



Victories

Mercedes Lackey , Rosemary Edghill

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The fourth and final book in the Shadow Grail series by the "New York Times "and "USA Today "bestselling authors Mercedes Lackey and Rosemary Edghill

Spirit White and her friends Burke, Loch, and Addie have escaped from Oakhurst Academy. But their freedom has come at a terrible cost--a dear friend sacrificed her own life to save theirs. In the wake of Muirin's death, they are also forced to deal with the terrifying truth behind the facade of Oakhurst Academy: all of the legends are true.

Queen Guinevere, King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table really had existed. With the magic of Merlin, they were able to imprison their greatest foe, Mordred, before he could plunge the world back into the Dark Ages. But Mordred is now free, in charge of Oakhurst Academy, and determined to finish what he started so long ago.

Pursued by Shadow Knights, the reincarnated remnants of Mordred's original army, Spirit's small band undertakes a quest to recover the Four Hallows, objects of immeasurable power. Memories of a past life have begun to surface, one in which Spirit wields a legendary sword. She comes to realize that these memories are the true key to Mordred's defeat. Can Spirit and her friends manage to recapture the magic of Camelot in time to save their fellow students and prevent the end of the world?

Victories Details

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From Reader Review Victories for online ebook

Veronica says

Disappointing ending to the series. I don't know what I expected, but this was too corny for even Lackey's "happily ever after." Total letdown.

The Book Breeze says

This is a fast-paced read that resolves most of the issues faced by Spirit in the previous books. However, like the others who stand beside her, she must face her immediate past and the loss of her family before she can take on Mordred. The ensemble cast of characters continues to act consistently while they come to terms with whom and what they originally were. Spirit had already fallen in love with Burke, but now they discover their previous roles in the Arthurian legend. Heroic, brave and faithful, Burke needed to learn to deal with his ego so he can truly be "King Arthur" and help Spirit lead their army to success.

Lackey and Edghill are accomplished storytellers who know how to build plots, sustain suspense and develop characters. Overall, this was an interesting tale that wound up the series, but on the other hand, it felt rushed. In the three previous books, Spirit struggled with the fact that she didn't have "any magic" and all at once she's in touch with her powers and ready to defeat Mordred. In addition, this book was so much shorter than the others, approximately 50+ pages, so it seemed like the teens zoomed through their preparations for the confrontation with their deadly adversary.

Victories needed extra time to be as strong as the others in this series, more pages, more of everything that Lackey and Edghill did so wonderfully in this retelling of the Arthurian legends. Despite the rushed feeling of this book, it was fabulous entertainment and definitely belongs with the rest of the series on my "keeper" shelves.

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Review:

The fourth in the Shadow Grail series, *Victories* ties up the story that evolved through *Legacies*, *Conspiracies*, and *Sacrifices*. When Spirit's family died, she was told that her parents planned for her to attend a private boarding school, Oakhurst Academy. Danger lurked at every corner and students either vanished or died. Discovering that she was next on the headmaster's "hit" list of victims, Spirit fled before she learned everything about herself. Now, she not only has to learn the identity she left behind as part of King Arthur's court ages ago, she also has to find a way to defeat Mordred, an adversary who just keeps coming.

This review was provided by Shannon Kennedy for her column Shannon's Space for the June 2014 issue of *The Book Breeze*.

Kathy Davie says

Fourth and last in the Shadow Grail urban fantasy series for YA and revolving around Spirit, Burke, Loch, and Addie.

My Take

I think Lackey/Edghill were impatient to get this series over with and crammed everything into this one. Not to its enhancement. For all the build-up the Shadow Grail series receives, *Victories* is a major disappointment. After everything everyone has gone through, the complicated twists, and then Lackey/Edghill suddenly drop the ball. I had thought finding the Hallows, that oh-so-critical quest, would take up the whole story. After all, the Hallows are an essential. But no. One quick shopping trip and, voila, they're all found.

