



Corambis

Sarah Monette

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T says

I read this because I had thoroughly enjoyed the previous 3 books in the series but I think this one is not nearly as good. It's not bad but it is not as deeply engaging. I felt like I had come to know and care about the characters through the first 3 books but by in this one they were too different and capricious. The ending was ultimately somewhat unsatisfying. I think the problem was that in the other books Felix and Mildmay are interacting fully with other characters and in this book the other characters feel very tangential to the larger point of finally getting these brothers to admit they care for each other. The storyline feels very isolated. Monette also introduces an entirely different world (Corambis and Caloxa) with steam engines and universities and it is not as engaging as Melusine. It's not a steampunk book so the attempts feel clumsy. I think this book is worth reading just to finish the series. The beginning of the series is SO GREAT that I felt disappointed but it's not a terrible book just not on the level of the others.

Punk says

Fantasy. This is the fourth and final book of Mildmay and Felix's adventures and it assumes you just finished reading the previous three within the past hour. If you haven't, I suggest you get right on that because there's a lot of name-dropping and it went straight over my head as I can only vaguely recall the events of the past books.

I definitely feel like I would have been more engaged with Felix if I could remember all his past traumas, but there are just so many. As for this book -- nothing happens. There's a lot of travelling and hotel rooms, and eventually there's a thing that has to be done, but the story lacks a central conflict. I could have lived with that, but there's not enough character development to make up for all the floundering around. A new guy, Kay, is introduced, but all I got from him was a sense of stoutness. I did like Corbie, what little we saw of her. Mildmay's still Mildmay, but at one point Felix's magic [redacted:] and Felix doesn't even react! It wasn't until pages later that I realized something (supposedly) awful had happened. This is a lackluster and pointless finish to a series plagued with pacing problems.

Three stars. It's not terrible, but it's not great either. Read it just to be done with it. (And maybe because someone will write us Felix/Mildmay slash.)

Meg says

Corambis

Or

Felix Tries Not To Be A Dick For a Change and Seriously Who Designed This Cover?

This was an excellent conclusion to the series. There are dark parts in the story telling, but over all things end on an unapologetically happy note. Which feels right and fair for everything these characters put up with.

I was dubious about having a third narrator again. But Kay was less intrusive to the story than Mehitabel. His sections, while present, work to explain the political and social system we find ourselves in. His story also does not distract from the main plot of the book. Most importantly, Kay's sections also consisted of

considerably less of the novel than Mehitabel's, giving plenty of time for Felix and Mildmay to tell their story.

And by Felix and Mildmay, I mostly mean Felix. This, in a lot of ways, was truly his book and he plays the central character. Don't pick up the last book expecting lots and lots of Mildmay. He's present, he's awesome as ever, but the story is primarily about Felix. I have always liked Felix, so this was a pleasure for me. People who didn't like Felix as much may not enjoy this book, depending on what aspects of his personality they do or don't like. He spends a lot of the story double guessing himself, so if you didn't like wishy washy Felix, you may not enjoy this. On the other hand, if you hated him because of the way he treated Mildmay, you may enjoy this book. People who hated Felix will have to make their own call on that one. As someone who liked Felix, the book gets an A plus.

I've been checking a lot of books out of the library recently, but this is series I actually want to own and have on my shelf. I loved the intricate writing, the distinct voices, and I was absolutely addicted to this series while reading it. Now I have to find something else to do with my weekends since I finished all four books. Oh well, back to paranormal books, I suppose.

Felicia says

I have very mixed feelings about this book, probably because I love the first three of the series soooo much and it's been a while since I've read them. That's the problem with huge fantasy epics, you forget stuff and then want to dive in without being properly oriented to what's going on.

Also, I read this on a Kindle which is nice but you don't have a map (if there was one in the hardback version). A map would have helped reading this book a lot. Hell, I like maps in every book I read, regardless of genre :)

The good stuff: I love these characters, I love how this series is not really categorizable, I love how she deals with homosexual characters in an interesting way, I love the introspection and the deepness of world-building.

