



A Study in Sorcery

Michael Kurland

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In an alternate history in which the Plantagenets still rule in England, France, and the New World, and where the science of magic has displaced the magic of science, Lord Darcy is the official representative of King John IV to investigate murders and other bizarre crimes, and Master Sean O Lochlainn his forensic magician sidekick.

An Azteque prince is sacrificed at the top of an abandoned Azteque pyramid in New England, his heart torn from his chest in a fashion discarded hundreds of years earlier. Unless Darcy and Sean can uncover the how and why of the crime, the fragile peace between the Angevin settlers of New England and the Azteque Empire may soon be broken.

Another first-class authorized continuation of the magical detective series begun by the late Randall Garrett.

A Study in Sorcery Details

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Author : Michael Kurland

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Ada Haynes says

I was looking for books about the Aztecs and found that story.

Also set up in a complete fantasy background, it's gret fun to read. I wish it was a bit longer, though, and that some characters were developped a bit more.

Mike says

Not terrible, but not as good as the original Lord Darcy tales

Jonathan Palfrey says

This is a good crime story, a nice exercise in alternative history, and it's good fun to read.

When I first read Kurland's two Lord Darcy novels, I thought they were quite good but not as good as Randall Garrett's originals (Garrett having been the creator of Lord Darcy and his world). However, after repeated rereading I've decided that Kurland's Lord Darcy is about as good overall as Garrett's. Perhaps Garrett is slightly better at scenario and plot, while Kurland is slightly better at characterization and writing style.

The particular advantages of this book are the touches of humour and the novelty of the North American setting: all other Lord Darcy stories are set in Europe.

The young Lady Irene is rather charming, and it's a pity that we meet her only in this book.

Although it's only a minor criticism, I'm puzzled that Lady Irene and other young ladies of her acquaintance, in their twenties, seem to regard Lord Darcy and Master Sean as interesting eligible bachelors. In this book, we can deduce that both of them are in their mid-fifties, and Master Sean is a rather stout beer drinker. I'm no expert on young ladies, but I wouldn't expect them to take such an interest in men easily old enough to be their fathers; particularly when there's no great discrepancy in wealth or status (Lady Irene is both titled and well paid).

Lord Darcy's age is somewhat disputable. This book and the Garrett story "The muddle of the woad" both imply indirectly that he was born in about 1931, and this book is set in 1985, so he should be about 54. However, Garrett's last story, "The spell of war", is an anomaly, implying that he was ten years older: born in about 1921.

Diane K. says

I really enjoyed this story. I liked finally getting a look at "New England" and learning something of the

culture there. I really, really enjoyed seeing Lord John Quetzal again; he's one of my favorite secondary characters in Randall Garrett's world. I thought the storyline was excellent. I especially liked the subplot with the Angevin legion struggling to bring an Azteque delegation safely to Nova Eboracum when the surrounding native tribes--and the Azteques themselves!--were all spoiling for a good, bloody fight. The spell woven by the young journeyman Magic Officer was nothing less than brilliant under the circumstances. He will no doubt be attaining his Mastership in very short order.

(Spoiler) The one thing that didn't feel right to me was the idea of the villain, a Master Sorcerer, passing himself off as a non-Talent for years and years. I just can't see it. Master Sean once had to pass himself as Lord Darcy's "gentleman's gentleman". A certain priest, a Perceptive, no sooner laid eyes upon him when he recognized him for what he was. The villain could never know when a Perceptive might, by pure chance, happen to walk into his range and give the whole show away. In addition, I've always had the impression in Randall Garrett's works that Sorcerers know their own. It would have been simple enough for Kurland to provide the villain with a henchman sorcerer, kept well in the background until he (or she) was needed.

But apart from that, as I say, the story was great. The creepy mystery of the murders, and the elegantly simple explanation was marvelous. And I liked the request Darcy makes of King John at the end of the book. Very fitting. I was sorry that Kurland wrote no more Darcy stories after this.

Amethyst says

not as brilliant as the original Lord Darcy series but still highly entertaining

Robert Gilson says

Once again Michael Kurland continues Randall Garrett's Lord Darcy stories. He does a great job recreating Garrett's story telling style and adds to the Lord Darcy world some fun new world back ground. I enjoyed this book and wish there were more books to read with these characters but this appears to be the end of the Lord Darcy books.

S.A.M says

Although I enjoyed reading this book, it was not as good as the previous novel by Kurland or the original series by Randall Garrett.

The Setting: I really like how it was set in the New World, Central America, to be specific. I find the continued existence of the Aztecs and other Native American Tribes to be pretty cool, and a logical deviation from reality. However, I felt that the deviations of Azteque and Angevin magic were not fully explained or followed through on. The use of blood magic by the Azteque's was interesting, but the reasoning given for why they could use it felt weak. If it really is a matter of intent, then what truly matters is what the sorcerer believes is 'black magic' and that delves into a realm of moral relativism that has not been seen in the predominately Catholic world of Lord Darcy. I feel that this premise needed more work to make it believable. Excluding the local magic, I found the setting, local customs, and natives to be interesting. And the interactions between western ideas, native ideas and the idea of western superiority were

well written and in accordance with the setting.

The Characters: I liked most of the new characters introduced. Except for Irene (view spoiler) I liked the role Lord John plays. I found him fascinating when he was introduced in *Too Many Magicians* and was glad to see how his character had developed. I also found de Maisvin quite interesting and wish we had a chance to hear more of his flowery formal speech.

The Plot: I enjoyed the multiple layers to the mystery, and although I had a guess as to who the villain was I could not create a logical connection. Of course all the clues were presented, I just did not take note of them until Lord Darcy explained the connection. (view spoiler) I did feel there were some loose ends; why was the temple lacking the aura of evil that it should have held, or why was it so diminished, and was the avoidance spell a conspiracy or a coincidence. These were matters Father Adamsus was supposed to be looking into, but we never hear the results of his inquiries.

On the whole, it was a good entertaining book. And I would definitely recommend it, with the caution that it isn't quite as good as the rest of the series.
