



A Scandal in Battersea

Mercedes Lackey

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The twelfth novel in Mercedes Lackey's magical Elemental Masters series reimagines Sherlock Holmes in a richly-detailed alternate 20th-century England

Christmas is a very special time of year. It is special for Psychic Nan Killian and Medium Sarah Lyon-White and their ward Suki, who are determined to celebrate it properly. It is special for their friends, Doctor John Watson, and his wife Mary, both Elemental Masters, who have found great delight in the season seeing it through young Suki's eyes.

It is also special to others...for very different reasons.

For Christmas Eve is also hallowed to dark forces, powers older than mankind, powers that come awake on this, the Longest Night. Powers best left alone. Powers that could shake the foundations of London and beyond.

It begins slowly. Women disappearing in the dark of night, women only missed by those of their own kind. The whispers only begin when they start to reappear—because when they do, they are no longer sane. And when Nan and Sarah and the Watsons are called on to examine these victims, they discover that it was no ordinary horror of the streets that drove them mad.

But then, the shadows reach for other victims—girls of good, even exalted families, who vanish from concerts, lectures, and evening balls. And it will take the combined forces of Magic, Psychic Powers, and the world's greatest detective to stop the darkness before it can conquer all.

A Scandal in Battersea Details

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From Reader Review A Scandal in Battersea for online ebook

Scratch says

I am at a bit of a loss with this installment to the Elemental Masters. Not because I didn't enjoy it, but because I can't figure out what possessed Mercedes Lackey to write about Sherlock Holmes fighting Cthulu. Literally.

Generally Mercedes Lackey has been formulaic in her writing for years. And this book did follow the same basic formula. The heroes engaged in good, wholesome practicality and learned the value of mixing hard work with fun (while describing their hearty food), and the villain proves his prurient interests throughout the course of the book until his own hubris is his undoing.

However, it is also true that for years Mercedes Lackey has been doing parodies or "homages" to other famous works. "The Collegium Chronicles" were the Valdemar version of Harry Potter, "Closer to the Heart" was her take on Romeo and Juliet, and there was a short story in one of her collections that was an honest-to-God pastiche of Scooby-Do set in Valdemar.

This book was... not an homage.

While Cthulu was never clearly named, the villain of this story was a tentacle-monster from another dimension that ate souls and wanted to unleash darkness upon mankind. And the depiction of the monster at each chapter heading was clearly good ol' Tentacle Face. So, yeah. And Sherlock Holmes was around this book because he and Watson were introduced in the last book, so, why the Hell not?

I am pleased to read a Mercedes Lackey book with some more serious stakes. People really did die, there really was the possibility of an Apocalypse, and none of this was following the script of any other particular story. So if you hadn't known that Mercedes Lackey books always have happy endings, you might actually have been worried about the world ending.

If anything, I am shocked that there was almost NO recap at the beginning of this book about who the Hell Nan and Sarah were, or how long they have been at this, or much of anything about the prior books. The author just launched into this story assuming the reader would know who all the characters were. And, I do know them, but it was unsettling all the same to have no recap.

One of the better Elemental Masters books in a while. Curious where she is going to next from here. Personally, I'm hoping for some clarification on how Nan and Sarah are going about the society set as seemingly a pair of lesbians without anyone being scandalized. (No, they are not ACTUALLY lesbians, but they are a pair of unmarried women traveling everywhere together and living/working together all day every day, so it would be everyone's assumption.) And what happened to Nan's selkie potential love interest? I was really looking forward to that going somewhere. Nan could use a little more straight-forward magic in her life.

If either Nan or Sarah finally settle down with a guy, will that bust up their semi-Sapphic partnership?

Edited the following day:

I also must note that this installment of the Elemental Masters does continue to have some of the same

problems as previous books. In "Reserved for the Cat" the final showdown between our heroes and the villain was anti-climactic to the say the least. The heroes got a gun. And then... yeah. That villain was made short work of.

