



The Royal Sorceress

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It's 1830, in an alternate Britain where the 'scientific' principles of magic were discovered sixty years previously, allowing the British to win the American War of Independence. Although Britain is now supreme among the Great Powers, the gulf between rich and poor in the Empire has widened and unrest is growing every day. Master Thomas, the King's Royal Sorcerer, is ageing and must find a successor to lead the Royal Sorcerers Corps. Most magicians can possess only one of the panoply of known magical powers, but Thomas needs to find a new Master of all the powers. There is only one candidate, one person who has displayed such a talent from an early age, but has been neither trained nor officially acknowledged. A perfect candidate to be Master Thomas' apprentice in all ways but one: the Royal College of Sorcerers has never admitted a girl before.

But even before Lady Gwendolyn Crichton can begin her training, London is plunged into chaos by a campaign of terrorist attacks co-ordinated by Jack, a powerful and rebellious magician.

The Royal Sorceress will certainly appeal to all fans of steampunk, alternate history, and fantasy. As well as the fun of the 'what-ifs' delivered by the rewriting of our past, it delights with an Empire empowered by magic – all the better for being one we can recognise. The scheming and intrigue of Jack and his rebels, the roof-top chases and the thrilling battles of magic are played out against the dark and unforgiving backdrop of life in the sordid slums and dangerous factories of London. Many of the rebels are drawn from a seedy and grimy underworld, while their Establishment targets prey on the weak and defenceless. The price for destroying the social imbalance and sexual inequality that underpin society may be more than anyone can imagine.

The Royal Sorceress Details

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From Reader Review The Royal Sorceress for online ebook

Seregil of Rhiminee says

Originally published at Risingshadow.

Before I write anything else, I'll mention that I'm hard to please when it comes to alternate history, because I've seldom been impressed by books and stories that can be categorized as alternate history. Fortunately I was positively surprised by Christopher Nuttall's *The Royal Sorceress*, because it turned out to be an entertaining and well written book.

I don't remember reading anything like this before, because Christopher Nuttall has chosen a bit different kind of a way of writing about steampunkish Victorian society. This book can be seen as a fantasy and alternate history story about a woman's place in Victorian society, and the differences between aristocrats and common people. It can also be seen as the growing up story of Gwen.

It's possible that readers may think that this kind of a fantasy book is heavy to read and requires quite a lot of knowledge about history etc, but in this case the story is so entertaining that the reader just has to enjoy it. The author writes fluently about the events and doesn't overwhelm the reader with heavy historical prose. (It is, however, possible that readers who are familiar with historical events will get more out of this book than other readers.)

This book contains plenty of humour. I was a bit surprised by the amount of humour, because usually there isn't much humour in alternate history books. I think it's great that the author has had courage to add humour to the book, because it adds a lot of charm to it. I especially enjoyed reading about the food fight between Gwen and the male apprentices - it was fun.

Here's a bit of information about the plot:

Lady Gwendolyn Crichton (Gwen) is a young lady, who is tired of her mother's attempts to make her a respectable young woman. Gwen is only interested in magic, but unfortunately the society doesn't allow women to use magic. She has all the magic powers that a person can have and that's why Master Thomas (the Royal Sorcerer) and other people become interested in her. When Gwen is asked to become the Royal Sorceress, she's very happy and excited about it, because it feels like all her dreams have finally come true. To her mother's horror, she accepts the proposition and begins her training under Master Thomas. Gwen has to work hard, because she has a lot to learn about magic. She has learned things by herself, but she can't control magic... At the same time Jack tries to bring down the government. He calls himself Captain Swing. He knows how to magic and he controls all the powers just as Gwen does. His actions cause havoc and chaos in London, but he does his actions for the right reasons, because the common people are ruthlessly exploited by those of noble birth...

Christopher Nuttall writes about an interesting alternate Victorian society, because in this book England is different from what it is in real life. Magic plays an important role in the society, and England is one of the ruling nations in the world. The author writes about fascinating "what if" situations (for example, England has won the American War of Independence). I think I'd better not write more about these "what if" situations, because writing more about them would spoil the story.

Although this book is entertaining, it's also - in an entertaining way - a surprisingly shocking vision about a woman's place among powerful men. Women seldom have magical powers and only men are educated to handle magic, because women must be good and obedient wives. It was interesting to read how Gwen felt

that she was different from other young women, because she wasn't interested in the same things as other women of her age - she wanted to do something with her life.

I liked the characters very much, because Christopher Nuttall has created realistic characters. Gwen and the other characters are believable and they have their own personalities.

I think it's great that Gwen is described as a powerful young woman, who doesn't want to submit to the rules and norms of the male dominated society. She has thoughts and feelings of her own and she wants to do something else than be a mindless and pretty wife to a noble man.

What makes this book especially interesting is that Gwen is the only woman in England who has an amazing amount of magic powers and can control all the talents. These powers make her a potential Royal Sorceress, because she's the only who has as much power as the Royal Sorcerer. Because the Royal Sorcerer is going to retire in the future, Gwen must take his place. (I'll write more about magic after the next couple of paragraphs.)