The pluses were the brief confusions the kids had as they tried to assimilate their centuries of knowledge with their current-day personas. The leadership worries were good as well. The twist on the story of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere with Mordred in the hot seat was fascinating, and I enjoyed this, ahem, rearrangement. It's another sort of twist to see what Mordred believes is the ideal world. I do not see how Mordred can be that lame in his outlook. If Ambrosius is Mordred, he must have had some exposure to the world as it is now. How can he possibly think serfs and primitive living is a plus?

QUERCUS is a disappointment. The backup the four are expecting? Oh, well. Then there's Spirit's unwillingness to allow any Reincarnates to remember. What's with that? I suspect most of the irritating questions Spirit got so frustrated with would have gone away if the Reincarnates had gotten their memories back.

There's a bit of background on Spirit's family life with all the major low points.

And there ya go, it's Vivian's statement about how useful looking at the past can be. A very good reason for not re-writing history to suit today's desire to whitewash the past.

The negatives were the rush to end this, the lack of strategic planning on the foursome's part; the numerous occasions when Lackey/Edghill ignored great opportunities to develop tension and drama — why not go somewhere with Allan Tate's mental chat and what's with Mark's so very convenient stance?; and, then one computer gets bombed and it affects the whole Internet?

Then there's the ending...oh, brother.

The Story

The Roundtable was bound to be reborn lifetime after lifetime as *Reincarnates* until Mordred could be defeated. Only able to remember who they were if Merlin or Mordred caused them to remember.

Now Spirit, Burke, Loch, and Addie are on the run, relying on obscure instructions from QUERCUS.

The Characters

The Grail Knights

Spirit White wields Spirit, a gift of which no one knew. She and **Burke Hallows**, a Combat mage, are

together. Spirit is also **Guinevere**, the White Mare's Daughter, while Burke is **Arthur**, the brother of Morgause and uncle of Mordred. **Fee** was Spirit's sister. **Lachlan "Loch" Spears'** gifts are Shadewalking with a secondary gift of Pathfinding; he's also **Lancelot of the Lake**. **Addie Lake** is a Water Witch *and* **Vivianne**, the Lady of the Lake and Lady of Avalon.

Vivian is their contact, a Water Witch, and an escapee from Oakhurst years ago. She was also **Nimue**. **Elizabeth Walker** reappears; she's **Iseult**. Seems Burke's parents also escaped. Until they died.

QUERCUS is the mysterious computer contact; he's also **Merlin**.

The Shadow Knights work at Breakthrough Adventure Systems

Breakthrough is headquartered in the Fortress near Oakhurst. **Anastus Ovcharenko**, a.k.a., Prince Agravaine, is Mordred's pet assassin. **Madison Lane-Rider** and **Muirin Shae** were sisters: Queen Morgause, a.k.a., the Black Hound, and Queen Morgaine. Only Muirin died in *Sacrifices*, 3. **Mark Rider** is also Mark of Cornwall who betrayed Arthur. He's married to Madison. **Teddy Rider** is Tristan. The **Gallows Oak** is where Mordred was imprisoned. **Clark Howell** is a regular human and a brilliant computer nerd.

The students who joined the Shadow Knights included **Joe Rogers**.

Oakhurst...

...is a boarding school for orphans who wield magic. And if you're not an orphan when the headmaster learns of your magic, you will be. **Dr. Vortigern Ambrosius** is the headmaster, a.k.a., **Mordred**. **Dylan Williams** had helped them in earlier stories; he's also Gareth Beaumains. Other students who were in lockdown include **Emily Davis**; **Vanessa Cartwright**; ; **Angelina Swanson**; **Troy Lang**; **Maddie Harris** is Brangane; **Kylee Williamson** is Bertilak; **Russell Frazier**; **Renee Trueblood**; **Allan Tate** is Dagonet, Arthur's Court Fool and the Illusion Mage, Arthur's spymaster; **Mike Sherwood**; **Blake Watson** is Peredur; **Noah Turner** is Cei; **Andrew Hayes** is Bedivere; and, **Chris Terry** is Gaheris of Orkney are the current-day students.

