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The Shadow Of What Was Lost: The Licanus Trilogy, Book 1



Synopsis

It has been 20 years since the end of the war. The dictatorial Augurs, once thought of almost as gods, were overthrown and wiped out during the conflict, their much-feared powers mysteriously failing them. Those who had ruled under them, men and women with a lesser ability known as the Gift, avoided the Augurs' fate only by submitting themselves to the rebellion's Four Tenets. A representation of these laws is now written into the flesh of any who use the Gift, forcing those so marked into absolute obedience. As a student of the Gifted, Davian suffers the consequences of a war fought--and lost--before he was born. Despised by most beyond the school walls, he and those around him are all but prisoners as they attempt to learn control of the Gift. Worse, as Davian struggles with his lessons, he knows there is further to fall if he cannot pass his final tests. But when he discovers he has the ability to wield the forbidden power of the Augurs, he sets into motion a chain of events that will change everything. To the north an ancient enemy, long thought defeated, begins to stir. And to the west, a young man whose fate is intertwined with Davian's wakes up in the forest, covered in blood and with no memory of who he is....

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

You know what I remarked - out loud to the cat, if we're insisting on complete transparency - when I was about 1/5 of the way through this book? "Holy [cow], this is an honest-to-god epic! Not one of those "epics" that are only called that because the author doesn't know how to write a book without throwing everything but the kitchen sink into the plot, but a real one! Parallel story lines that tie

together in the end! New interesting magic in a new interesting world! This is **AMBITIOUS!**"(For anyone who's wondering, the cat made a strange little growly noise and left the room. I'm fairly sure that his reaction was unrelated to the topic of conversation.)I'm hesitant to say it - I do hate being wrong - but I think I just stumbled across another author with bestseller potential. From very early on, I thought - internally this time - this book kind of tastes like Sanderson. Later on, I picked up some Robert Jordan textures too. At one point, I headed over to the author's Goodreads profile and, lo and behold, there under his biggest influences are Sanderson and Jordan. And since I wasn't done with the book yet, I was a bit skeptical. I mean, those are some pretty big shoes to fill, and though I'm sure lots of people try, lots of people just end up sounding like they're trying to sound like Sanderson and Jordan (or whoever) rather than finding their own voice. I was liking the story so far, and I found myself hoping that Islington wouldn't be influenced by these other authors so much that the story suffered. I mean, ambitious is good, but TOO ambitious is just going to fail.I needn't have worried. This story is a great one, and it's great not because it sounds a bit like a Sanderson fantasy, it's great because James Islington has some real chops.I wouldn't call it perfect. Perhaps the most frustrating thing about this is the amount of world building. Understand, there are no info dumps, and there's enough world building that, for the most part, we're able to follow along without being totally confused, and we can trust that our questions about what X means will be answered eventually. However, I spent a fair amount of time in the first half of the book wishing I understood the background a bit more than I did. How the magic works. How society is structured. What the history was. Where all these countries are. (Perhaps part of the problem stems from the naming conventions, which were foreign enough that all the weird words were running together without getting saved in my brain with an identification.) The amount of exposition included was a very valid artistic decision, and it could very well have been a better choice than the alternative, but...maybe just a bit more balance would have been nice.If well-used plots bother you, you may not care for this. The story itself is the epic fantasy standard: world on the brink of disaster, ancient evil escaping its prison, nobody believes me, etc. Some of the specifics were pretty familiar too. They're being chased, their only chance is an ancient abandoned city with an evil of its own because the bad guys won't follow...now, where have I heard that before? I personally don't mind revisiting a trope if it's done well, but some people really do. In any case, I think that even though I was reminded of other works at various points in the story, the book is fresh enough and well-written enough that just about everyone will be happy with how it all turned out.Oh, what else? The book is meaty enough to support its sweeping scope. The characters were above average, I think; nuanced and likeable, realistic, with their own unique voices, though none of them particularly blew me away. The dialogue

was well-written. The editing was good. Not quite perfect, but still good (and better than most!). The magic was involved and interesting without being overpowered. Islington avoided the 100% good vs. 100% evil thing; the book was full of gray areas. And there were a handful of surprises. I have a feeling James Islington is going to have a spot on my shelves alongside the other epic authors of this generation - Brandon Sanderson, Pat Rothfuss, Brent Weeks... If you're a fan of epic fantasy, I strongly suggest this book. So many fantasies try to be epic, think they're epic, but so few actually pull it off. This one does.

I believe that the *The Shadow of What Was Lost* is a great first offering by Mr. Islington.

Thoughts on plot development: -Good pacing throughout the entire story. -Numerous plot twists that seem to feed into potential books in the series, rather than help the current story along.

Character development: -Characters are young, but fall into the same issue with other YA/epic fantasy novels. The "children" main characters seemingly know more than the adults, or when something is explained by the adults, then the children understand without issue. -Excellent dialogue throughout the story.

Writing/Editing - one serious comment - Entirely too much passive voice for a book that is considered epic fantasy. Alternate passive and active voice in the same paragraph caused some reading issues. Passive is a necessary part of good writing, but the amount of passive voice could have been significantly reduced with another draft or two, and it would have reduced the page count.

Observation: Each chapter ends, and then a blank page follows before the next chapter. I found this interesting, as the publishing method allowed for a brief pause before the next chapter, but it also makes the book seem to be about 50+ pages longer than it really is. Nothing critical, but I don't think the blank page is necessary.

Overall: I enjoyed this first book! I'd recommend it to those who enjoy coming-of-age fantasy stories.

For a first time novel, *The Shadow of What Was Lost* is very good. Pacing starts a bit slow and picks up nicely as you go. Characters deepen over time in ways you can see and cannot see, and you find yourself asking questions about who they really are. What Islington does with causality is very interesting. His magic systems are fun too, and show clear Sanderson influence. That being said, the book's hook is somewhat delayed, because much of the first third of the book is occupied with repetitive mechanics. Quite a few chase and hidden basement narratives. Islington puts his own spin on them in the details, but not the execution. This means that when you read certain sections, you wonder "haven't I read something like this before," and struggle to care about these sequences. You learn to care about them - their settings, especially - when you realize midway

through the book how everything fits into a carefully constructed mythos that is only beginning to unfold before you, and you begin to see how interesting the world Islington has built is. That's when the book grips you. But you have to make it there first. Apart from that, very fun and well-written read. Once it grips you, it's very hard to put down. I'm looking forward to the next installment!

I have rarely come across a book that made me decide that I would buy anything an author published, but I have to say I would for James Islington. I have seen other reviewers refer to this as similar to WoT or Brandon Sanderson's writing and I see the connection only in length of book and quality of writing. Everything here is kept detailed enough to make it interesting yet not so weighed down with details that you forget there is a story. There were no 100 page batters and I didn't notice any "fluff" material so overall I say I am certainly looking forward to what comes next.

Like the great epics of this age that are mentioned in the blurb, it is not. Those stories are vastly more complex and layered. Save for the TRUE surprise at the end, the story paced along appropriately according to fantasy style expectations. It got more interesting as it climbed over the halfway mark and headed towards the true action at the end. I'm game to hear the rest of this tale.

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