



The Sleeping Beauty

Mercedes Lackey

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Heavy is the head—and the eyelids—of the princess who wears the crown...

In Rosamund's realm, happiness hinges on a few simple beliefs:

For every princess there's a prince.

The king has ultimate power.

Stepmothers should never be trusted.

And bad things come to those who break with Tradition....

But when Rosa is pursued by a murderous huntsman and then captured by dwarves, her beliefs go up in smoke. Determined to escape and save her kingdom from imminent invasion, she agrees to become the guinea pig in one of her stepmother's risky incantations—thus falling into a deep, deep sleep.

When awakened by a touchy-feely stranger, Rosa must choose between Tradition and her future...between a host of eligible princes and a handsome, fair-haired outsider. And learn the difference between being a princess and ruling as a queen.

The moral of the story? Sometimes a princess has to create her own happy endings....

The Sleeping Beauty Details

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Author : Mercedes Lackey

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Genre : Fantasy, Romance, Fairy Tales, Fiction, Magic

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From Reader Review *The Sleeping Beauty* for online ebook

Allison says

I really enjoy the ways that Lackey finds to mash up fairytales and come out with a unique tale that works. I love the idea that fairytales are forced on people's lives by the Tradition and the Fairy Godmothers' job is to harness the extra magic and save people from their less desirable fates by forcing the nicer Traditional paths wherever they can. It lets you laugh at the traditional tales and enjoy the magical wonder of them without simply repeating what's been done before. This series is really humorous high fantasy set in a world where fairytales are a danger to people leading their ordinarily magical lives.

I turn to these books when I need something light and entertaining and that doesn't take itself seriously. As with the previous books in the series, *Sleeping Beauty* was what I needed - humorous, tongue-in-cheek, fluffy, and really quite silly. This might have been one of the sillier ones, in fact. I loved it for that.

It was more of a hodgepodge than the others so far, with an entire magical kingdom full to the brim with Traditional magic. It's not really a *Sleeping Beauty* tale, although there are bits and pieces of it in there. It's a mish-mash full of Heroes, challenges for the hand of a princess, seven dwarves, a huntsman, dragons, curses, unicorns, talking animals... the list goes on. How the Godmother Lily manages it all is a feat indeed.

There is a sweet romance, but it is not really the focus even though the goal is to win the hand of the princess. I saw another reviewer mention that the story focused more on developing a bromance, and I agree. It was more about the friendship between two of the suitors and the scheming of the Godmother than about the princess herself. It's also a romance without any explicit scenes, which I am thankful for since the first book in the series was a bit more detailed than what I usually like to read.

I do have to mention that in spite of all these magical events, it was still a bit slow in places. And although I found the hodgepodge of fairytales amusing, they made it feel choppy at times. Some of the solutions were a little too coincidental, because you can always throw in another part of a fairytale to fill a need that arises. Not that this prevented me from being entertained, but it's not for everyone.

Cecelia says

Mercedes Lackey is a ubiquitous fantasy writer. Chances are if you've ever stepped into the fantasy and science fiction section of the bookstore, you've seen one of her titles. And not only is she prolific, she's incredibly good. There's something for almost every taste. My favorite series (well, one of them) is her Elemental Masters series, which re-imagines fairy tales in an alternative, magic-laden Edwardian England.

In the past several years Lackey has published another fairy-tale-type series, set in a new fantasy universe. These stories combine generous doses of romance and happy endings with imaginative world-building. They include: *The Fairy Godmother*, *One Good Knight*, *Fortune's Fool*, *The Snow Queen* and now *The Sleeping Beauty*.

The hallmarks of the 500 Kingdoms books (as they are called) are humor, inventive plotlines that alter fairy tale stories and take them in new directions, clever heroines, and sweet romances. In my book that combination equals a satisfying read.

