



Mira's Last Dance

Lois McMaster Bujold

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In this sequel to the novella “Penric’s Mission”, the injured Penric, a Temple sorcerer and learned divine, tries to guide the betrayed General Arisaydia and his widowed sister Nikys across the last hundred miles of hostile Cedonia to safety in the Duchy of Orbas. In the town of Sosie the fugitive party encounters unexpected delays, and even more unexpected opportunities and hazards, as the courtesan Mira of Adria, one of the ten dead women whose imprints make up the personality of the chaos demon Desdemona, comes to the fore with her own special expertise.

Fourth novella in the “Penric and Desdemona” series.

Mira's Last Dance Details

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From Reader Review Mira's Last Dance for online ebook

Michael says

A pleasant and amusing excursion in a favorite writer's newest series, my second from among the five novellas so far that feature the scholar, sorcerer, and priest Penric and the more earthy and sarcastic "demon" possessor, Desdemona. This one involves a challenging journey out of a country where Penric and his companions, a brother and sister, are being hunted for their role in some secret mission there. All we know is that Penric is recovering from some magical attack that damaged his heart, leaving him vulnerable and weak in his sorcery powers. As I read this one out of order, I suffer a bit from not knowing what their mission was, but the author's method of not revealing the backstory itself makes it feasible to read out of order without spoiling an earlier tale.

Here the main plot element involves the party seeking refuge in a village brothel, the aid of the madam is disguising Penric as a traveling female courtesan, and the comedy and danger when the commander of the nation's defense falls for "her."

The modest plot here, and I suppose all of the series, appears designed to use certain fantasy elements as a means to elucidate human nature. The device of souls of the dead being able to jump into and the mind of the living allows Bujold to explore the functioning of plurality of the self we all have of capacity for. Not only is Penric the host to Desdemona, he is the repository of the personalities of about 10 others, plus two animals. Luckily, one such personality is a skilled courtesan, Mira. The metaphor or allegory of our mind as a stage for performance of roles we put on takes on some special whimsy here when it involves crossing the gender boundary.

I wished for more out the two stories I've read so far from the series, such as the fulsome tales from the same "World of Five Gods" as her masterful "Curse of Chalion" and "Paladin of Souls." My rendering of 3.5 stars for this read reflects that comparison. But perhaps I will come to benefit from seeing this new series of novellas as chapters in one big book or as dishes in one prolonged smorgasbord meal.

This book was provided for review by the publisher through the Netgalley program.

Bradley says

Light fun, maybe less impressive than the rest of the Penric novellas, but this one has more of one thing than all the others combined. Boobs.

It was very funny, and even though it's basically a direct follow up from Penric's Mission, still a roadtrip novel, it was a delight just for seeing Penric have to cross-dress. :)

That's what you get when one of your ten demons was a courtesan! The poor boy never stands a chance. :)

Olga Godim says

Loved it. This novella is the conclusion to the previous one, Penric's Mission. Remember I griped about that one: that it didn't have an ending. Now it does, with *Mira's Last Dance*.

This story is much lighter in tone than Penric's Mission, with moments of unrestrained hilarity interlaced with sadness. Penric's mission is a success, all the characters are safe; they found what they were looking for, or at least got as close as it was possible in the confines of their world, but the story doesn't have a happily-ever-after I hoped for. The woman Penric fell in love with turned him down.

I thought about it. I like Penric and I wanted him to be happy, but I couldn't blame the author for finishing her story this way. It was logical and couldn't turn otherwise. Penric possesses a huge personality, plus his demon Desdemona with her dozen previous lives, plus Penric's multi-faceted education. He is huge on the inside, a giant of culture and magic, a Renaissance man of his fantasy universe.

His love interest, Nikys, on the other hand, is a brave and kind woman, but she doesn't seem to have a personality at all. No education. No goals of her own except a quiet and secure little life with a quiet and secure little husband in a quiet and secure little house. Penric couldn't offer her that. His life is bound to be big and turbulent. He carries a demon of chaos inside himself after all. Of course, Nikys refused his proposal. Penric's partner should be either 100% dedicated to him, like so many wives of the geniuses of our world. Nikys clearly is not. Her first priority is her brother. Or Penric's partner could be a personality in her own right – a talented artist or musician, maybe. Someone with goals and aspirations of her own. Someone who is unusual herself – because her talent drives her towards nonconformity and originality – so she wouldn't be freaked out by the weirdness that surrounds Penric and his demon. Nikys doesn't have a talent either. She is just an average, prosaic woman who sees that they don't suit and acts accordingly. Still, it made me a bit sad.

Rachel (Kalanadi) says

2nd read: Still good!

1st read: I loved Penric's interactions with his companions and Mira. This certainly addresses what Penric's life can be like as a man with 10 female personalities inside his head! A few scenes made me laugh aloud!

This is much briefer than the previous novella (which was the first half of Penric, Nikys, and Adelis' journey), and I hoped for a more tidy ending. Maybe #5 is coming soon??

Gavin says

The story in this one was pretty much a direct continuation of the story in Penric's Mission.

Penric, Nikys, and Adelis, are still trying to flee to Orbas but the journey through the last parts of Cedonia proves anything but smooth and is hindered by the fact that Penric is still recovering from the happenings at the end of the last novella.

