



Sword and Sorceress XII

Marion Zimmer Bradley (Editor / Contributor) , Monica (Artist) , Lisa Silverthorne (Contributor) , Vera Nazarian (Contributor) , Laura J. Underwood (Contributor) , Deborah Wheeler (Contributor) , Mercedes Lackey (Contributor) , Elisabeth Waters (Contributor) , more... Diana L. Paxson (Contributor) , Jennifer Roberson (Contributor) , Linda J. Dunn (Contributor) , Syne Mitchell (Contributor) , Stephanie D. Shaver (Contributor) , Deborah Millitello (Contributor) , Cynthia McQuillin (Contributor) , Lynne Armstrong-Jones (Contributor) , Patricia Duffy Novak (Contributor) , Heather Rose Jones (Contributor) , Lisa Deason (Contributor) , Karen Luk (Contributor) , Tom Gallier (Contributor) , John P. Buentello (Contributor) , Carolyn J. Bahr (Contributor) , Valerie Atkinson Gawthrop (Contributor) , Patricia Sayre McCoy (Contributor) , Various ...less

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WOMEN OF POWER

Two sisters, one a mercenary, one a practitioner of earth magic, learn that the irony of love knows no justice...

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Ippino says

Antologia decisamente scadente: su ventidue racconti, ne ho trovati solo una manciata godibili; gli altri mi hanno fatto sbadigliare.

Demone sotto vetro: insipido e raccontato maluccio.

Ti va ancora bene la scarpetta, adesso?: spassoso, molto spassoso. Però il finale arriva inaspettato, proprio quando la storia si fa interessante.

Una lince e un bastardo: la trama non sarebbe neanche da buttare, ma è scritto incredibilmente male.

Stivali di pelle di drago: molto originale ed ironico. Una bella sorpresa.

La verità: breve ma intenso, con finale a sorpresa.

Pelli e piumaggi: un pò confusionario nella prima parte, e frettoloso nel finale. Si rivela comunque originale e abbastanza godibile.

Anche se il mondo è buio: ambientazione carina, avrebbe meritato più pagine.

Hemparius il mercante: scenario stuzzicante, trama non banale.

Chance: bel racconto, più lungo dei precedenti; avrebbe dovuto essere più lungo, per essere migliore.

Baciato dagli Dei: così così. Non sarebbe male, ma la trama scricchiola in un paio di punti.

Una promessa è una promessa: decisamente bello. Ampliato, avrebbe potuto essere un buon romanzo.

L'ombra del suonatore d'arpa: noioso dall'inizio alla fine.

Faccia di pietra, il gigante e il paradosso: una bella sorpresa. Canovaccio classico, ma raccontato in modo gradevole e con una bella sorpresa finale.

Assenzio: corto ed incisivo.

Lama d'argento: noioso, noioso, noioso. E scritto abbastanza male.

Un drago angosciato: sconclusionato ed insignificante, tranne per il modo ironico con cui affronta il tema dell'omosessualità.

Lo spirito della pietra: bel racconto, onirico e d'azione al tempo stesso, incastonato in uno scenario affascinante.

Un giardino glorioso: originale. Ma a chi interessa, se è raccontato male?

Ladro di poteri: corto, niente di eccezionale.

Il sentiero perduto: prevedibile e scontato, dall'inizio alla fine.

Rose d'inverno: comincia bene, si sviluppa altrettanto bene, ma il finale è troppo affrettato.

Ambra: breve e splendido, uno dei migliori racconti di questa antologia.

Barbi Faye (The Book Fae) says

Some powerful women: some sisters, a sorceress, a seeress, and a spell-gifted swords-woman are only some of them in this series of short stories!

Eliška says

Better than S&S XI, but not by a whole lot. A couple really trite stories that I'm surprised made it past MZB, a couple very poignant ones, and a really silly Tarma & Kethry crossover story that I'm not surprised wasn't

ever included anywhere else. There's one that I think I would have liked a lot if it hadn't been done better as a major subplot in *The Oathbound* (*Hemparius the Trader*, Valerie Atkinson Gawthrop). One Bera, no Cynthia.

Worth a reread:

Truth, Lynne Armstrong-Jones

Skins, Heather Rose Jones

Wormwood, Laura J. Underwood

A Dragon in Distress, Mercedes Lackey and Elisabeth Waters

Stone Spirit, Diana L. Paxson

Winter Roses, Patricia Sayre McCoy

Amber, Syne Mitchell

Werner says

Another reliable winner from Bradley's long-running anthology series, with a good mix of genre stalwarts and talented newcomers. For once, I read this volume without interspersing it between other books, and read the stories almost entirely in order. In this case, the really outstanding stories tend to be clustered closer to the back; but most of the earlier ones are also solid, competently-told tales of their type.

The one worthless clunker in the collection, IMO, is Carolyn J. Bahr's "Does the Shoe Fit You Now?" a cynical and predictable re-imagining of the supposed situation some time after the part of the story of Cinderella that we know, from an anti-male, anti-marriage standpoint. It preaches to the choir of women who've married self-centered drunks and given up on the male gender as a result; but like most tracts in the form of "fiction," it doesn't succeed well as either, unless the aim was solely to resonate with that audience. (And news flash: physical work is going to a part of ANY lifestyle, married or single, that involves earning one's keep and contributing to the world.) Nor does it really fit the collection theme: it has no fantasy element apart from the nominal "fairy-tale" connection, Cinderella is neither warrior woman nor sorceress, and stealthily running away from a bad situation without trying to change it (especially when that involves renegeing on a commitment) is not a strong or "empowering" action.