After I've read a summary, I often ask myself a couple of questions. What's the deal with this book? Do I need to read the others in the series to 'get' it? What makes it worth my time? Let me try to answer. If you've read the other books in this series, you'll like *The Sleeping Beauty* (but you don't have to read them to understand). If you read fairy tales for adults (or even teens), you'll like it too. If you prefer your stories fairly clean and a touch humorous, you'll also fall for it. In other words, it's what you expect. And that's not a bad thing.

For Lackey's novels in general, this is 'romance lite.' Though she reworks several familiar tales to bring something quirky and new to the table, the result ends up feeling a bit formulaic. Which isn't to say I didn't enjoy it. I did. It's a tribute to how much I expect from the 500 Kingdoms novels, and from Mercedes Lackey – I anticipate first-class entertainment. She so enchanted me with previous stories that I felt a bit let down when I could see just how the story would end after I finished the first twenty pages. I suppose I'm an addict for twists and mysterious endings these days...

I'm a demanding nitwit, I know. After all, I enjoyed the reading and I will still re-read *The Sleeping Beauty* and also eagerly await the next installment in the series (Lackey is that fantastic). What does it boil down to? I heartily recommend this book to anyone with a natural bent towards happy endings. In fact, it qualifies as a PERFECT summer beach read, especially for the fantasy-inclined. There! I've found its niche. And I can't wait to place a finished copy in my beach bag!

Gail says

A funny twist on the traditional fairy tale. Because in the 500 kingdoms, Tradition will try to twist things to follow the fairy tale paths. The heroine princess lives in a kingdom rich enough to have the Tradition in full force, trying to push the lives of everyone in it into a familiar pattern. The hero is from a different tradition, one from Wagnerian opera. He's been avoiding sleeping maidens on biers surrounded by flames as hard as he can. So when it seems they can mix their fairy tales and possibly avoid the tragedies Tradition keeps trying to push them into, they jump at the chance. All the mangled fairy tales are fun, and keep things lively as the hero and heroine find their happy ending.

Rebecca says

Lackey's been getting a lot of mileage out of fairy tales of late. Actually, she's been getting a lot of mileage, period--her publication schedule is pretty dense, and this one shares the minor continuity errors of several of her more recent books. It's not bad enough to be really annoying, but the books clearly have been written in some haste.

This is a very enjoyable featherweight tale with likeable, entertainingly pragmatic characters. In this series, fate in the form of The Tradition pushes people into acting out the stereotypes--princesses are supposed to be lovely but not necessarily very bright, stepmothers are always supposed to be wicked, and the hero and the maiden are supposed end up married, even if one is six years old and the other's gay. The fun is watching the characters--the dragon who would really rather take a nap than rampage, the warrior who knows perfectly well that kissing the sleeping Valkyrie will lead to glory and doom and has no interest in doom, the princess whose ex-shepherdess mother was no fool and taught her daughter how to cook and clean and sew as well as dance--try to wiggle around within the confines of the story to get to one of the endings they would actually

enjoy.

There's not a huge amount of angst or tension here. But there is a lot of fun and some cleverness. The common sense approach to magic is trademark Lackey and still quite enjoyable. A brisk little romp with an appropriately happy ending.