In this novel, while I am pleased to say there was a BIT more suspense leading up to the final showdown, the climax was still somewhat anticlimactic. And while I will not give a complete spoiler as to how the heroes defeat the villain, suffice it to say, the means used is something of a deus ex machina. Mercedes Lackey gave almost no explanation for how this method would even be an OPTION in the entire novel leading up to the climax. Just... climax.

And that is setting aside the fact that in general, Mercedes Lackey plots have been too thin for too long. I feel like she really started phoning it in after the "Wind" trilogy in Valdemar. Since then her plots have been as substantial as popcorn. I don't feel like she is following rules so much as she is following a script. As Flannery O'Connor said, (and I shall only paraphrase rather than quote), a good ending should be both unexpected and inevitable. And the way to really do that is to use elements previously established earlier in the book in unexpected ways. Lackey does not do this. She is fine with bringing in a completely new element to solve the conflict in one fell swoop, wrapped up in a little bow, and everything leading up to this deus ex machina can just be shrugged off as an enjoyable little journey for the Hell of it.

What this book needed was a subplot providing more conflict. Maybe if Sarah were haunted by a dark spirit who whispered in her ear that she can't trust Nan. Or if the Celtic warrior Nan channels began to turn on her, so that Nan felt like she was possessed or at war in her own mind. Something. Maybe a subplot where one of the girls gets pregnant and worries that the unborn fetus is infected with Cthulu's darkness, and Sherlock Holmes is the only one to deduce that she is pregnant and becomes her confidante?

Just spitballing here. But you get my drift. The plot is currently paper thin, and there were lots of fun ways Lackey could have added more depth and conflict. And maybe, if she had invested a little more time and effort into deepening the plot with subplots, then we could have developed a more nuanced way to resolve the conflict. The pregnant girl could sacrifice her unborn fetus with dark blood magic to close Cthulu's portal, setting up the next book where we are concerned Nan or Sarah is corrupted by dark magic, when in truth she is just grieving over her decision. Or, the dark spirits that had been haunting Sarah could be imprisoned in the soulless bodies that our main characters had been finding throughout the course of this book.

Something.

I think it would actually be really fun to co-author a book with Mercedes Lackey. She would chug out a book like this in just a few months (She really does produce a lot of books per year), and then I would go through an add sub-plots. It would rock.

Alas...

Kathy Davie says

Thirteenth in the Elemental Masters alternate history urban fantasy series for young adult readers and revolving around two young women who use their magic for good. It's set in Victorian England at Christmastime.

My Take

An interesting tale that took a long time to tell. It got rather tedious as Lackey went on and on about the perverse Alexandre. *There are a few referrals to his, um, preferences, but nothing that should be negative for ages 16 or 17 and up. I'd say that the younger kids probably already know about this, but...what do I know.*

The story reads well and easily even though Lackey uses third-person point-of-view from only Nan's perspective. Seeing as the girls are joined at the hip, I'd've thought a dual POV using both Nan and Sarah would have been practical. No matter, though.

There's really nothing new about the core characters — except for Lord Alderscroft. I did enjoy his letting go at the panto.

The theme is the age-old one of good triumphing over evil. I suspect "knowing" the eventual outcome added to the tedium. Don't get me wrong. It was an interesting story, and it does progress the series arc a touch. I did appreciate the goodness of the core characters, so in that respect, it does set a very good example.

The Story

It begins with Lord Alderscroft asking Nan and Sarah to help John and Mary Watson scour the asylums of London, for those who have been declared mad because no one understands their budding magical abilities.

What they haven't taken into account is that it's Christmas, and Christmas Eve is also hallowed to dark forces, powers older than mankind, powers that come awake on this, the Longest Night. Powers best left alone. Powers that could shake the foundations of London and beyond.

