



## Heaven's Needle

*Liane Merciel*

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**Heaven's Needle** Liane Merciel

**The second book in an epic fantasy series featuring “an inspired new world where unexpected plot twists bedevil strong, clearly visualized characters, in a story that glints with intelligence and hums with life” (*Publishers Weekly*, starred review).**

Six hundred years ago, an unknown force destroyed one of the greatest fortresses in Ithelas, slaughtering its defenders so swiftly that none survived to say what befell them. Now, in the shadow of those ancient ruins, something malevolent is stirring.

Kelland, a divinely blessed Knight of the Sun, is charged with the duty of confronting the felled powers of the world. But his only chance of stopping this evil may be to ally with another—even as Bitharn, his companion, betrays their faith in the name of love. Meanwhile, three young novices from the Dome of the Sun, accompanied by a scarred and taciturn swordswoman, venture bravely but unwisely into the heart of danger, seeking a holy artifact that, they pray, might end it. And when their paths converge in Carden Vale, a nightmare awaits.

## Heaven's Needle Details

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Author : Liane Merciel

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## From Reader Review Heaven's Needle for online ebook

### Joy says

Dark, sort of fantasy/horror. But good.

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### Nicole says

The story can together a little better in this second book, however her descriptions of violence and torture are a little too graphic for me (they either leave too much, or too little to the imagination, I can't quite decide). I will probably not pick up a third to read.

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### Sandy Frediani says

This was a bit of a dense read, but not in a bad way. I have to allow that I haven't read the first in the series, yet it wasn't difficult to follow the story. There are quite a few characters and the storyline jumps a bit between them, but after a little while it wasn't difficult to keep the "who, what, where" straight. The world building was well done although a bit dense. At the end, though, it was a satisfying story that I did enjoy.

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### Ronald says

A bit disappointing considering that I loved the previous novel in the series. I wasn't entirely sold on the idea of turning the second novel in the series to a dark fantasy setting but I think the intention of the author was to showcase the world of Ithelas and her characters in different ways and I can go with that. The novel missed the mark on good storytelling though and because of that the dark fantasy approach fell through. There were several instances the author chose to tell what was happening with a character rather than showing it through her prose. There were also chapters that I had to struggle with getting read because the writing felt flat and needlessly gory in some instances. The lack of character development was also disappointing. After months of imprisonment and torture, it would have been interesting to see changes in the Sun Kinght Kelland's character but there wasn't much if any changes in him. Some new characters were introduced but, ultimately, their fate is inconsequential. I really liked the potential of Ithelas as a setting and it's nice to see more of this world explored. I think one of Merciel's strengths is creating a cool back story behind events and places. When it comes to weaving it together with the plot, sometimes her efforts falter.

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### Foxglow says

It was a compelling story, but much too bloody for me.

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### Peterwilliam says

Reviewed at:

- 1) SFFWorld.com
  - 2) Speculative Book Review
  - 3) Ubiquitous Absence
- 

### **Lindig says**

I made it to page 130 before I gave up. None of the characters seemed real, just facades of some "type." And there were lots of long speeches that supposedly were in conversation but were really disguised info dumps. Boring. Well, the Spider Queen wasn't too boring but she wasn't around much either. And the plot was really drawn out till it felt like no progress was being made at all. So I quit.

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### **Mihir says**

I was first introduced to Liane Merciel's writing with last year's debut *River King's Road*, however I read it this year and the sequel *Heaven's Needle*. I also happened across this fantastic review of it which raised a lot of expectations for me.

*Heaven's Needle* shares the same world as its predecessor and has only 2 characters from the previous book. What it does expand on is the world mythology, magic system and the political machinations. The story begins on various fronts; the primary one being Corban's search for a new weapon. Bitharn's quest for freeing Kelland, Asharre's travels to find the purpose of her life and so on...

This book is in many ways different than its predecessor, whilst the first one was high fantasy, this one is a cool fantasy-horror combination. The author's prose truly makes for some gruesome scenes which will affect the reader [This goes for seasoned readers as well], one of the author's strengths was her characterization [which was seen brilliantly in *RKR*] and even in this book brings to the fore the various thought processes and behaviour manifestations.

I truly loved this book and this just makes waiting for the 3rd *Ithelas* novel, that much harder. Currently its unknown what the author has planned, but whatever it may be. I'm definitely in for the ride!

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### **Candice Mckinney says**

*Heaven's Needle* by Liane Merciel is a great book. Very well written, the characters are well defined. I had not read the first *Ithelas* book *The River King's Road* but now plan to. The Sun Knight Kelland and the archer Bitharn are in love but unable to act upon their love because they are bound by duty first. They join forces with the Thornlord to defeat the Mad God. Kelland and Bitharn do not trust the Thornlord but are put into a position where they don't have a choice. The warrior Asharre was put in charge of the safety of two Illuminers who have been sent to the village of Carden Vale. She feels that she has failed to protect her sister and now these two Illuminers. She feels like she needs to redeem herself before she can be at peace with herself. The horror that the Mad God has unleashed is terrible. This is a very different and exciting book. I am looking forward to a third book!