Kit★ says

Another good installment in the 500 Kingdoms series. There's another new Godmother in this one, Lily, and she's actually part Fae, so she's pretty powerful. She's in charge of the kingdom of Eltaria, a kingdom rich in resources, especially gold, silver, and gem mines, all expertly managed by Dwarves. The queen of this kingdom, Celeste, has recently died, leaving the king broken-hearted, as well as their daughter, Rosa. The king is constantly busy keeping enemies away, because everyone wants to take Eltaria's wealth for themselves. The Tradition wants to push Rosa into a tragic path, complete with wicked stepmother, but thankfully Lily is wise, and disguises herself as a dark sorceress and takes the place of any truly wicked woman who would be the stepmother. Rosa doesn't know this, and she thinks 'Queen Sable' is out to get her. Then she gets chased into the forest by an evil Huntsman, thrown from her horse, and captured and enslaved by some bad Dwarves. All in a day's work for our poor princess. Using her mirror-magic, Lily eventually finds her and disguises herself as a kindly old lady to rescue her, which she does by bewitching her into a death-like sleep. So the Dwarves put her on a dais in the woods and leave her there. Just as Lily's about to wake Rosa back up, two princes come into the clearing, fighting for the chance to awaken her with a kiss. Here we have our two heroes, Siegfried and Leopold. Siegfried comes from the North, and his destiny is to awaken a sleeping Shield-Maiden and enact a trail of doom and destruction, a destiny he is trying to avoid at all costs. So he sees a sleeping princess and thinks if he can kiss her, it'll fit into what his path wants, but without the doom. Leopold is a prince who's a second son, not set to inherit, so he needs to make his way in the world. After the princess is safely returned to the palace, they receive news of the king's death, and now all the neighboring kingdoms are waiting with armies on the borders, waiting to come in and conquer. However, Lily comes up with a plan to invite tons of princes, especially ones from the enemy kingdoms, to come to the palace to compete in a bunch of trials and tests for Rosa's hand. With all the princes in residence, no one would dare attack, for fear of invoking some other kingdom's wrath upon themselves. This effectively delays any wars that might have happened. The tests and trials Lily and Rosa think up are pretty amusing. There's a few laugh out loud moments as all the princes' different ways of thinking and acting come out. Of course Siegfried and Leopold are in the main running. But Rosa finds she likes Siggy better than anyone else. There's also a bad prince in the bunch, and he's the one who sent the evil Huntsman. They have some nefarious plans, and it's up to our heroes and Godmother to save the day. The last third of the book had a lot more action than the first part, and it was a rush to see how it would end. There were some good characters in this one, as well as some great animal companions and helpers. I wish I could have the power to understand and speak to animals, that'd be cool... Of course it all ended happily ever after, with interesting ways of tying things up. I'll definitely be getting the next one when it comes out.

Lois Bujold says

Well, that was tolerably amusing. Since I was in the mood for just that, it was a good book-reader match for that day.

I've read three or four in this series -- this one worked best for me so far, largely due to the two male protags. Set in a fairy-tale world where Narrativium (or, as it is dubbed here, The Tradition) rules, and the smart try to resist being sucked into tales that may well not be in their best interests. In this case, two or perhaps three Sleeping Beauty traditions cross and clash, to the distress of the characters, confusion of the Tradition, and entertainment of the readers. I think this would work best for someone apprised of Wagner's *Ring* cycle (not to be confused with Tolkien's) -- a quick trip to Wikipedia beforehand would probably allow the reader to get more of the jokes, without having to sit through hours of opera.

I'm still trying to work out if the Rogue character connects to yet another Sleeping Beauty tale. He does mention at one point that his great-grandfather once owned a quite extraordinary booted cat... My one wish was that his encounter with his Sleeper could have occurred on-stage rather than off, but perhaps the author was up against a word-count limit by then.

I think this book would work just fine as a self-contained or initial series read, if perhaps with slight spoilers for the first in the series where the discovery of the world and its rules is first worked out.

Ta, L.

Erin Reilly-Sanders says

I really loved this series by Mercedes Lackey that plays with the idea of Tradition driving fairytales. While I found the book to eventually be quite funny and an enjoyable read, I had a little trouble getting into it at first. It may not have been helped by my sleepiness, but it seemed a little contrived at the beginning and not as exciting as the book flap made it out to be with more possible paths. Instead, the beginning seems rather abrupt, especially if you don't remember the previous books in the series well, as you expect to recognize some of the characters. The characters are actually entirely new, except for brief interactions, which is okay if that's what you're expecting. On the whole, the lack of introduction to the characters, along with the rest of the book where the tales edge towards trite rather than complex and interesting, seems to beginning to get pretty watered down in comparison to the first book, which was quite excellent. While I will likely keep reading the series because I love fairy tales and they're such fun fast reads, I doubt I'll expect the same quality from this series again.