It begins slowly. Women disappearing in the dark of night, women only missed by those of their own kind. The whispers only begin when they start to reappear — because when they do, they are no longer sane. And when Nan and Sarah and the Watsons are called on to examine these victims, they discover that it was no ordinary horror of the streets that drove them mad.

But then, the shadows reach for other victims — girls of good, even exalted families, who vanish from concerts, lectures, and performances. And it will take the combined forces of Magic, Psychic Powers, and the world's greatest detective to stop the darkness before it can conquer all.

The Characters

Nan Killian (she transforms into a Celtic Warrior) and **Sarah Lyon-White** are best friends and roommates, who happen to have magical powers. Each has an avian companion: **Neville**, a black raven, is partnered with Nan while **Grey**, an African parrot who transforms into a large hawk, is partnered with Sarah. The young **Suki** is their ward, a medium of great potential power. **Mrs. Horace** is their landlady.

Dr. John and Mary Watson are friends and live above **Sherlock Holmes** on Baker Street. **Billy** is one of the Baker Street Irregulars. **Mycroft Holmes** is Sherlock's brother and has the ear of the Queen. **Sergeant Frederick Black** commands the special platoon.

Puck, a.k.a., Robin Goodfellow, is the Oldest Old One in England and their friend who has given the girls a talisman. **Durwin** and **Roan** are hobs assigned to the girls by Robin to act as protectors and messengers. The **Wild Hunt** is led by the **Huntsman** who determines for himself who is fair prey.

The Harton School is...

...a school for the children of expatriates and those with magical abilities. It's headed up by **Mems'ab**

Harton (sports a very short Grecian tunic and spear) and her husband, **Sahib Harton** (who turns into a medieval knight), who has installed a manager for his import business while Sahib takes on instructing. **Karamjit, Agansing, Selim, and Gupta** — Sikh, Gurkha, Muslim, and Hindu — are protectors and experts in the mythology and magic of their respective regions. **Mustafa** is one of the servants.

The Hampstead Hospital and Sanitarium is...

...where the wealthy send relatives who act “funny”. **Dr. Huntley runs it**, without being too conscientious. **Amelia** isn’t mad, but does experience prescient dreams.

The White Lodge of London Elemental Masters and Magicians is...

...led by **Lord Alderscroft**, the Wizard of London and Fire Master, who loves indulging Suki’s sartorial love. **Graves** is his butler. **Brendan** is his coachman.

Victims include...

...the unfortunate Maisie who objected to his sexual demands. **Elizabeth Penwick** had been going to fetch fish and chips. **Cynthia Denniston**, a niece of Lord Denniston, had been visiting the Grosvenor Gallery with a group. **Katherine Dalton** was attending a performance of *Hamlet* with a very bad understudy.

Alexandre Harcourt is a selfish, perverted, murdering sociopath who always wants the easy way. He believes he would be a Water Magician. **Alf** is his extremely obliging, perverted servant. **Victor** is the brother who would have inherited it all. His father and mother, **Emily**, never got over their grief.

Arthur Fensworth is a lawyer and had been a friend of Harcourt Senior and is quite dutiful in adhering to his bequest that Alexandre pursue a useful “career”. **Young Abernathy** is the current head of the law firm, Abernathy, Abernathy, and Owen.

The **tentacled entity** promises much and demands even more.

The Bohemian crowd of...

...artists and writers of whom **Beatrice Leek** is one who interacts with Earth Elementals. **Caprice “Cappy”** is Beatrice’s black cat. **Hobson** is a brownie who works for Beatrice.

Treadman’s Books specializes in the rare, the occult, the esoteric, the profane, and the obscene. **Maudie** is an old lady and neighbor of Nan and Sarah’s who’s been ailing for months. **Grannie Toscin**, a neighbor of Harcourt’s, lives with and helps care for her granddaughter **Jilly**’s babies while Jilly is out housecleaning. **Madame Maud** holds virgin auctions.