The stuff I want to avoid talking about but must to review it is that this book was a bit of a disjointed ending to an AMAZING series. I felt like the world we got dropped into, one with mechanics and steam etc etc, was a little bit jumping the shark from the first three. Better this had been a start to another trilogy in this "steampunky" universe our heroes got taken to. I missed the secondary characters from the last book (which ended on a heartwrenching note, amazing), and I was slightly confused about why we actually were living through the new character's eyes, even to the end. The first half was very engrossing because it was a lot of Felix and Mildmay (or more Felix actually), but the storylines seemed to drift from where they wanted to go midway through, and instead into a metaphysical realm that was a bit hard to follow and connect with as a reader (Only my personal opinion).

I will definitely read other things this author has to offer, she reminds me of Jaqueline Carey a lot, and I would encourage trying this series despite the strange turn book 4 took.

Margaret says

This goes off in a completely different direction from the first three books; the setting is somewhere new, and nearly all the characters (save for Felix and Mildmay) are new. Yet I found it a very satisfying conclusion to the series, because although it introduces new elements and a new story arc, it also resolves

Felix and Mildmay's character arcs and relationships in a believable and pleasing way.

Annelies says

I finished this book about an hour and a half ago and I am so proud of myself for not crying (yet!) Also beware of spoilers??

I'm actually surprised to say I enjoyed this book most of all four, something I had not expected. At all. Corambis just about proves that you can get Felix out of Mélusine, but you can't get Mélusine out of Felix, the poor bastard. But boy, how he improved to be a better person, I'm so proud of him! Mildmay is still the perfect cinnamon roll (is2g he is one of the most gentle people i have ever read about and i have read a few hundred books, he deserves an award or something for sticking with his brother)

Kay, on the other hand, felt a little one-sided to me?? Not that I disliked him or anything, but he was so focused on being blind and the negative side effects that it felt repetitive at times. I mean, I understand he couldn't go around the being blind thing, and how he had to get used to it (and will face many obstacles yet to come), but the subjects during Kay's POV were 50% being blind and 50% something else. (i might just be rude here ^^) He did have good insights though, and with him, Mildmay, Felix and Corbie, unraveling the secrets of the bog people wouldn't have been that hard. Sadly, we'll never get to see that.

Another good thing is that Key didn't become a love interest for our dearest Felix. Ever since the book talked about him being a "violet" guy/boy/youknowit, I feared that he and Felix would get together. Oh how fate has proven me terrifically wrong :D Also that Mildmay wasn't interested in a relationship! I truly think he didn't have nightmares about Ginevra anymore, though both guys are prone to every weird nightmare you can think of... I bet you can tell I feel for them, right?

I must say, like the three other books, that names/places/historic events/etc still are hella confusing... In Corambis less so, fortunately, because there are less characters of importance, but still confusing.

Another confusing thing were those dreams!! Did the books ever say what those dreams meant because I don't get it???

Bless Felix for trying to not hate himself and bless Mildmay for supporting him all the way (and the other way around)!

Now, let's drown my feelings about this book in the next one :')

Cow says

Amazing, excellent end to the series. I really didn't want this to end, and it's been a long, long, *long* time since I felt that way about a series.

I think, at this point, I have read everything Monette has published, so I need to find new authors again.

Jamie Collins says

An enjoyable read, and a nice enough ending for this series. It's rather different from the earlier books - it dips a toe into steampunk, for instance. Knowing that this was the series wrap-up, I had a hard time getting interested in the new characters and their problems, and I missed Mehitabel.

LenaLena says

An excellent finale to Felix and Mildmay's story, although I personally wouldn't mind if there was going to be another book. Or an epilogue or something with a fluffy ending.

Compared to the third book, this one is almost simple. Normally, that is not necessarily a good thing, but the previous one was so chock full of details and history and genealogy and ghosts and stories and spies and murky shadows and unexplored hallways, that this book almost radiates with its clean, good story line. It is a relief to leave all those other people, dead or alive, behind in Melusine. Not only for the reader, but for Felix and Mildmay as well. The distance they put between themselves and their past and all the drama in the Mirador allows them to gain much needed perspective on their previous lives. Both gain the kind of insight in themselves that comes with making a new start in a new place. Sure, you carry your baggage with you, but without other people around who expect you to be who you've always been, that baggage isn't quite as heavy a burden and you have the freedom to make different choices. A large part of the story is about the main characters finding those things out.

Add all the excitement of a new country, new customs (good and bad), new politics, new characters and new technology in all its steampunkish glory and this becomes a very satisfying read.