The Grail Knights whose current-day names we don't know include **Morholt**, **Olwen**, **Laudine**, and **Loholt**.

Passelande is the White Horse of Britain; **Hengroen** is the horse Arthur rides into battle. **Cafall** is Arthur's Hound.

The town of Radial

Brenda Copeland is the first of the townies they encounter. **Veronica Davenport** has been playing along. **Brett** and **Juliette Weber** are weak idiots. **Macalister High School** is their school. **Adam** and **Tom Phillips** and **Kennedy Lewis** also join them. The **Basses** lost their daughter **Erika** to a Shadow Knight attack, but they still have **Damien**.

There are four **Schools of Magic**, well, actually five, now that they know about Spirit's gift: **Spirit**, **Water**, **Air**, **Earth**, and **Fire**. There are four **Hallows of Britain**: the Sword, the Shield, the Cauldron (or Cup), and the Lance (or Spear).

The Cover

The cover is snowy, all white and silver with a white horse rearing up in the swirling misty background as the blonde Spirit in her snazzy white ski jacket and jeans wields a beautiful sword.

The title is how it ends, in *Victories*. ?

Victoria says

Finally finished the series. Usually after a series this long I feel sad, parting with the characters and the world, but here the good byes were easy. Although I finally started to like the main character by the book 4, at that point it was too little too late to care much for her or others. So at the end I felt relief more, than anything.

Overall the idea of the series was interesting, but the execution fell flat. The plot holes, the untied ends, the unbelievable villain and the winey main character.

And the info dump. Why did the writers feel the necessity to explain every little unimportant thing, while leaving more important questions unanswered? And why, why the parenthesis in almost every sentence? I think there might be parenthesis within parenthesis somewhere there. I won't be surprised if that's the case. The horrific sentence structures took attention from the story and nothing, but destructed the reader (me, that is) :)

At least, the last book made up for the boring previous ones in plot. So I gave it 3 stars, but barely.

Doris says

Although this final book picked up the theme of the nearly-adult Spirit and her friends, I was a bit disappointed. Part of the story to this point had been the constant need of the group to defend themselves and work to find a way around difficulties. In this story, solutions seemed to present themselves as soon as a difficulty arrived. In addition, there were constant references to other parts of the story from earlier books, including characters who we were supposed to remember from a quick reference, and not from any descriptive text. A good, but not a great, finish to this well written series with yet another twist on the Arthurian legend.

Dana says

I thought this was the best book of the series. It does a good job of discussing that we all have a "dark" side. We all have to make choices on whether or not to go down the easy path (many times this is just conforming even if we aren't sure it is right) or doing what is hard (many times this is doing what is the human thing to do). I really liked that the story discussed this part of life as I think our hypercritical society forgets that we all have to make this choice and sometimes we make mistakes. The only part that matters is that we keep trying to do the right thing.

Marissa says

Overall, a good conclusion to the series. Because the main characters were on the run from Oakhurst and

preparing for the final showdown, it was a bit more attention-grabbing from the beginning. School's out for an epic battle.... A number of rapid revelations come, and the full retelling of the Arthurian legend that is being used here comes to light, which holds some nice twists. There were a few issues left open-ended, some of which were even called out by the characters at the end. Despite that, it was a quick, enjoyable read.

Furrawn says

Fabulous ending. Epic battle. Legends reincarnate. Good versus evil.

All the answers you had from the first three books are here. In a perfect package. Perfect. Including, sadly, answers to things you hoped would be different.

I hoped Muirin had used an illusion spell in the last book when she was shot.

Spirit, Burke, Loch, and Addie all grow. They change. They become who they are meant to be.

Great story. I'll reread the books again in a few years.

You should read them at least once.

I have heard folks say these books are for teens. What does that even mean? Books are books. If it's a wonderful story, it can be enjoyed no matter what age you are.