The Cover and Title

The cover appears to be an underwater scene with its blue green drifts of color overlaying the tentacles that writhe around the braking parrot, Grey, on the left of the purple and pink bordered graphic insert of Sherlock Holmes (in his trademark deerstalker hat and checked coat) carrying a long-barreled gun with the raven, Neville, soaring upwards from behind the righthand corner. The author’s name is in an embossed white gothic script at the top while the title is much smaller at the bottom in an embossed white-outlined black. The series information is very tiny just above the right end of the title.

The title refers to the Victorian horror of scandal, for what happens to the girls, for what Alexandre gets up to, for the invasion of England, and it is *A Scandal in Battersea*.

Annie says

Originally published on my blog: Nonstop Reader.

This is the 12th book in the Elemental Masters series by Mercedes Lackey from Berkley Publishing.

An ensemble cast including Nan and Sarah, their birds, assorted elementals, Sherlock Holmes, John and Mary Watson plus others from earlier books in the series do battle with, well, 'Cthulu lite' in an alternate-earth in Victorian London.

There are few iconic fictional characters with a more passionate following than Sherlock Holmes. There are numerous serious groups who study the Holmes canon and meet to have dinner and debate the finer points of Conan Doyle's extant oeuvre. For those folks, this book and the one previous (A Study in Sable, #11), would certainly bring on apoplexy.

While I love traditional Holmes and have read them many many times, that hasn't stopped me from enjoying the rich abundance of Holmes pastiches and modern narratives. For those people who are a little stricter in their acceptance of ersatz Holmes, it can be said in defense of this installment that Holmes himself isn't really a central character, more of recurring cameo. I didn't find his presence distracting at all. I don't know that I would have rated him a cover appearance (though the cover art is beautiful), he doesn't appear all that much in the book.

My main problem with the book was that I found myself repeatedly jerked out of the story by the really over the top 'dialect' dialogue. Much of the time I found myself almost having to translate phonetically to see what they were trying to say. That was my biggest grumble with the book and it certainly wasn't insurmountable, just annoying.

This *is* a Mercedes Lackey book, the good characters are **good**, the villains are **villainous** and there isn't **much** any blending.

I found it comfortably readable, entertaining and distracting. I loved the scene with the panto, and I love little Suki.

Four stars, it was exactly as expected, thank goodness.

Disclosure: I received an ARC at no cost from the author/publisher.

Marlene says

Originally published at Reading Reality

A Scandal in Battersea is the 12th book in Mercedes Lackey's Elemental Masters series. I read the earliest books in the series long ago, probably when they were published in the mid-1990s. It doesn't seem as if one needs to have read the whole series to get into this particular entry in it, although now that I'm diving back into the whole thing, it looks like A Study in Sable is more of a direct prequel to A Scandal in Battersea than any of the other books.

The original premise of the Elemental Masters series was to re-tell well-known fairy tales in a late Victorian/early-20th century alternate universe where magic works and is divided into at least four main branches representing the classic “elements” of Earth, Air, Fire and Water. But other forms of “magic” were introduced in later stories, notably telepathy and other ESPer powers, and the mediumistic power to communicate with spirits.

Over time, the series morphed into a single world, with some semi-continuing characters, including many of the protagonists in *A Scandal in Bohemia* – notably our main characters. John Watson (yes, that John Watson) is a Water Master, his wife Mary is an Air Master, while Nan Killian is a Psychic and Sarah Lyon-White is a medium.

It takes all of their combined powers, plus the rational mind of Sherlock Holmes, to solve this case. It all begins with a young woman having visions of a ruined London where a tentacled monster sucks people into itself, never to be seen again. While traditional medicine believes that the poor girl is mad, Dr. John Watson is all too aware that she might be sane – and psychic, warning of evil on the horizon.

And so it proves. Someone, some idiot, is calling up a power that he does not understand, in the belief that it will give him earthly power and vast wealth. And power. Lots and lots of power. All he has to do is sacrifice a few virgins to its ever-growing hunger.