Got My Book says

Also posted on my blog [Got My Book](#).

This Adult Fantasy, which mixes various fairytales with "The Ring Cycle," is one of Lackey's better 500 Kingdoms novels.

BOOK DETAILS:

The Sleeping Beauty by Mercedes Lackey, read by Gabra Zackman, published by Audible Studios (2013) / Length: 11 hrs 5 min

SERIES INFO:

This is Book #5 of 6 in the "Five Hundred Kingdoms" series. These books can easily be read as standalones.

SUMMARY:

Although I feel that Ms Lackey's newer books lack the narrative tightness & emotional punch of her earlier work, this one is the one I like the most. I enjoy the characters, even the disreputable ones, and find more of the story to be interesting.

Note: it is not necessary to be familiar with "The Ring Cycle" at all. Ms. Lackey does an excellent job of presenting the slightly altered details she has based this on.

CHARACTERS:

There are 3 main protagonists in this story.

Rosamund: Her father is the King and her mother, the late Queen, was once a commoner who got her HEA. Although she is definitely a damsel in distress, she does everything she can to save herself. And although she is strong, I like that at a particularly low moment she lets her self cry and be hysterical. Also that she still needs some help.

Siegfried: Although his background is very similar to that of Wagner's character with the same name (and he is running from a prophecy that he will marry his Valkyrie aunt), he is not the same type of person at all. He is intelligent, honorable, and very likeable. He has an intelligent Bird who keeps him company. Although he used to think that girls were icky, now he thinks that having someone "all his own" would be nice.

Godmother Lilly: She is a true Faerie Godmother (in this world, some Fairy Godmother's are talented & trained human women). She has been watching over the Kingdom for 100s of years. Some FG's take care of multiple kingdoms, but this one comes with enough troubles to keep her busy. She relies heavily on her mirror servant Jimson who is a great side character.

WORLDBUILDING:

This takes place in a world where magic has taken on a power of its own in the form of The Tradition. This is a non-sentient force that seeks to push everyone into typical fairy tale roles regardless of whether it will make them happy or not. There are Fae folk, but they don't have a big presence in this book; there are also mythical creatures such as unicorns; and all the typical fairy tale trappings.

PLOT:

I did feel like it took quite awhile to get to the most interesting parts of the book, and that maybe it should have started a bit later and flashbaked some more. Once all the main characters come together and are known to each other, it really picks up. (Note: this seems to be an issue with many of her newer books, I feel like the main story did start a bit sooner here than in others I've read.)

I wish we had gotten more parts with Rosamund and her future husband interacting together, although I liked what we did get. And there is one section where everyone is having to answer riddles and it jumps back and forth so much that it's hard to tell which answers go with which questions (this may only apply to audio version, I don't know).

Since each of these books is essentially standalone, we get a very satisfactory ending that wraps everything up nicely.

HIGHLIGHTS / CAUTIONS:

- The "waking Sleeping Beauty" scene
- The "get rid of the curses" quest

--Siegfried's courting gift to Rosamund

CONTENT NOTES(?): Leopold is someone who is partial to tumbling any willing woman and liable to "take liberties" if allowed to. / Another couple talks about seducing each other.

I COULD HAVE DONE WITHOUT: A male character is laughed at for being a virgin. / Mild swearing / Non-graphic harm to animals

NARRATION:

Character voices differentiated = Yes / Opposite sex voices acceptable = Yes / Accents = Sounded good to me / Phrasing, Pacing & Pronunciation = Good / Emoting = Good / Speed = listened on 1.25, my usual

I find her voice very soothing, which makes this a great "comfort listen."

Anne Osterlund says

Beware the Tradition! The Tradition is a force which desires to repeat the same classic fairy tales over and over again. Not a great thing if you are a princess who has just turned sixteen, like Rosa, whose mother has died because the Tradition wants her to have an evil stepmother. And on top of that, there is the evil woodsman and, unfortunately, the evil seven dwarves who kidnap and enslave Rosa. All at the very beginning of the story.