## Jonathan says

Heaven's Needle is the second book in Liane Merciel's "Ithelas" series, following her very good debut, *The River Kings' Road*. This book continues the adventures of the Burnt Knight and his star struck lover, Bitharn, as they approach a blighted land. A very confusing novel, full of annoying fantasy tropes, it was a huge disappointment, especially after the fine beginning of the series.

The book basically follows 2 groups of adventurers. Kelland, Bitharn, and a much distrusted Thorn, or evil mage, approach Carden Vale with eyes wide open, knowing a vast evil has been unleashed on the world, although not sure to what extent. On the other hand, 3 young apprentice clerics, as well as their bitter expert swordswoman, approach, unaware of the evil that lurks. Their paths eventually cross as they attempt to sniff out the evil lurking there.

I can't even describe how disappointed I was in this novel. Although I wasn't too sure why, I really enjoyed the first novel. The characters were interesting, but flawed. The story was an intriguing mix of politics and bravery, with a sprinkling of mystery and evil.

But this book concentrated on the sorcery and I found it very annoying. The confusion rife in the book is indicated by the title, *Heaven's Needle*, which isn't even where the quest was going, but rather where one of the characters was rescued from early in the book and from then on, *Heaven's Needle* had nothing to do with the story.

It had to unholy triumvirate of dreams, mysterious magic, and meddling "gods". The dream sequences even went so far as to have a character killed earlier in the book mysteriously show up in another character's dream to tell him how to defeat one of the opponents with some weird rite. How convenient. Ugh.

Oh, and the magic! In general, I feel magic tends to be a *deus ex machina* for most books, where it can solve things until it, magically, can't. And this book had the worst case of it since the first book in the Dresden Files series, *Storm Front*. Basically, the devout could pray for some kind of spell, but they would always seemed to tire just when it was convenient. And one character got a magic sword that she didn't know how or when it would cast magic but wouldn't you know, the sword just happened to cast the right magic at the right time to sort of cure some ills but not entirely. Double ugh.

And there was some babble about an evil god possessing people and good gods granting spells (more like wishes). I never could keep all the factions straight, despite (or maybe because of) the author's constant chatter with background details. And for some reason the evil mage that was helping out needed the magic sword and that was enough to have him back off.

And the apprentice party? Well, they had some adventures but in the end contributed nothing to the plot line. If they hadn't been written in at all, the book would just have been half as long, but the main story arc wouldn't have been affected at all.

Like I said, sorely disappointed in the whole thing. I did actually finish it, but the last half was more of a sprint, as I tried to get through it. Be warned also - there were lots and lots of gruesome scenes, from maimed children to strange "undead" people and animals, twisted into grotesque shapes.

I'm not sure if I'll read any more in the series. It seemed like the author ran out of ideas and kind of went scattershot for the rest of the book. I don't get the 5 star ratings here, which to me would indicate one of the

best books ever written. It is hardly that. To say the least.

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## seak says

Sequels can be quite the mixed bag. Some show the author is here to stay, while others prove them to be more a one hit wonder. Sometimes sequels, however, are even better than the original; Deadhouse Gates, The Elfstones of Shannara, X-Men 2, etc. I'm also happy to report that Heaven's Needle falls into this latter category as well.

Heaven's Needle is the second novel of Ithelas, following the extremely well-done debut, The River Kings' Road. As you'll notice from the blurbage above, there's a distinct lack of some of the main characters from River Kings', Brys Tarnell (great name btw) and Odosse. Instead, the story focuses on Bitharn and Kelland and some new characters who will more than win you over.

While we're on that note, I think it was a great move on Merciel's part to change the focus a bit in this novel. Brys and Odosse had their time and I really think their story was over, at least for now, and this new focus really worked.

Just when Bitharn and Kelland were really realizing their love for each other, Kelland is taken away from her, to the dungeons of the Thorns. This is as tragic as it gets and even though Bitharn has certain responsibilities as a Celestian, she realizes the true purposes behind all the rules and laws, thus opting to follow the spirit of the law instead.

We also get a look at some other players in the game, and really only glimpses into the dangerous games they're playing. As I mentioned in my review for River Kings', Merciel has created a magic system that is completely dependent on religion. Only those anointed to a certain calling can utilize magic in their name, be they Celestians or Thorns.

In Heaven's Needle, not only does a new evil enter the struggle, but these other players attempt to use magic on their own, without the blessing of the gods, thus welcoming all sorts of new problems.