Susan Pola Staples says

Mercedes Lackey is one of my favourite authors. I have enjoyed rereading the three previous books in the series.

I did correctly presume who was the reincarnated Guenivere, Spirit; however, I was only partially correct in identifying Arthur. I thought Burke was either he or Lancelot. I totally missed identifying Loch as Lancelot and Addie as Vivienne, The Lady of The Lake.

The villains had identified themselves in Book 3, SACRIFICES.

One of the best things about the book is the role of Guenivere. She determines who is High King. From the previous Book, you knew she was a mage of considerable talent who was capable of leading.

One of Ms. Lackey's gifts is her characterisation of women. They are strong, intelligent and capable. Definitely no wimps.

This quartet feels like a tribute to Marion Zimmer Bradley's MIST OF AVALON (a fav book of mine). Spirit and Addie even mention it in passing.

William Bentrin says

Victories is an excellent wrap up to a good four book series. The authors did an excellent job tying up loose ends and making clear everything that had gone on in the previous three books. I thought the previous books dragged a bit as they focus primarily the insecurities of a bunch teenagers. This book has more action and consequently was a more interesting read.

This book is definitely a young adult book and is marketed as such. That is not to disparage it but a caution that it may be a bit juvenile and if that turns you off, you should be aware of that fact.

Spirit White finally discovers what her magic powers are. She finds out some surprising facts about herself and her friends. Losing a friend provides the pathos of the book making victory a bittersweet success. The kids face their insecurities and tap their inner heroes in battling evil. The King Arthur aspect is finally clear in this final volume.

This was a good series. For my taste, there could have been more action in the first three books but overall it was a good series.

I recommend the book.

Jo Oehrlein says

The only one of this series not set in a boarding school because they left the school, running for their lives, at the end of the prior book.

They meet with Quercus, find important British relics to help them, and discover who they really are (as reincarnates). Then, the battle ensues.

This is definitely not a stand-alone book -- you'd be lost without the prior books in the series. It's also best if you know a good bit about King Arthur legends. It's set in the present and there are lots of contemporary references, so it might seem dated relatively quickly (already the chat room idea seems a bit "quaint").

Ann Cathey says

The culmination of the Shadow Grail saga offers the same attention to detail and subtle humor as the rest of the series in a steady flow with some surprising revelations, well constructed tactics and a not-quite fairy tale YA ending. The series is a good read for young and old alike, with it's intriguing spin on the Arthurian legends coming to an interesting end.

Kristin Taggart says

I don't use star ratings, so please read my review!

(Description nicked from B&N.com.)

“Spirit White and her friends Burke, Loch, and Addie have escaped from Oakhurst Academy. But their freedom has come at a terrible cost—a dear friend sacrificed her own life to save theirs. In the wake of Muirin’s death, they are also forced to deal with the terrifying truth behind the facade of Oakhurst Academy: all of the legends are true.

Queen Guinevere, King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table really had existed. With the magic of Merlin, they were able to imprison their greatest foe, Mordred, before he could plunge the world back into the Dark Ages. But Mordred is now free, in charge of Oakhurst Academy, and determined to finish what he started so long ago.

Pursued by Shadow Knights, the reincarnated remnants of Mordred’s original army, Spirit’s small band undertakes a quest to recover the Four Hallows, objects of immeasurable power. Memories of a past life have begun to surface, one in which Spirit wields a legendary sword. She comes to realize that these memories are the true key to Mordred’s defeat. Can Spirit and her friends manage to recapture the magic of Camelot in time to save their fellow students and prevent the end of the world?”

I’ve been following this series since the beginning, and so I was excited to see that the final book was coming out. There’s always a bit of sadness at finishing a series, because that means that there’s no more story to look forward to; at the same time, there’s a sense of satisfaction at getting to the end of the tale and finding out what happens. In this case, the sadness also had the aspect of disappointment, because this book didn’t have the impact of the ones that came before.