Fortunately, there is also Lilly, fairy godmother extraordinaire, capable of thwarting the Tradition by pretending to be an evil stepmother, helping Rosa into a deathlike sleep, and assisting her in waking up.

Except Lilly plans to forego the whole the prince thing.
And the Tradition sends two.

So . . . Rosa may be in a wee bit of trouble.

An engaging fantasy romp. I loved the premise. And Siegfried, the hero trying to avoid doom. And while I didn't feel I was missing anything by reading this book before the other Five Hundred Kingdoms books, I will no doubt start reading the others now.

Anne says

4.5 stars

This was my second book in the **Five Hundred Kingdoms** series, and it didn't disappoint. I thought it was a great blend of fantasy, fairytale, and humor. The characters are more three dimensional than what you normally find in retellings, but the best part is how Lackey keeps the *romance* realistic. I've noticed that the characters in these stories seem to seem to fall in love *after* they get to know each other a bit. *Gasp!* Revolutionary!

P.S. Even though the name of the book indicates it's a retelling of Sleeping Beauty, you also get Snow White mixed in as an added bonus. And possibly others that I failed to pick up on...

Tabitha says

Cover Design: 2/5

Plot: 4/5

Characters: 5/5

Overall Rating: B+

Obtained: Library Book

I'm such a visual person and yes I do judge books by their covers. To start out with, the cover did nothing for me. First off, the woman on the front doesn't even match the description of Rosa. The graphic designer just threw a composite images together and didn't give much thought to it. When some covers are so striking, this one just makes you kind of overlook the book. Don't fall for it! It's a trap.

Sleeping Beauty is a witty romp in a fairy tale world. I've read a couple of Five Hundred Kingdoms but this one has to be the funniest one that I've read. Lackey has created a very tongue in cheek novel ala Shrek. What really makes the book are the characters. The plot looks like it's going to be very generic (and some of it is) but it goes off into these paths that makes the reader raise an eyebrow with surprise. What really makes the novel are the characters and not just the main characters either. The secondary characters are wonderful! Like a gambling charming prince/best friend, a witty bird, a sarcastic but helpful mirror and a unicorn with a lisp. Pick this up, it's such a charming and funny read.

Laura says

In *The Sleeping Beauty*, as with the other Tales of the Five Hundred Kingdoms, there is a force of magic called The Tradition. In other words, the tradition of how fairy tales "should work" tries to make everyday life fit the bill, no matter how unpleasant it may be for those persons involved. Princess Rosamund, whose kingdom is in danger of being invaded, is chased deep into the woods and becomes prisoner of seven dwarves. After being rescued, however, she and Lily (the Fairy Godmother of this kingdom) must fight the Tradition to try and trick it while also protecting their own realm. And the arrival of two handsome young princes seems to complicate the problem... although those two young men might be part of the solution.

Another fantastic work by Mercedes Lackey. She is one of my favourite fantasy authors for a good reason, and this book series in general is a delectable blend of humour, magic, and romance. She blends a series of fairy tales in this romp, including Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, and a few others I am unfamiliar with.

Rose is a strong female character who most definitely grows throughout the story. In fact, so do all the other main characters. They are immensely likeable and incredibly sympathetic. (Pardon the adverbs--I'm too giddy to think of a more concise synonym.) Although it's a bit cheesy, I love how (view spoiler) I love all the quirky uses of magic here. The Trials are excellent and clever, unique enough but also building on fairy tale tropes. Mercedes Lackey knows how to walk the fine line between cheesy and clever, that's for sure!

Mercedes Lackey, may my bookshelf collapse beneath the weight of all your wonderful novels (and those to come)!