The story was decent enough but not quite as exciting as the story in Penric's Mission. It might just be a personal preference but I've always preferred intrigue stories to journey tales. That is not to say this was a bad read as it was still pretty good. It had a lot of the elements that made the last instalment of the series so good. We got the combination of Pen, Des, Nikys, and even the surly Adelis again and that resulted in the opportunity for plenty of humor and even a little romance in the tale.

The big plus to this instalment was that we got to enjoy Pen having to draw on the skills of one of Desdemona's previous hosts, the courtesan Mira, to aid his companions flight and that produced a bunch of hilarious moments!

I was not a giant fan with a few developments late in the story and that likely hurt my enjoyment of this story overall.

All in all I felt like this was a good read and a decent sequel to Penric's Mission. Bujold's writing is always good and engaging and the story had plenty of humor and a bit of tension to keep it ticking along at a decent pace.

Rating: 4 stars.

Audio Note: Grove Gardner does an OK job with the narration of this series. He has a few flaws but is definitely passable.

Hélène Louise says

I love Penric's novellas and hope they'll be assembled in a book someday.

This story is rather special, quite contemplative in its own way. Penric and Nikys' relationship has reached a dead end (or maybe not ^-^), because of sensible and oh so logical feminism. Nikys' arguments are clever and could be used for many nowadays women who have to choose between their career and their relationship...

Penric is somewhat tame in this story, reminding me Miles in his Auditor's days. He hands the reins for a while to Desdemona, in a very astonishing way, which may shock but is also a very clever way of indirectly speaking of transgender.

A transition novella, a very good read, I'm looking forward to the next one!

Jacob Proffitt says

I'm deeply disappointed. And I can't say why because spoilers. But I'll try in general terms. I don't like how passive and even withdrawn Nikys became. I had thought better of her. This isn't the woman who defied and planned and schemed and accepted help, but asserted her own terms while doing so. And that change made me sad. Bujold's mastery of story is still strong. Penric is still dazzling and inventive and I still love his continuing growth with, through, and in spite of Desdemona. So this is still three stars. But I'm still ending on disappointment so no higher.

Nicole Lisa says

This is a direct sequel to the previous installment rather than a stand-alone story.

For some time, as a writer, I have been contemplating whether and in what circumstances I or someone else could write a story about a man dressed as a woman that is not a farce. That has some of the power the reverse kinds of stories have over some readers (which are less likely to be farces). After all, when a woman disguises herself as a man, it's seen as her seizing agency and power, usually, that is out of her reach as a woman. When a man disguises himself as a woman, it's still seen as risible because he is assumed to already have that power and agency.

A lot of the reviewers think this is a farce. While I do think Bujold was having fun, it doesn't feel like a farce at all to me. It felt deadly serious in its consequences for Penric as a result of Nikys's reactions to him. (Not to Penric exactly as he seems very "flexible of mind" as Desdemona puts it.) So was this successful? I don't know. I really have no idea how I feel about this book. I gobbled it down. I enjoyed it. I enjoy Penric very much. I enjoyed Penric making Adelis uncomfortable--and perhaps by extension some of the readers? But I had very mixed feelings while reading it. I wanted to know more about what went on behind closed doors and wondered what those closed doors mean, not for this individual writer, but about what we as a society find acceptable. And is this acceptable because it's a one-time thing? (The book is titled LAST dance, after all.)

I still am wondering about the situations that would make it possible to write a successful man disguised as a woman story. Like this one, I think it would have to be when a man is in a position where he is without power, and which also looks at the types of power women have in sexist societies.

Sidsel Pedersen says

More please

OhWell says

[a cross-dressing adventure with questionable moments and a frustrating conclusion. (hide spoiler)]

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David Holmes says

Mira's Last Dance is the silliest thing Lois McMaster Bujold has written since *A Civil Campaign*. It's clear she's enjoying her semi-retirement and just writing whatever the heck she feels like.

I don't mind that one bit. I had a giant grin stretched across my face for most of the book.

Stephanie says

Mira's scenes were excellent and everything else was mediocre in comparison

MrsJoseph says

Oh, gosh! IDK what to say. I enjoyed this one much more than Penric's Mission...

...but I am hating the woman Penric fell in love with. She does not deserve him in the least. Ugh. *spits*

Soo says

Mini-Review:

Initially, I rated this as 3 stars and then I went back and listened to the last 40 min of the story and changed it to 4 stars. This story raised a lot of interesting questions because really hit the point about boundaries for Penric. He is a person in himself but he has multiple female personalities living inside his body & mind. I felt it was odd how easily Pen could act as Mira and laughed at the times that he willingly let Mira have control of his body. Yet, the pieces that touch on healing and the deep loss he feels about it felt very much a part of him.

It would have been great if Pen could have fallen in love and found someone to love him back. I thought it would happen. Yet, the way Nikys responded to him was totally true to herself and that she wasn't the right person for Pen. He needs someone that is willing to share him with his demons. A lot was packed into a short novella and it was good.

I'm totally down to talking to someone about the awkward stance on sexuality for poor Pen! LOL
