



Cleopatra's Heir

Gillian Bradshaw

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The might and power of Julius Caesar, the man who conquered the known world. The beauty of Cleopatra, the woman who conquered the conqueror. Together they could have forged an empire whose power had never been seen before. Tragically, it was not meant to be, but what of the son who was born of their passion?

Gillian Bradshaw gives us a possible answer in *Cleopatra's Heir*, a riveting historical novel drawn from meticulous research and a unique historical premise. The young son of Julius Caesar and the fabled Cleopatra, Caesarion was seen by some as the hope of the marriage between Rome and Egypt, by others as the folly of a commander's lust for a wanton foreign schemer. For the new Roman ruler, Octavius, Caesarion is the threat that could topple his dreams of a safe and peaceful Roman Empire.

The brutal truth is that Caesarion could not be allowed to live. But what if he somehow managed to survive the inevitable assassination and went underground to hide his identity? How would he find a way to live when he has always chosen and honor, even though his life has been shadowed by forces greater than anyone should have to cope with?

Caesarion will travel the lands that he thinks he knows so well only to discover that he knew his people not at all. And only after that discovery, when he loses all and is forced to confront his humanity, will Caesarion finally come to know friendship, honesty, and love.

Cleopatra's Heir Details

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From Reader Review Cleopatra's Heir for online ebook

Anne says

The suspense of a thriller and the drama of a coming of age story. This book, I thought would be hard to read as the pages are crammed with words, and it is a bit thick and heavy, but I flew through it. From the first pages it snatches up your attention and holds it ransom until the bittersweet but satisfying end. It is both about a prince surviving his way in a savage time under the rule of an enemy who wants him as dead as his mother and siblings, as well as a young man trying to come into his own. It's also rich with ancient culture, taking certain legendary quirks of both Cesar and Cleopatra and adding them like a delicate but crucial spice on top. A fantastic book, all around.

Melinda says

I'm sure like many others, I was fascinated with Cleopatra and ancient Egypt.

I had finished reading the book and read the author's comments in the end. I didn't appreciate the comments the author had made in regards to Cleopatra. Sure, Cleopatra was controversial and in the eyes of many, she might not have been the best ruler, but she certainly wasn't such an atrocious or completely destructive person as propaganda and her enemies paint her as. Honestly, if she was a man, would people be so harsh to criticise her and her ideas? We may never know, who she truly was but there was no need to treat her so harshly in the book, which you can catch glimpses of that throughout the book whenever Cleopatra was mentioned.

I had always wondered what happened to the children of Cleopatra. This book told of one possibility, had Caesarion managed to survive assassins and betrayals. OK, I'll buy that he may have been epileptic, although I think it was used way too many times in the book to make us sympathize with them more and maybe forgive him for certain actions. For a while, he acted like the spoiled and arrogant child king that he likely would have been. I did enjoy how he learned respect and humility while in the debt and care of Ani and his family.

The whole interview (or interrogation) Caesarion had with Octavian seemed to stretch the imagination a little too much, given everything Octavian did to ensure that people question Caesarion's paternity and no male heirs of his enemies remained unscathed. (view spoiler).

Also, to just waltz right into Alexandria completely unnoticed during Roman occupation and with Caesarion's statues everywhere...well how come no one else recognized Caesarion? It seems highly likely that he would have been recognized sooner rather than later and possibly by people who would be more than willing to turn him in for money or to be on the good graces of the Romans.

Ozymandias says

Plot: 8 (mostly engaging at all points)

Characters: 9 (simplistic if enjoyable archetypes)

Accuracy: 9 (simplifies a complex situation but generally thorough)

So what if Caesar and Cleopatra's son survived? That's the big question posed in this novel. It's not *precisely* an alternate history since the basic idea is that nobody knows about it, but it does make the events surrounding the Roman conquest take on a bit of a different flavor.

But don't let that fool you into thinking this is going to be a dramatic political thriller. The entire premise is basically an excuse to give us a *Captains Courageous* storyline set in newly Roman Egypt. Caesarion's basically a spoilt little brat, endlessly going on about his destiny and greatness. Naturally, he's recovered (from a funeral pyre rather than the sea) by a no nonsense merchant who then teaches him the value of hard work and compassion and leaving him having to choose his own destiny.