The UHQ Nasanta says

Positives: unicorn scenes; some humor; smart, fairly capable heroines; likable heroes; mix of fairy tales and mythology; happy ending for all "good" involved

Negatives: writing style that "tells" through lots and lots of character introspection and shows off how clever everyone is; strong and distinct author's voice which takes me out of the story and makes me hear the author, not the characters

[Note: What I disliked about this book was a matter of personal taste developed over a decade of reading and rereading previous works by Mercedes Lackey. Newcomers to the author or those less discriminating might not find this to be a problem.]

Ashley says

I think I would have really loved this book if someone else had written it.

I've been a fan of Mercedes Lackey's *Tales of the Five Hundred Kingdoms* series since its first book, but with this fifth book I've really got to question whether or not I continue. Like all the books, *The Sleeping Beauty* starts with a collision of fairy tales (in this case, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and The Niebelungenlied) and the introduction of a godmother (Lily) to sort everything out according to The Tradition and make sure everyone gets their happy ending (or, at least, doesn't get the decidedly unhappy ending they're steering towards). Like all the books, *The Sleeping Beauty* can be read independently of the series.

The set-up of the story is quite good. Princess Rosamund's mother has died and her kingdom is at war, leaving her father in danger of marrying an evil stepmother according to the tendencies of the tradition. Godmother Lily steps in to pose as Princess Rosamund's stepmother to prevent this from happening, but that doesn't stop the Tradition from finding another way to harm Rosa. She is kidnapped by an evil huntsman, held captive by vicious dwarves, and only rescued by a sleeping potion Godmother Lily gives her to make her appear dead. At this point, she need only be kissed awake by a prince - but the Tradition won't even go easy on her here. Not only does poor Siegfried - desperate to kiss awake any maiden other than one of his aunts in a ring of fire (or so his tale should go) - stumbles upon the sleeping princess and goes to kiss her, only to have to fight off the smooth-talking rake Leopold. (I'll let you read to find out who actually kisses her.) After Rosa is awakened, the trio plus the Godmother work together to uncover who is behind the evil threatening Rosa's kingdom, and of course Rosa falls in love with one of the two men.

Great plot, but what was the problem? Too much information when we wanted action. Sometimes the characters (particularly) Siegfried would wax on and on about various plans they had to achieve their goal, but when the time came to implement these plans he ended up doing something else. So why waste our time by making us read all of that boring plotting? The biggest example of too much information came at the end, when four new characters appeared literally pages from the end of the book, and Ms. Lackey stopped the narration of the story to describe each of them in detail. Was she just trying to fill up pages?

I was also very dissatisfied with the development of the characters. The characters in the first three of the

Tales of the Five Hundred Kingdoms books were quite well developed, but in this book it seems we never quite get friendly enough with them to like them. Leopold, for example, would have been a wonderful character to elaborate on, but unlike the other four main characters we never got to hear from his point of view, making his motivations pretty vague and two-dimensional.

All said, I wish someone else had written this book. It seems obvious to me that Mercedes Lackey has lost something of her spark after writing 50+ novels, and this great story really deserved more effort.

Jamie says

Shortly after rescuing the princess and finding the two princes, a second storyline seems to start. The first third of the book, you see, was mainly to get the characters and settings introduced, but as long as you understand that this book is a fairy tale retelling that covers the Snow White and Sleeping Beauty plots mashed together with a middle section created by a retelling of common themes and not one story in particular, the book manages to work its way into a more cohesive whole. However, before you reach the end section and see how things come full circle, the book does have a jarring disconnect.

The plot and conflict are driven by an entity called Tradition. This unintelligent, unseen (to most) force is attracted to people who appear to fit the characters in stories. The more a story gets retold, the more interest the Tradition has in seeing it repeated. Fairy Godmothers are in charge of using the Tradition to try and steer the stories it's telling into something more benign. For example, in the first book of this series, *The Fairy Godmother*, Godmother Elena finds a Sleeping Beauty plotline starting up and disguises herself as the witch with the garden to prevent an *actual* evil witch from taking advantage of the situation. The Sleeping Beauty plotline in particular is one of the stories the Godmothers try to prevent, as some versions of the story have the thorn forest littered with the corpses of all the princes who died trying to save Rapunzel before her hero showed up, notwithstanding the implication of leaving a kingdom without the protection of its royal family for 100 years.