What I need though is a map of this world. If ever a series needed a map, this is it. Mildmay has maps. Why don't I get one?

Ascian says

The last book of the series is the only one that isn't quite depressing. I love it, and I love how Felix Harrowgate slowly and painfully reclaims his empathy.

Also, I'm a big fan of Ferrand Carey, the Duke of Murtagh. No really edifying reason, though. I just like heroic bears. :)

Siina says

Well, damn. It's hard to say whether the book is worth three or four stars, since it depends on what you want from it. Corambis is the last part of the Doctrine of Labyrinths series that is more like a journey than a story with a plot. This eventually ate the fourth star, since Corambis didn't manage to gather the bits and pieces for me. Felix is exiled to Corambis where he is supposed to get his judgement for being a heretic. Mildmay follows him and mostly the story is about this journey and them meeting other people and eventually saving Corambis from titan clocks, automatons and whatnot. This part of the story, the whole labyrinth thing was

lacking though and somehow we never got into it, really. The books all deal with difficult magic and structures, which makes reading heavy. Also, I don't really get why Kay gets a voice and some of the other characters in the books. It makes the story line messy.

The most I love are Felix and Mildmay and them together. The pervert in me wanted them to get together and somehow it feels like Monette did just that. Their relationship changes subtly in this book and suddenly our brothers act like a married couple and at first I was sure Felix would end up with Kay, but nothing (thank god, wasn't the dead dude enough..). The last paragraph kind of implies that our brothers are more than just brothers. Or is it just me? The whole "lets make our life together in a secluded lighthouse and be happy, you and me". Throughout the book it felt like Monette wrote us what we wanted, but was so clever with it. I loved it. The whole plot is quite simple and it's more about the characters than anything else. Felix and Mildmay's voices are perfect and so different and at the same time they work so well with each other. I wished for more affection though, even though the whole staying in bed together, talking and witchlights around them was romantic, but I needed something more concrete, even though it would've been creepy in a sense. I'd love to get an unofficial lighthouse love episode when Mildmay caves in. Yes, I'm a pervert.

Irene Soldatos says

What am I going to do now this series has finished? I feel somehow at a loss. Yes, all four books were *that* good. *Corambis* was a fitting conclusion to a truly wonderful story. I'd say epic, as well, only that might lead some people to think of the wrong sort of epicness. The writing from the first page of *Melusine* to the last page of *Corambis* was simply superb, and the scholarship and erudition inspiring. This is a many-layered story, with many-layered characters, and layered writing, and that's what makes it so incredible.

Eisheth says

I liked this book, but in a lot of ways it felt so different from the rest of the series that they hardly mesh in my head. It feels kind of like a spinoff, but still with the same main characters.

Felix and Mildmay go to a very different place, where everyone does very different things, and they themselves change so much so as almost to become unrecognizable.... Felix mostly. I've been wanting more character growth from Felix for the entire series, but coming as it did in this (very different) final volume, it sometimes felt like it wasn't really even Felix at all.

All that being said, I enjoyed it immensely. And I feel somewhat satisfied with the end of the series, though I could go on happily reading more about Felix and Mildmay for quite some time.

Elena Johansen says

All the tension between Mildmay and Felix, every harsh word, argument, physical altercation... all of it was finally paid off in the last book in the series, when Felix is arguably at his lowest (knowing exile, compared to his earlier unknowing madness) and decides that it's time he tried harder to be a decent person.

His faults and his transgressions are not wiped away--quite the opposite, in fact. He's less able to forgive himself for what he's done than others are, especially Mildmay. It comes out, in a short but beautifully emotional conversation between the two of them, that basically Felix did so much to push his brother away because he couldn't believe anyone could ever accept him as he was, and the fact that Mildmay did felt undeserved, unwarranted.

I am wholeheartedly satisfied with this conclusion, and it was a real pleasure to watch the two of them interact like friends, even like family, rather than brothers-by-chance who were thrown together by circumstance.

On top of that, what made this final book a standout for me in the series was a twist on worldbuilding I'm not sure I've ever seen. The first three books seemed to have the same rough level of technology as say, Edwardian England--carts and horses and boats for travel, at best. Then, in exile, Felix and Mildmay go to a country totally unknown to them, and there are trains! Corambis has a higher level of technology, and while steampunk is nothing new (and technically they're steam- and magic-powered) I've never read anything involving higher technology without alien visitation being involved.