Jack is also an important character, because he's trying to bring down the government. He is a renegade magician and he has the powers of a Master Magician. Reading about Jack's actions is fun, because he feels that people have to pay for their crimes. If needed, he can use magic as a weapon and knows what he's doing with it.

Gwen's teacher, Master Thomas, is an interesting character, because he teaches Gwen several things and tries to be patient with her actions. Gwen is at times a bit impatient and loses her temper, but Master Thomas tries to show her how to control her temper and powers. He's a wise man who has a lot to offer to Gwen.

The author paints a vivid picture of the social conflict between the common people and the aristocrats, because the rich people shamelessly oppress the poor. He uses the characters and their actions to show what's happening. For example, Gwen is a bit shocked when she realizes how certain things are handled ("out of sight, out of mind" seems to apply to several things).

Christopher Nuttall writes perfectly about the action scenes and all things related to magic. Reading about Gwen's education is fun, because the author explains magical things in an interesting scientific way. There are different talents and most people can only use one talent, but if a person can use all the talents, he/she is a Master. Because Gwen can control all the talents, she's a Master Magician (that's why she was asked to become the Royal Sorceress).

One of the best things in this book is that magic doesn't make a person invincible. People who use magic powers can be arrogant and they can believe that they can't die, but everybody can die. Killing is a skilled magician can be difficult, but it's possible. This is good, because magic and magical powers are often used as deus ex machina and that can be annoying for the reader.

I also enjoyed reading about the author's descriptions of the various places. He writes enthusiastically about the streets of London, houses and palaces. It feels like the reader is really reading about London during the Industrial Revolution, because everything feels genuine (all the filth of the streets and the poverty of the people feels realistic).

Because *The Royal Sorceress* is the author's debut book, there are a couple of flaws in it, but on the whole it's a fine achievement and definitely worth reading. I have nothing bad to say about it, because I liked the story and the characters.

Christopher Nuttall is currently writing a sequel to *The Royal Sorceress*, *The Great Game*, so readers who enjoy this book will soon be able continue reading about the Royal Sorceress. It'll be interesting to see how

the author continues the story.

The Royal Sorceress is an excellent fantasy book, which combines fantasy, steampunk and alternate history elements in a successful way. In my opinion it's one of the most interesting and entertaining alternate history books ever written. If you're interested in fantasy, alternate history and magic, you should read this book, because it's good and fun entertainment.

Rating this book was a bit difficult for me, because I couldn't decide if I should give it four or five stars. After careful consideration I decided to give it five stars for its entertainment values, because it was a bit different kind of an alternate history book and it was fun to read about Gwen and her education.

Rick Stuckwisch says

I'm delighted to be reading this series, finally, after having it on my Kindle for the past five or six years. I think I was put off from starting because I don't care for the cover artwork at all. The story itself is far more complex and robust than the cartoonish and childish cover art! It's historical fiction, of a sort, which is a genre I often enjoy. But it's set within an alternative history, one in which the American, French, and Russian revolutions have failed and the British Empire spans the globe, in large part due to its corps of royal sorcerers. As always with Christopher Nuttall, his knowledge of history, politics, military strategy, and social dynamics lends substance and compelling realism to his writing. The result is an interesting and engaging story, thoughtful and thought-provoking. Plenty of twists and turns and challenging scenarios to consider. The characters are flawed but sympathetic. All in all, I found this first book in the series to be quite compelling, and I could hardly put it down. I'm eager to move on to the other books in the series (there are four altogether so far). I will say that this would not be appropriate for younger readers or listeners. It's not graphic or gratuitous, but it does deal frankly and straightforwardly with some fairly mature themes and situations.

Jennifer Conroy-Schwartz says

I enjoyed this book tremendously. It has a well paced well written story.

Hollyberye says

Though I much prefer the Zero Enigma and Schooled in Magic series...it has some merit. It just didn't grip me like those. I am on the fence about re-reading it and trying the sequels.

william Goodrow says

The Royal Sorceress

Once again Christopher Nuttall has outdone himself with this novel. The story moved right along, while being injected with different twists. Very enjoyable from beginning to end. Well done Mr. Nuttall, now onto the next installment.

Jonathan Palfrey says

After a few introductory chapters, this story becomes quite gripping and entertaining on first reading, though I'm not sure how rereadable it'll turn out to be.

The heroine is clearly a goodie, and some of the characters are clearly baddies, but the good/bad nature of some other significant characters is ambiguous, they have elements of both, which I think is a good thing in a book. Too many novels divide their characters clearly into the good and the bad, and things aren't that clearcut in real life.

The so-called magic in this book could be better described as supernormal mental powers: no spells or special ingredients are required, just the trained effort of will. I think that both magic and mental powers have been handled better by other writers, but the way it's done here is adequate, although the mental powers described are rather too powerful for comfort. I think more limited powers make for more interesting fiction, and also seem subjectively more credible.