Of course it all goes wrong. Bargains with demons, devils and otherworldly creatures of shadow never go well, at least not for the human bargainer. Plus, (or minus, depending on on your perspective) sometimes the monster gets out.

In order to keep this monster from getting out, every person and creature that our heroes can find on the side of the light, or even just on the side of keeping our world for us, wades into the fray.

And it might not be enough.

Escape Rating A-: For a book with Sherlock Holmes on the cover, where the title is a direct reference to one of the canonical stories, there just isn’t enough Holmes in this book. In the end, I had an absolutely marvelous time with this book and with this world, to the point where I ran out and picked up as many of the previous entries in the series as I could borrow from libraries, but there’s not enough Holmes to justify its description as, or to satisfy my yen for, yet another version of the logical, rational Holmes finding his way in a magic-working world.

But if you are looking for a version of Victorian London where magic works and where the cast of characters is both diverse and endlessly fascinating, you’ll love *A Scandal in Battersea*. That the main characters are a pair of independent young women and their intelligent birds just adds to the fun.

If you like this concept of a magical, or at least slightly alternate, Victorian London, the setting of *A Scandal in Battersea* reminded me quite favorably of Cindy Spencer Pape’s *Gaslight Chronicles*. And since I loved that series and it seems to have ended, it is very nice to find something that reminds me of it quite so strongly.

And if the monster in *A Scandal in Battersea* gives you the shivers as much as it did me, take a look at *A Study in Emerald* by Neil Gaiman (included in his collection *Fragile Things*, which is a pastiche where Sherlock Holmes’ London intersects with the Cthulhu Mythos, with predictably creepy results. I include this reference because the descriptions of the monster that they have to fight struck me as Cthulhu’s cousin. A

reference that left me appropriately creeped out.

As much as I missed Holmes until his appearance at the $\frac{3}{4}$ mark, I had a great time with this book and could not put it down. I enjoyed this world so much that I immediately picked up an earlier book in the series, *A Study in Sable*, which introduces readers to Holmes, Watson and Mary Watson in what looks to be a kind of prequel to *A Scandal in Battersea*.

I'm charmed and enchanted all over again.

Bea Charmed says

Much better than the last one I read. Review to come.

Brenda Lower says

Not my favorite from the series, but still a good book.

Lara says

Well, Lackey has broken away from the fairy-tale themes of the previous books in the series. This book, while a direct sequel to *A Study in Sable* and featuring the Even Further Adventures of Sarah and Nan, the Best Psychics in London, is not a fairy tale retold. This is Sherlock Holmes vs. Cthulhu with the serial numbers rubbed off. And it's not great, and Nan and Sarah have not grown at all as characters, and roughly half the book is given over to the perspective of the villain and his only-talks-in-a-heavy-accent henchman, and Daw's copyeditors really need to get back on the ball (*arrant* nonsense, not errant. *Poring* over a text, not pouring. ARGH).

Either I'm getting old, or Mercedes Lackey is. Maybe both.

CatBookMom says

I really used to love the stories about Sarah Jane and Nan, their birds Grey and Neville, and the sort-of fairytale stories in this Elemental Masters series. Pulling Sherlock Holmes, Dr John Watson and his wife Mary into it was a real stretch in *A Study in Sable*. I wanted to enjoy this newest book, but I found I was having to skip every other chapter, the ones about the Evil Guy and The Book.

Not going to try to finish.

Darnell says

It looks like the Elemental Masters books start to build on each other later, so I shouldn't have tried to jump straight to Sherlock Holmes vs Cthulu. Despite that, it was still easy to follow and everything Mercedes Lackey writes is at least good.

Having said that, not my favorite EM book. Kind of a generic version of Sherlock, given the setting, though the part where he's transported to an eldritch hellscape and immediately takes a soil sample for clues was pretty great. Other major complaint is that the villain POVs remove all mystery from the mystery aspect of this, and don't add a lot to make up for it.