Also, Monette uses a very similar structure for the books throughout this series, many seemingly unrelated plot threads that gradually (or suddenly, in some cases) come together in a spectacular ending. While I criticized the previous book for doing this badly, here, it's handled much better. While I couldn't see all the specifics of how the ending would play out, I did at least get some sense of where things were going, instead of being bewildered about the importance of a character or an incident for most of the book.

I look forward to rereading the entire series in the future, hopefully picking up more of what confused me the first time, now that I know how it all works out.

Benjamin says

Finally got around to reading this, a few years after reading the earlier books in the quartet, which may go a long way to explaining why I initially found it unengaging - I had forgotten so much of what had previously transpired; but as soon as I got into the meat of the story I was once again hooked. Apart from whatever else goes on here this is very much about Felix and his half brother Mildmay and the developing relationship they enjoy, and despite the fact that Felix continues to bait, abuse and otherwise take for granted his brother, the relationship does change over the course of the novel.

There are interesting new characters to meet too. Kay Brighmore the Margrave of Rothmarlin; forthright but wise and beloved by his people. The Duke of Murtagh who comes to the timely rescue of Kay (and also enjoys a most fulfilling night with Felix in a very fleshly way); and Murtagh's sixteen year old jewellery bedecked son Julian who after a bad start becomes a loyal support to Kay. Suffice it to say that this is a very absorbing and rewarding conclusion.

Joy says

The conclusion to Monette's series really got under my skin. This is the redemption book, and we see real development of the two main characters and their relationship. This book also gives us one of the most cool magic systems I have encountered. Throughout the books, Felix is constantly studying different types of magic systems from different regions, just as one would study different religions. He believes that the

underlying reality of magic will never be known; rather, it's the metaphors that different cultures create to model that unknowable reality that determine the magic's capacity. Felix says, "There are bad metaphors, dangerous metaphors, destructive metaphors-- but not wrong metaphors. Thaumaturgical theory, in the broadest sense, is about manipulating our metaphors and, ideally, making sure that the metaphors we use are good ones." This explains different schools of wizardry, but also leaves open the possibility of completely new metaphors. I think it is amazingly cool!

Liviu says

Perfect ending to the Doctrine of Labyrinths series and incontestably the number one fantasy of 09 so far for me, though there are many books to come.

Also a daring book as it's pretty much a standalone, taking place far away from Melusine in Corambis, and having only Mildmay and Felix as recurring characters.

Corambis is a very different setting too with trains, subway, magic as technology, and an Aristocratic Republic to boot, just ending a brutal three year old insurrection from its southern province formerly known as the kingdom of Caloxa which was a medieval like state with very different magic and has been conquered only 40 years before.

Felix was presented as "Caloxan" by Malkar to the Mirador Court in the series beginning, and that is basically the only tenuous connection between the first 3 volumes and this one.

Outstanding and the best of series, a truly mature novel that marks the culmination of one of the best fantasy series of the past 4 years

Suuanda says

Another fantastic novel by Sarah Monette. Honestly, I think I'm biased because I love her character so much that I'd read any story about them, even if the plot wasn't that good. But Monette's characters are really her strongest trait I think. Her characters are human, imperfect, damaged and hurting, but not like so many emo!wannabe characters you find in every book nowadays. Felix and Mildmay's pains and hurts are real, easy to relate to, even if it's unlikely anyone of us has had to live through so many horrors as they have. This (unfortunately last) novel is about healing. Mildmay and Felix's relationship has always been a very difficult and troubled one, as can be expected from two persons with such dark pasts, but in this novel, they find a way to accept the past for what it is and move on.

I think this novel has a lot more dialogue than any of the previous books, and it reads maybe too easily. I mean, I was loving every bit of it, but it feels like there's not enough. Not enough at all ! It can't possibly be the last we read of Felix and Mildmay and Kay and all the other characters, right ? I pray that Monette is once again inspired to write in this wonderful universe. More more more !

Juxian says

3,5 stars.