There was more questing going on in Heaven's Needle than in the first book, but while Merciel could focus on the travelogue, she focuses instead on the emotional struggles of the characters. They quest, but the book isn't about the quest so much, and I'm glad the book wasn't padded to do so. While running the risk of a few spoilers, Merciel also created some amazing monsters that really creeped me out, but had me running back for more.

Merciel really focuses on some very human themes in this book that had me doing a lot of introspection myself. We all have principles we hold dear in our lives and Merciel shows how easy it is to give up what is you one step at a time. It doesn't happen all at once, but the more you allow to happen that goes against what you believe in, the sooner you'll find that you've completely given up.

Why Read Heaven's Needle?

All in all, this is a great series, that has only gotten better. I was doing everything I could to find time to read Heaven's Needle and that's always a good sign. I can't wait for more from Liane Merciel.

4.5 out of 5 Stars

## Angela R. says

I won this book through Goodreads' giveaways, and like the true cheapskate I am, I must admit that I'm always kindly inclined towards anything that I got for free. But that doesn't mean I'm going soft with this review. I was not so kind to the last ARC I won (though I did feel a twinge of guilt for that). I really wanted to give this book 4.5 stars. I'm pretty critical, and to me a book must be utterly amazing in order to earn 5 stars. So maybe it was the good feelings from winning that caused me to round up instead of down. Who knows? But I am being completely honest when I say that this book is everything a reader hopes for in the fantasy genre.

In many ways, *Heaven's Needle* follows the usual conventions of the genre. The story is filled with courageous warrior women, honourable knights, sorcerors both good and evil, ancient magical artifacts awaiting discovery, and of course an ancient evil that threatens to consume all in it's path. But this is not a criticism. The story is beautifully written, full of interesting and likeable characters, and had enough suspense that I was up well past my bedtime several nights in a row because I just **had** to see what happened next!

The magical system in this world of Ithelas was somewhat unique. Magic in this world is something only granted by the gods. The "good guys" fight using not only steel, but goddess blessed magic. One thing I liked about this book is that I did not see any thinly veiled attempts to glorify Christianity (as in the Narnia books) or any pagan/Wiccan influences. The gods of Ithelas are unique creations. Celestia the sun goddess is clearly good. Other gods not so much. In fact, the Celestians end up forming an uneasy alliance with the Boazites (who remind me a lot of Sauron's army in the Lord of the Rings trilogy) in order to fight the mad god Maol. I liked that instead of a good/evil duality, these seem like realistic characters put in realistic situations where sometimes the lesser of two evils is the best you could hope for.

I hate reviews that read like a plot summary, so I'm not going to say any more about it. But overall this book was so well written, the characters so engaging, and the plot moved so quickly that I had trouble putting this book down! I will definitely go back and read the author's first novel *The River King's Road*, which is set in the same world. Since *Heaven's Needle* read like a complete stand-alone book, I'm not sure whether I'll meet the same characters in the other novel, but I can hope. I can't recommend this book highly enough to anyone who enjoys a good fantasy, or just a well written novel of any genre!

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## Therese Arkenberg says

3.5 Stars

I claimed R. Scott Bakker's *White-Luck Warrior* was horror in the guise of epic fantasy, but the *White-Luck Warrior* would take one look at one page of *Heaven's Needle* and run away crying.

Which is why, despite it being marketed as high fantasy, *Heaven's Needle* is my review of choice for *Hallow's Eve* this year.

(That's a warning, by the way, that the following review will contain disturbing imagery--and possibly spoilers--and if you aren't up for that, especially if you're currently eating tasty food, feel free to visit a different webpage).

The prologue includes a nice grisly bit about people exploding, proving this is going to be far more twisted than previous *The River King's Road* if nothing else. Of course, we should expect more twistedness, given the Sun Knight Sir Kelland has been kidnapped and imprisoned by the sadomasochistic Thorns, whose magic depends on their worship of the goddess Kliasta through disfigurement and torture. His friend and would-be lover, Bitharn, is on her way to rescue him. But doing so involves deceiving and betraying their own order of paladins serving the sun goddess Celestia. She frees Malentir, a Thornlord imprisoned by the Celestians, in order to have a prisoner exchange.

Meanwhile, Kelland is discovering moral complexities of his own in conversation with the leader of the Thorns, called the Spider. Here the Thorns rise above standard villain fare by revealing discipline and philosophy. For one thing, these vicious clerics are truthbound, which the Spider explains is because "the truth hurts worse" than any lie. It's still interesting that the villains of the previous book are suddenly revealed as...not exactly trustworthy, but more complex than they were at first. The Spider is also deeply in love with her husband (and their relationship has definite consensual BDSM undertones, which is confusing to the chaste Sun Knight but not represented as a sign of their Evilness. We're past the days of R.A. Salvatore's sadistic sorceresses and their captive elves; instead it was refreshing to see BDSM as a humanizing element to an evil character, rather than Bad People Having Bad Sex). Speaking of confusing the chaste Sun Knight, the Spider further sends Kelland for a spin by teaching him of a Celestian heresy that allows sexual activity within a committed relationship. In short, only casual sex is bad for Celestians. Given Celestia is the moral arbiter of this story's universe, I feel like She's going both too far (celibacy, according to my Catholic upbringing, is the sacrifice of emotional as well as sensual intimacy) and not far enough (what, then, is so wrong with casual sex?).