I like happy endings, so I was relieved to find that this book has a relatively happy ending, although unfortunately I found it implausible. Given the events of the story, I would have expected a messier outcome, with much wrangling over the future of the country.

Politically, the author paints a picture of a sick society of gross inequality, in which the poor have no hope; but he also makes the point that violent revolution tends not to improve the situation. What, then, is the way forward? I think he dodges the issue by handing us an implausibly happy ending.

The writing style is not bad, but lacks the assurance of a seasoned professional. Well, the author is quite young and says himself that he's improving steadily.

Cor says

A interesting historical AU mixed with some fantasy and steam punk elements even if the later are mostly unimportant.

The way it portrays the British Empire is different to many other is the genre because here it is an oppressive, totalitarian state where magic, or steam punk didn't really fixed or changed anything within the society.

The female main Character, Gwen, is an noble woman who is idealistic but smart enough to know that the world will never be perfect. It is refreshing to see a character who doesn't start a revolution in the first 100 sites.

Jack, the main antagonist is a crazed idealist hell bent on changing the world. Like any other Fanatic he is willing so sacrifice anything and anybody for it and also seems to think that only he can change anything.

The plot and writing is solid and the ending even manages to be surprising and makes me hope for more.

Shane says

I came to this book after reading some novels set in the modern magic genre thinking it would be a little lighter, like Harry Potter for girls. I was surprised at how gritty it all got. Fantastic characters, action, and jarring descriptions of the times it was set in.

Crys says

There was huge potential, the world is interesting.
However if magic does not need much schooling at all, its just silly.
Less then 3 month to become the most powerfull woman, even human is just silly.
Then a major issue is solved within 1 minute, from clueless to controlling masses.

Kylie says

Again another 2.5 stars technically. To tell the truth I was nowhere near as engaged with this novel as I really should be, I hardly cared about anyone.

The inclusion of well known fictional creations in the world of the novel I found quite distracting and on occasion a touch infuriating. I'm sure one was meant to be Mary Poppins, but it's the wrong period for her to be about especially if you're going with the film portrayal - though in the world of the novel she probably would exist as a powerful underground/unacknowledged Mover, which is a piece of genius really when you think about it...I digress. There's no reason why not to include these characters, since once you change history in fiction you can pretty much do whatever you like, but since I KNOW those characters exist as fictional elsewhere it means I'm more aware of the implausibility angle. This complaint makes little logical sense I know, but it did contribute to my lack of enthusiasm.

There are a lot of good points about the novel though. Firstly, it's one of the first alternate history novels I've personally read where the past isn't glorified. At all. The whole point of the novel is that society's status quo is grossly unfair and characters are fighting to change that. Exploring what might happen if there had been a British revolution was definitely interesting. Also the magical system was fairly inspired IMO, I can't say how unique it might be but it was reasonably well-defined and thought out. Any gaps could easily be attributed to the in-universe lack of knowledge of the subject, which in itself contributed to the plot.

I'm torn as to whether to bother with the sequel at all. On the one hand Gwen was fairly likeable if bland (and her and Jack's romance seemed rushed if not forced, but we won't have to deal with that in any sequel) and I would like to see how the AU and development of the magical system plays out. On the other, it didn't really grab me and it didn't keep pulling me back to read it outside of lunchtimes at work (when I had no other means of distraction).

Dieg says

Jack was certainly a pivotal character in this first book, but I have to say I didn't like him that much. He had a warped vision of justice... Even though I doubt he was trying for justice, perhaps some kind of retribution?

He certainly does like chaos.

Emily Leathers says

I couldn't finish this book. I wasn't enjoying the story and most of the characters got on my nerves.

Additionally, there were parts of the setting that just didn't make a lot of sense. For example, it doesn't make sense to me that individuals have a tendency toward specific types of magic, and often come into their powers with no training or effort, and yet magic has only 'existed' for 60 years.

Abandoned 1 October 2014. Just can't set finished date or it counts toward 2014 challenge and I only want to count books I finished.

Lynne Stringer says

I was determined to finish this book, but it was hard work. I liked the premise well enough and even some of the characters. But the story itself was bogged down with frequent and sometimes long passages of detail and information that was not really relevant to the plot. Even the details that were relevant were usually included several times, which was unnecessary. I think this was in an attempt to give the reader a more full understanding of that world, but it only served to make the pace crawl along and it took a huge effort for me to stay engaged in the story.

Another thing - what is it about alternate Earths and zeppelins? So many alternate Earth stories I encounter have zeppelins in them! Maybe they seem a trifle exotic.

Amy says

I'm finding it difficult to know where to start.

With the blatant ripoff of the MISTBORN series?

The author's obsession with rape?

The banal "romance"?

The one-note characters, and the poor development of said characters?

At least, I was charmed by the appearance of characters from the Sherlock Holmes mythos, even if the detective barely appears himself. The alternate history is fairly well thought out, and the descriptions are very vivid.

heidi says

Did not finish. After 2 months of time out, I still don't want to know more about ANY of those people. Ick.