Well, going back to the beginning. The first book was awesome. I loved it to death and more. The second book was extremely good. The third book was a disaster (all IMHO, mind you!) And the last book... I loved the first half of it almost as much as I loved the first and the second book. It focused on Felix and Mildmay, it was intense, there was so much angst you could drown in it twice and a half, and yet there were sparkles of hope as well... And the third p.o.v., Kay's, was not annoying, well, since Kay was in the situation of extreme suffering and yeah, I cared what was happening to him.

And then it all kinda... I don't know what... petered out. Kay's p.o.v. became just page count (well, I want to say it again: it all is just my opinion, I can totally imagine other readers loving it all). There were too many characters I didn't care about doing things I didn't find interesting. Felix and Mildmay's relationship... you know, if it were a contemporary book, they'd probably go to psychotherapy (and you're right, I do sound as unenthusiastic as I seem). Anyway, they were working on their relationship, they figured out their mistakes and will try to be better. And it was good, I'm happy for them...

Who am I kidding? I want passion, I want suffering, I want catharsis. The ending was so anti-climatic I'm trying hard to find something to say about it. It ended. I'm ready to move on and start reading other books. And it shouldn't be like that! I spent more than a week with these characters, there should be a... a sillage after that in my mind. I do love it, lingering on the characters after I finish reading, imagining their lives after the word "end". I don't want to do it here. It's all so... bland, I don't know. Maybe I didn't like the ending, too. (view spoiler)

A couple more things I'd like to mention. Why the f*ck was that incest thing necessary? Please, I've read all four books, I still don't see any importance of it. I don't want to guess the author's motivations because I won't be nice about it. Anyway, it was the gun that didn't shoot and just got rusty hanging on the wall. Stanislavsky is disappointed.

Another thing... I think SM is really bad with romance. Any romance, m/m or m/f. Not her strong suit. I don't mind it per se because - you cannot have everything, I know it. Just saying.

So well. I'm happy I read the first two books. And there was no way I wouldn't read the third and the fourth one. But... I just hate it how often - almost every time! - a fantasy series stars stellar and finish up disappointing. IMHO again.

P.S. I suddenly wondered if it'd make a difference for me if it were not the last book of the series. If I knew the author planned another book (even if it never was written). And the answer is yes. If the ending of the book is just a stage in Felix's and Mildmay's life, a temporary situation before they move on - I would find it pacifying and would be content with it. But since the ending of the book is the CONCLUSION of the series - and so, supposedly, what we have there is the prediction of their future... no, I dislike this kind of future for them. It's lukewarm future.

Karin says

I so loved reading this tetralogy. It was one of those "I want to read these books ALL THE TIME but I also never want them to end". Luckily, the four books together were over 2000 pages so they lasted for quite a while.

Magic (so Felix claims) works, or is explained, through metaphors. And therefore The Doctrine of Labyrinths is a very apt name for the book series. It was through following the characters - the two main characters, but also the many side characters - through their trials, through their mazes, avoiding or seeking the heart of the labyrinth, wrong turns and right turns, gathering magic all the while, that I came to care for them so deeply.

I often thought about it - and I hope you know I mean this as true praise - as reading really good fanfiction. Centered round the emotions and reactions of characters one has become deeply invested in: their stupid, conditioned choices and their stupid not-talking-to-each-other and their getting lost in the labyrinth even

though they took the only road they could have taken - and then the honesty and openness, when the clouds do part, being all the more important.

Sidenote: there's a critics' term, probably male critics', not certain if it's Swedish or more widespread, of "housemaid reading" - "pögläsning". It means involving your feelings in your reading, reading emotionally, considering your emotional attachment to the characters and the story, and not only your intellectual appreciation and understanding of the text. ... So, I guess, the opposite of how you read male, white Nobel Prize winners. (No offence to Eyvind Johnson, Albert Camus, and some others. I got emotionally attached to your stories and your characters.)

Sidenote 2: It wasn't until the second half of the second book that I realised that The Doctrine of Labyrinths can be read not only as really good fanfiction, but, in a way, as a very advanced AU of my incredibly preferred fic: Holmes & Watson. (This is not to suggest that the world-building is lacking: it is wonderful, and, to use a word from one review, luscious. And certainly multi-faceted and carrying its own weight.)

Sidenote 3: There have been reviews of this series that haven't liked the POV-switching, and I'd worried beforehand that this would mean that the author would forget whose POV we were in in a particular scene - but the switches are clearly marked and I think they work very well dramaturgically.