This is all extremely interesting to me, if the thick paragraph above hadn't tipped you off. Unfortunately, one of my pet peeves from *The River Kings' Road* carried over--the flashbacks. "Have you heard of this fortress?" Character A asks. Character B has heard of the fortress, and now we the readers will to, in the form of a 2-page flashback/lecture. Then Character B replies to A, "Yes, I've heard of it. "

Enjoying this series involves some level of acceptance of the fact that every chapter or so will contain a mini-short-story setting up background information that is perhaps 30-50% relevant. I get some fantasy fans really enjoy the worldbuilding. I usually do, too, but I like it to be subtler and more connected to the action of the story. Especially because there's enough to unpack in this story.

Our villain (or at least one of them), Corban, starts down the road to ruin by trying to democratize magic, which has previously been the realm solely of the gods. Unfortunately, he decides to democratize war magic, as that's where the greatest popular demand is. Even more unfortunately, this magic isn't actually free of the gods after all--it comes from Maol, god of Madness. This is why tracing your supply chain is important, everyone.

That said, the idea of god-free magic is very tantalizing to those of a more agnostic strain of thought, and I feel the theocracy of the Celestian Sun Knights goes unexamined. Especially as Bitharn goes to prove the Celestians are not flawless avatars of the good.

I said about the previous book that this world's Viking-analogues were very close to historic Vikings, but I was incorrect. They turn out to be more misogynistic (not hard, actually, as the Vikings allowed women to own property, divorce, and many other useful rights) and this paves the way for a new character, the gender-role-crossing Sword Maiden Asharre. Asharre is mourning the loss of her sister, a Celestian cleric, when she is given the job of playing bodyguard to two new clerics as they travel to their first assignment.

It doesn't go well.

Kliasta, the goddess of the Thornlords, has driven her followers to pluck out their eyes, disfigure themselves,

and devise some really amazing torture devices. Thorns still flock to her in steady numbers. The followers of Baoz, god of war, are the topic of some really horrible visions inflicted on Asharre as she crossed a booby-trapped bridge. Boaz is still pretty popular among solidier types, who come to him willingly. But Maol, bloody four-armed Maol, is so wrong that he doesn't have volunteer converts; instead His spirit just sort of comes where it will, inflicting body horror and insanity.

He's taken over the town where our baby clerics and babysitter Asharre are going preaching.

If the scene where a ferret claws out its own guts hasn't proved enough warning, I'll just lay down the line: do not eat, and be careful of drinking, anything at all after page 200. I giggled through MangaMinx's Amnesia playthroughs, and this book was too much for me (not literally too much, but...I'm pretty sure you understand what I mean. If this were a movie I'd be hiding behind the couch). Body horror transformations, torture porn, and scary creatures chasing the protagonists through the night abound. There's also helpings of sexual assault (consider yourselves trigger warned), no child immortality, and pleas for mercy coming from orifices that shouldn't even work as mouths.

To defeat this haunting/manifestation/curse, Kelland and Bitharn find themselves working alongside Kliastans, who are not only safer than the alternative but also more stylish. You know it's bad when I prefer the aesthetic of missing-eyeball body modifications, although for the record, Malentir's thorned bracelets? Stylish.

Aside from the Amnesia games, this book also reminded me of C.S. Friedman's Coldfire trilogy, if only for the surface similarity of sun clerics fighting the powers of darkness against a fantasy-horror background. Coldfire, though, had much more depth and the worldbuilding felt more rigorous--appropriately, as among its mash of genres there was a healthy dose of science fiction. Heaven's Needle seemed to miss the chance for deeper examinations of its premises in places like Celestian theocracy (also, Celestia appears to be the only benevolent deity in this universe). (view spoiler)

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## Elisabeth says

Epic fantasy with believable, three-dimensional characters. Evil that isn't purely evil; good that crosses the line. Like people, almost.

The story here is a bit more convoluted than its predecessor, but every bit as compelling. The characters are wonderfully drawn. It does more or less wrap up, but I can't help wondering when (if?) there will be another installment.

## **Jarl Anderson says**

I completely enjoyed the blend of fantasy & horror (almost splatterpunk) in this novel, and I like it much more than it's predecessor, which seemed like a novel-long set-up for this work. I'm hoping a third book in this series arrives... someday? Soon? Ever?

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