"I need you to think as you never have before, and see if the other Godmothers can and will help with this, as well. We are going to need some real trials here. Hard ones, but not fatal ones. Trials that require a lot more than brawn. Honestly-" She paused and rubbed her aching head. "Honestly, this is going to have to be a set of trials that sets Tradition, not just follows it."

(Mercedes Lackey, *The Sleeping Beauty*, p.147-148)

The middle section of the story deals with the above quote. Using trials from actual stories as a guide, Godmother Lily sets up a contest for Rosamund's hand in marriage once their enemies start closing in on their borders. It's a brilliant move, and with other Godmothers using magic to hurry along anyone who wants to participate it guarantees her a palace full of royal hostages, while also giving the women some time to figure out a more permanent solution to their helplessness (the country had been at war for centuries as they've got mines bleeding gold and jewels and are bordered by five greedy neighbors).

The two female characters of the book were a dream. Godmother Lily is crafty, quick-thinking, and good at planning for the future, but she's also so stressed and overtaxed that she has a tendency to collapse the moment she's alone. And Princess Rosamund was clever, sneaky, and eager to learn how to do her job as a ruler to the best of her abilities, as well as being both reasonable and realistic about her future life (she mentions to Lily regarding her future husband that a love match would be nice, but that she'd be happy with a kind man who was good for her kingdom). The two were highly enjoyable to read, especially once the

Wicked Stepmother disguise was removed and the two started working off each other. There's a feminist aspect to it that made me love the book all the more. Not only are the two women strong characters in their own right, but Lackey makes a point of having the villain be so dismissive of women that he entirely misses all sorts of important information.

The male leads were likewise rich in character. Siegfried is a Norse warrior trying to avoid his own 'fairy tale'. His country is one of the unfortunate ones ruled by petty, jealous Gods, and his story is the Norse myth of Andvari's Ring.

Leopold waved his hands in the air to stop him. "Wait, wait, I'm confused here. I thought you said you were supposed to fall in love with the first person you see who is not your aunt...."

"I am. I'm supposed to fall in love with the Shieldmaiden, then I'm supposed to forget the Shieldmaiden and fall in love with the person who's not my aunt and then-" Siegfried let go of the reins to wipe his forehead "-then it gets very complicated and involves all the usual messy things like jealousy and retribution, and unusual things like murder and suicide and the death of gods and the fall of kingdoms and can we just not talk about this anymore?"

(Mercedes Lackey, *The Sleeping Beauty*, p.297)

In the myth, Siegfried is supposed to wake a sleeping shieldmaiden in a ring of fire and get the whole drama kicked off. Trying to avoid this, he instead has been travelling around and being heroic until he figures a way out of his fate once and for all (the Tradition has been taking umbrage at this, and sleeping shieldmaidens in rings of fire tend to pop up in path pretty routinely). When he comes upon a bespelled Princess Rosamund, Siegfried rushed in to 'wake' her in the off chance waking a *different* sleeping maiden might satisfy the Tradition into leaving him alone. It doesn't exactly work, but he's brave, clever, practical, and kind, and a joy to follow through the rest of the story. His friendship with Prince Leopold was a treat, as I hadn't really expected them to get along so well.

On his rush to wake the sleeping princess, he didn't at first realize that he hadn't been the only person to spot her. Also rushing in was Prince Leopold, a middle son who doesn't have much for the Tradition to be interested in but who has become very good at getting wealthy parents to pay him to leave their daughters alone. Despite how that sounds, he's actually very sweet and sneaky, and a perfect foil to the magic-ridden Siegfried, especially since Leopold's not terribly practical and his new friend isn't especially charming. They make good partners.