One of the things that I’d liked about this series was how things didn’t come too easily to the characters, especially Spirit. She was always the one with no magic, struggling to outmatch those set against her, using nothing more than her wit and intelligence. Her friends had power, to be sure, but they were all still teenagers, inexperienced and often out of their depth. With the revelation that they were dealing with Mordred and the other Knights of the Round Table, the ante was upped even higher.

Unfortunately, this final novel gave Spirit and her friends far too much power and ability all at once, and thus the final conflict didn’t have much impact. You have to expect that the good guys will take the day eventually, and thus the challenge for the author is to give the journey to that resolution as much tension as possible. This was accomplished in the earlier books, even to the point of killing off one of the major characters. Here, things just come too easy.

I did enjoy the book, for the most part. The strength of the previous books in the series made me predisposed to enjoy this one. I wish it hadn’t felt so much like the authors realized that they had to wrap up the story and did so as expeditiously as possible. To me, it’s telling that this is the shortest book of the four by a good fifty pages or so. On the plus side, this makes the novel a fast, light read that might do the trick for some fans of the series. For me, it wasn’t enough.

Victories doesn’t score a victory with its storytelling. Too much haste, as well as too much power given unearned to its main characters, make this a disappointing end to a series that, overall, I enjoyed.

This review originally appeared on Owlcat Mountain on May 19, 2014.

Natasha says

This was for sure the most put together of the four books in this series. The only part that didn't make much sense was towards the end when Spirit said she'd never been inside The Fortress when she had, doing the dance committee thing in the last book. But whatever.

Want the break down of reincarnation? Ok! So Spirit White is Guenivere, who in this rendition has way more actual power than Arthur and is the true wielder of Excalibur and the only reason Arthur is King is b/c Guenivere decided to marry him. She's also the daughter of the White Mare, which is what gave her all that power. (Another disjointed bit though: The daughter of the White Mare is supposed to be one Queen of Britain, while Morgause is supposed to be the other, and the only reason Mordred fights Arthur is b/c Morgause wants him to be King so she can be Queen of all of Britain somehow? B/c Mordred is her son. Which is really not any more messy than any other Arthurian legend so let's go with it. EXCEPT that the reincarnation of Morgause is like, third/fourth tier bad guy. So???)

Anyway! Burke Hallows is Arthur (Spirit's bf.) Addie Lake is Vivianne, the Lady of the Lake (ruler of Avalon and under no obligation to follow Guenivere or Arthur and she does it just to be nice and a badass.) And Lochlan Galen Spears (who is gay) is Lancelot. Like, the names are so obvious and cliché, but I like clichés like this so there you go.

They spend a good part of this book training outside of Oakhurst in an abandoned missile silo and talk to Merlin who... lives in the internet. They find their Special Weapons (Excalibur, Lancelot's Spear, Arthur's shield?, and the Cauldron of the Lake) and then their reincarnate memories awaken and they know who they are and who each other is. And Spirit's magic powers are the same as Mordred's. They go back and break out the remaining kids from Oakhurst. They retreat and then are attacked, and then go to the non-magical high school and prep for battle

And their whole point is to destroy the oak tree that locked Mordred away originally b/c it will kill his body and w/o his body his soul will also... die? And it'll break whatever immortality spell he cast on himself. They uncover more reincarnate friends to help them fight. And.....

Oh and the Seer from before, the one who disappeared, she's still alive and rejoins them. More people die, but mostly nameless or bad guys so its not too shocking or anything.

They win, and afterwards start to rebuild the town, but of course the school is destroyed so all the students have to separate and they all have like, barely any magic left? And Addie with her heiress fortune is going to rebuild the school and make it the new public school. And Mark the leader of the video game company is being extra philanthropic and repents for his misdeeds.

Everything turns out OK the end. (Except all the friends have to separate and Muirin died and everyone is still orphans.)

Becky says

Meh. Lackey has turned too preachy for me. At 13 she was great but now... not so much. I think I only finished this series out of nostalgia.