Margaret says

This is a direct sequel to "A Study in Sable", in fact the villain of the piece is a character who was mentioned in passing in the first book.

Nan, Sarah, John & Mary Watson, and even Lord Alderscroft are indulging young Suki in all the trappings of Christmas. But along side the joy and the fun, something dark is brewing.

A magician finds hand written book and deliberately sets forth to let an ancient horror loose in this world. The only clues are the mindless young women wandering the streets of London, and a young lass in a private insane asylum who is anything but insane.

As the darkness gathers, Sherlock Holmes must once again join forces with the others to battle something he could not even imagine ever existed.

Absolutely loved this book. My copy was a library one, so now I'm on the hunt for a copy for my collection.

Nicole says

This was a fast read for me, due in part to the fact that it was such a predictable novel I found myself skimming bits of it. I find that really sad, because I used to love this series and now it's all cookie-cutter perfect. Spoiler-not-spoiler alert: the good guys win, the bad guys get what's coming to them, and no one is even majorly hurt. I have lost interest in this series, and no longer care what happens in them, because I am convinced that nothing even remotely bad can happen to the main characters. (For the record, that wasn't always the case. In the first few books of this series, there was a definite threat that something bad would happen. Even though these are fairy tale re-tellings, I believed that they were in danger. And sometimes they had to sacrifice something in order to get their Happily Ever After.)

Also, the probably MOST ANNOYING THING EVER in this series (and most of Lackey's other work past a certain point) is the use of written accents so thick I have to translate them. I mean, really? Is this actually necessary? Part of Lackey's charm has always been her ability to draw the readers in and keep them wrapped up in the story. If we're stopping every few paragraphs to unravel a bit of dialogue, we ARE NO LONGER WRAPPED UP IN THE STORY. It was very jarring, and very annoying.

In short, I enjoyed this book as a library skim-read, but will not be buying it. I will also be removing all the remaining books in this series from my TBR list, and will not be wasting my time on them. If I want to read

a good story from this series, I'll stick with #0-3, with the occasional inclusion of 6 & 7.

Joan says

Nan and Sarah and their birds, Neville and Grey, have to join forces with pretty much everyone including Sherlock Holmes, the Watsons, MemSahib and others at the school, a witch, Brownies, Hobs, and even Robin Goodfellow, often known as Puck and the Oldest Old Thing in England, to try to defeat the malevolent entity from another world who wants to invade England. The evil human who works with the entity expects a reward for his efforts in advancing evil. I enjoyed this but due to my own inability to keep up with books, I had to read this extremely quickly to get it returned to the library without a fine. In fact, I need to go do that right this minute. The book was enjoyable but I think the author is falling into a trap writers often fall for. If they keep raising the stakes in each book, what on earth do they do in the next book in the series? I suppose I'll keep reading but I'm not sure it is holding my interest the way it used to. I want to give a quick mention of the jacket which is pretty attractive and enticing.

Alison (Lady Coffin) S says

I enjoy Mercedes Lackey writing so much. The Elemental Masters are such a wonderful series.

Lark of The Bookwyrm's Hoard says

Closer to 2.5 than 2. A Sherlock Holmes/Elemental Master crossover ought to be riveting, and it just... wasn't. Plus it left a few loose ends at the end, and never explain how a certain group of people survived. There's also a somewhat Lovecraftian feel to the monster (though I admit I've never read Lovecraft), which I didn't care for but should have found scarier than I did. All in all, while I didn't *dislike* it, *A Scandal in Battersea* just didn't work for me. (I did like Robin and the hobs, though.)

I'll try to expand on this review when I've had a day or two to think about it.

Read for #TakeControlTBR 2018

Laura says

Really did not enjoy this one. I've already given up on her Valdemar series and it may be time to stop reading this one.