Overall there was just one thing that confused me, and one thing that disappointed me. The cover image is of characters that don't exist in the book. You would expect the woman to be Princess Rosamund, but the woman is dark-haired and it's a significant point that Rosamund isn't. And the man in the background might be Siegfried, but he's clearly wearing some sort of medieval knight outfit and Siegfried is a Norse warrior, nor does he wear anything that silly-looking anywhere in the book (and it does take the time to describe the clothes he's given once at the palace).

The main disappointment was with the book's total failure to keep to the rule of three. There were multiple tests and contests for the princes to go through, but ignoring that I've really got a problem with the Old Maggie disguise and Siegfried's animal quests. First, the Godmother uses Old Maggie to offer help to Princess Rosamund while she's trapped with the dwarves at the beginning of the book. Next, halfway through the book Princess Rosamund borrows it to warn Siegfried and Prince Leopold of the first test. As important as the rule of three is in fairy tales, you'd expect to see it again near the end, but it never shows up and it had played such an important part thus far that you were expecting to see it. The discrepancy happens again later when Siegfried is helped by animals. A cat warns him of the missing princess; that's one. But the

next to help him is a bear and wolf team he'd rescued from being baited. And third is the same bear and wolf team again. It might have worked so much better if something caused the bear to leave the second section to the wolf alone, instead of having the same pair help twice.

CHARACTERS:

The four main characters were amazing, but the villain was a little obvious. I'll only deduct a half star for him because he was the only character with enough attention on him who could have been the bad guy, but he still put up such a good front that I was second guessing myself before the reveal. And I'm going to remove another half star for the ridiculous romance for Godmother Lily that came out of nowhere. It's not even the relationship I have a problem with, it's that she never showed interest before and suddenly decided she was in love like she'd flipped a switch. At least give her time to consider the idea, for God's sake!

SETTING/WORLD BUILDING:

The setting was well-written and we got to explore outside the castle a bit. It was easy to figure out where everything was in relation to each other. The world building did a good job at explaining and demonstrating the Tradition in everyone's lives, even if there were some bits that were a little heavy-handed. I think in particular of a scene with the two male leads wandering around the forest and happening across what is clearly a witch's abandoned gingerbread house, and the two make a few pointed remarks that I'm not sure were jokes or not, ex. commenting that the former owner must have thrown herself in her own oven for being so sick of living in a place so morbidly cheerful-looking.

PLOT:

The plot had a weird disconnect that I'll have to deduct a star for, especially since it jumps from the queen's death to the princess's wild escape from the huntsman years later with nothing between to warn us that this isn't a Snow White retelling. And I'm going to deduct another half star for the failure to follow the law of three. The animal's were irksome, but the Old Maggie disguise was set up so clearly that not seeing it again was downright painful.

OTHER ASPECTS:

No other book in the series managed to pull off a fight against the Tradition quite as well as this one has. You really got a strong sense of the struggle and stress Godmother Lily was constantly under. From trying to force Rosa into a storyline she didn't quite fit (Snow Snow instead of Sleeping Beauty), scrambling to fix it when the Tradition responds by slapping together plot elements that also don't quite line up (Rosa is found by dwarves who chain her to the stove and treat her as a slave), trying to create a new Traditional path with the contest while still staying within Traditional parameters for the exact trials, and still having it all fall apart and collapse back into the plotline she'd been fighting to avoid this whole time. The stress of the situation all but bleeds off the page.

And even though the verdict is probably already five stars, I'm throwing another one on for seeing the sharing of information as gifts of love. The mother figure teaching her daughter skills to guarantee her independence and personal power. The romantic hero sharing skills for self defence. It just serves to highlight how egotistical and ignorant the villain is about his skills and victims respectfully.

To hell with it! Another half star for Luna the unicorn. I wuve you, too, sweetie.

THE VERDICT?

While I definitely recommend this book, its problems with the plot structuring mean I wouldn't recommend it to anyone just looking for a general read. But if you're into fairy tales and their retellings or just want

something with strong female characters, you're probably really going to like this one.