However, the other selections more than make up for that one. 17-year-old (at the time this was published, in 1995) Karen Luk and L. S. Silverthorne contribute good exercises in humorous fantasy with "A Lynx and a Bastard" and "Dragonskin Boots," respectively. Luk's title characters would make series protagonists that I'd enjoy seeing more of. (I can say the same thing for Kaitlyn and Alvyn in Patricia Duffy Novak's "The Lost Path" --and Novak was, at publication time, working on a novel featuring them!) "Though the World Is Darkness" by Lisa Deason pits her protagonist against a challenge more intimidating than fire-breathing dragons or pillaging hordes, and one far more obviously relevant to the real world --loss of eyesight. Heather Rose Jones' "Skins" is a new twist on the shape-shifter theme, and very well done. One of two male authors represented here, John P. Buentello, makes use of the craft of glassblowing in "Demon in Glass" to tell a satisfying tale, though exactly how the magic system works there was a bit murky to me. Mercedes Lackey collaborates with Elisabeth Waters here to produce, in "Dragon in Distress," another well-crafted yarn featuring Tarma and Kethry, whom I first encountered in an earlier volume of this series. (That's also a story with a humorous touch.)

As usual in these volumes, a number of the stories struck me as truly outstanding, with a seriousness of tone

and an evocative power that went straight to my heart. Several of these were by other veteran writers whose work I've also enjoyed in one or both of the earlier volumes in this series that I've read: Diana Paxson, Jennifer Roberson, Deborah Wheeler, Vera Nazarian. Like her earlier "Beauty and His Beast," Nazarian's "The Stone Face, the Giant, and the Paradox" explores the difference between physical appearance and moral worth. (The story here also pushes the limits of language to try to convey mystical experience that doesn't translate well to language, but manages to do it without alienating the reader.) Paxson sets her "Stone Spirit" in a still-pagan Dark Ages Norway, where things like trolls and draugs are real, and people think their lives are ruled by Wyrð (Fate); being of Scandinavian descent myself, that background strikes a chord with me. (Patricia Sayre McCoy, on the other hand, draws as successfully on ancient Chinese culture to create the world of her "Winter Roses.") Wheeler's "Silverblade," besides being a gripping story on its face, makes particularly striking use of symbol and metaphor to say things about challenges, obsessions, and parent-child relationships. One of my favorite stories here, "Garden of Glories" by Roberson, has very little fantasy element at all. The cultural-historical background is one we can't identify in the real world, and one of the two sisters depicted here has a talent for mending things that's more than figuratively magical, as one minor incident shows; but basically this is "just" a story about human relationships (sisterly, filial, romantic, marital), about choices, about being true to our nature, about growing and changing; above all, about caring and love. It could easily have been written as descriptive fiction --very, very good descriptive fiction! Two of our protagonists here (the title characters of "Chance" and "Amber", by Tom Gallier and Syne Mitchell, respectively), are assassins by trade, trained to be good at a morally dark and lethal profession, and whose lives haven't offered them much in the way of other options; but that doesn't mean that either of them are sadistic, nor lacking in a sense of honor or capacity for love. Chance in particular is one lady you won't soon forget, and her story is another of my very favorite ones here --but be warned, it's not a sweet and warm-fuzzy tale, and her path in life isn't an easy one.

My comments haven't touched on all the 22 stories, but hopefully I've touched on enough to convey the flavor of the collection. In many of these selections, the quality of the world-building and character development cries out for expansion into a novel or story cycle. If swords-and-sorcery, or just good storytelling in the short format, is to your taste, then this is a collection well worth your time!

M— says

/review to come

Notable stories include:

"Skins" by Heather Rose Jones | Another in her set of stories about shapeshifters.

"Winter Roses" by Patricia Sayre McCoy | How many died in the search for blue roses?

Knight says

Demon in Glass/ John P. Buentello. Does the Shoe Fit You Now?/ Carolyn J. Bahr. A Lynx and a Bastard/ Karen Luk. Dragonskin Boots/ L.S. Silverthorne. Truth/ Lynne Armstrong-Jones. Skins/ Heather Rose Jones (Skins). Though the World is Darkness/ Lisa Deason. Hemparius the Trader/ Valerie Atkinson Gawthorp. Chance/ Tom Gallier. Touched by the Gods/ Deborah Millitello. Promise to Angel/ Stephanie Shaver. Shadow Harper/ Cynthia McQuillin. The Stone Face,the Giant,and the Paradox/ Vera Nazarian. Wormwood/

Laura J. Underwood. Silverblade/ Deborah Wheeler. A Dragon in Distress/ Mercedes Lackey and Elizabeth Waters (Tarma & Kethry and Birthday Gift). Stone Spirit/ Diana L. Paxson (Bera the Voelva). Garden of Glories/ Jennifer Roberson. Stealing the Power/ Linda J. Dunn. The Lost Path/ Patricia Duffy Novak (Robes). Winter Roses/ Patricia Sayre McCoy. Amber/ Syne Mitchell.

No bad stories! Stories are eerie, some funny. These anthologies are never boring. Some are excellent.

Karen-Leigh says

No gems but readable.
