities along a major river. When the force reaches the river estuary it will besiege and occupy the shipbuilding city. At this point it will be able to make an armada to sail across the ocean and conquer Midkemia where Erik lives. He and the squad of trained soldiers are hoping to delay that event and give the continent time to prepare for war.

If we just stayed on those lines all would be well, but the author insists on bringing in several different scattered characters who, we suppose, are from previous books. There is a dozy young man with a magic sword, who does nothing at all for most of the books. There is a magic user who can't be bothered doing anything as he is waiting in an alternate dimension with a charming woman until it's time for war. So on. These people are largely irrelevant and just give the impression of padding out the books and the story.

I liked the other books less but they were readable and it is possible that fans of this author will want to read everything about this world and enjoy the adventures more than I did.

C.S. Woolley says

Set across the sea from the Kingdom, this book gives a feel of ever widening the world of Midkemia. Drawing from characters from the previous books in the Riftwar Saga, there are some wonderful appearance of much loved characters that create continuity. I love reading books where at the moment you start wondering what has happened to a set of characters or what they are doing, they make an appearance and change events unfolding around them. Feist is a master of this. With Pug the Magician acting almost as a background character to the events that follow Eric Von Darkmoor and Calis son of Tomas. Most of the battle and action of the novel takes place around and away from the characters giving a sense of the war raging around them but not alienating the reader. This allows for character development and relationships to grow through the adversity that they face and the pain of death to be shown. Feist isn't afraid to kill off characters either, which always leaves me with knots in my stomach as to who will survive encounters with the enemy and who won't. Superbly crafted, it had me cheering and worrying right alongside the characters and mourning the deaths of some along the way.

Marina says

This is man's book, with wars, fighting, battles, soldiers and so on.

It features, Goodess of Death (lesser know as Khalisi, but this name is mentioned in passing), birth companions, Saaurs who reminds of Dothraki, bastards sons of nobles, dragons, magic, morbid jokes, rape, sailing, hanging, and lots, lots of camping and camp routine.

I gave this story 3 star review because endless camp routine, which was time consuming. I will try next installment, I usually love boring stories.

Matthew says

Maybe even 4.5 stars

You like fantasy. You have never read Raymond Feist. You are seriously missing out.

While you are waiting the next 10 years for George R. R. Martin to finish the Game of Thrones series, you should check this one out. And, this one is already finished (you can read all 30 in the series, or just a segment of the saga, it's up to you)

Shadow of a Dark Queen starts a new saga with several old enemies. People who have read the entire series up to this point will be able to enjoy this book with nostalgia. But, if you are reading this book without the benefit of all the series leading up to this, I think you can still enjoy without too much confusion.

Arttakra says

The more of Raymonds's Books I read the less I like them, to may mistakes, in this saga the first book he says the blacksmith was the first dead person Eric has every seen and then as the story continues Raymond writes that it was someone else. There are many little mistakes like these in most of his books I dont understand why he nor his editors are picking them up I'm deslexic an i can pick them out. Also the characters always have the same personallities he kills off a few main characters then creates more main characters that may as well be the same but for the change of name. The only characters that really evolve throughout the books is pug and thomas. I will continue to read his books because I enjoy the storyline and the amazing world he has created, but for how much longer I'm not sure.

Lindy says

The book is okay, but not incredibly amazing. The writing was alright (I actually found quite a few errors that baffled me because isn't this supposed to be on some bestseller lists or something? Breath instead of breathe, carnage instead of carriage, etc.) I liked the characters quite a bit, but the way in which the author wrote the story was confusing. It wasn't one or two characters that had the limelight. We jumped around a lot, from a woman sorcerer on a quest, to their captain, to a captain of a squadron, then back to Eric and Roo. I kind of wish we stayed with only Eric and Roo. I haven't read any previous works by this author so I was confused in several of these head-hopping parts and found it hard to keep track of all this story-switching. If we stayed with Erik and Roo for most of the journey I probably would have liked it more. The parts about the other characters didn't add much to the overall plot, although maybe I'm missing something because I haven't read previous works.

Don't take the book too seriously and you'll get though it just fine. It's a typical fantasy journey with your usual bad guys and unlikely heroes. I love fantasy stories like that so I read it as if it were a light read despite the page count. Read it as a casual read and you'll get though it alright.

The thing that bugged me more than anything was that nearly every woman in the story was raped, a hooker, or the evil queen. There's one female magic user, Miranda, but she didn't really do anything super-amazaballz-awesome. She was just kinda there. Every other girl was subject to horrible crimes or brutally murdered or something. I just wish there were more strong women in this book. It could've added a lot.

Anyways, I won't go out of my way to get the sequels but if they turn up in a used bookstore I might bring them home. Not a waste of time, but not an incredible read either. It's very middle of the road.

[Name Redacted] says

This book seems to occur towards the tail-end of Feist's "rape-fantasy period" (a name my friends and I gave to those of his books written between 1988 and 1995 which all seemed to involve graphic rape and abuse of female characters) as the actual rape of the female character is not narrated and only the after-effects are described. Instead he seems to replace it with a consensual encounter between the male protagonist and a middle-aged prostitute, which I suppose is something to be grateful for given the books which preceded it... The narrative was otherwise quite interesting and the characters were fairly engaging; even the whoring made a certain amount of sense, given that the character was a grunt in the army during war-time. However

the inclusion of yet another rape, even an "off-camera" one, meant that I could no longer stomach Feist's works. I threw this and all the other Feist "rape-fantasy period" books I had in the garbage. I'm told he stopped with the steady stream of rapes after this book, but I haven't been willing to check those claims.