None of this is meant to mock the book too hard. *Captains Courageous* is a good novel, and one that can be adapted easily to many new circumstances. I particularly enjoyed Charles Sheffield's *Billion Dollar Boy*, which is the same thing in space. As it stands, the story is a good one and it builds its scenarios well. For example, the problems that ensue when Rome seizes administration of Egypt naturally pose difficulties for our hero. Being a known figure helps as well. In addition to coming to terms with being a forgotten and unwanted figure, Arion has to figure out a new position for himself in this Roman-dominated world. I enjoyed both Arion's internal journey, from prince to merchant lord, and his physical one, to Alexandria and a new life. In addition to his emotional hardships, Arion's been given a physical one as well in the form of uncontrollable seizures that strike him sporadically (and actually saved his life).

In addition to (and really more intriguing than) the high level intrigues are the day-to-day existence of Egyptian traders. Arion's journey sees him traveling alongside an upstart Egyptian trying to cut his way into a Greek-dominated market. Arion, with his knowledge of high class Greek culture and Roman society, is ideally placed to assist them in getting their business off the ground. So we get to see a lot of what life was like during the administrative changeover, as the Greeks of Egypt came to terms with the fact that their independence was gone and nobody knew quite what the Romans would demand or expect. A perfect time for a new man to strike it rich, but also a dangerous and shifting one.

Nikki says

Bradshaw always writes strong historical fiction that reminds me a little bit of Rosemary Sutcliff's work, and *Cleopatra's Heir* is no exception. She takes the little that is known about Cleopatra's son, Caesarion, and plays with it — what if he survives? What if he really is Caesar's son? And if he is, what if he's also epileptic, as Julius Caesar was known to be? She writes about genuine medical treatments of epilepsy, and the way people generally saw it. Some of her characters are perhaps a little too good to be true in their understanding of it, and especially in how well they deal with Caesarion's arrogance... but people like that do exist, and without that family, the story wouldn't be nearly so satisfying.

It's an interesting what-if, and it's also an absorbing story. It explores what it might be like to be Cleopatra's son, and what it might be like to survive the fall of your dynasty. And it explores what it might be like to go from being Caesar's son to being nobody, to having to rely on your own wits and knowledge for once. Of course, for the story to be interesting, it's no surprise that Caesarion has those skills and learns to use them, but it's still a satisfying arc.

I'm not sure I'm convinced by the Octavian we see here. He was perfectly capable of being ruthless, and I

don't think he'd have let sentiment get in his way. Even if he pitied someone, my impression is that he wouldn't have taken a risk on them being faithful to a promise made when killing them would be so much safer.

Still. That wouldn't be as satisfying for an ending, and Bradshaw definitely knows how to balance faithfulness to history and historical personages, and an entertaining story.

Reviewed for The Bibliophilian.

Deborah Pickstone says

An interesting look at what might have been had Caeserion lived. He's a historical character it is hard not to have hope for a miracle for him - the only son of Caesar and Cleopatra. It did need some willing suspension of disbelief but Ms Bradshaw is such a good writer that that suspension was given oh, so willingly! The hardest part to swallow was Octavian being merciful. But we all have our good points....maybe even he did!

Brook Allen says

This book is exceptionally well-researched, delving into alternative history. What COULD have happened to Caeserion, had he survived his murder by Octavian. For those with a hunger for late 1st Cent. BC subjects, this is a perfect fit.

Brian says

The premise of Gillian Bradshaw's novel is a simple but powerful one. Caeserion, Julius Caesar's illegitimate son with Cleopatra, was assassinated on the orders of Octavian after the defeat of Marc Antony and Cleopatra. In Bradshaw's story, however, he manages to escape the assassination attempt and struggles to create a new life for himself amid the ruins of his mother's kingdom. Reduced overnight from prince to hunted fugitive, he is forced to depend upon the kindness of people whom he would previously have despised.

What makes Bradshaw stand out as an author of fiction set in the ancient world is that rather than focusing on battles and the brutal mechanisms of conquest that so many other authors of this period are fixated upon, she writes about the relationships between individuals, the cultural pressures they face, the accommodations they are obliged to make with political, religious and economic realities, and their attempts to find a place for themselves within their society. As a result, despite living under very different circumstances from us, her characters are immediately recognisable. The reader is drawn into the narrative as he or she would be drawn into a novel set in the contemporary world.

Engaging, sympathetic and vividly imagined, Cleopatra's Heir is a hugely enjoyable read and undoubtedly one of her best novels.

Keith Currie says

What I like most about Gillian Bradshaw's novels is that she writes excellent stories which are realistically grounded in their historical contexts - no difference with this one, even though she posits a central plot device which is historically untrue - the survival of Caesarion, son of Cleopatra and Julius Caesar, after an attempted killing on the orders of Octavian, Caesar's heir and enemy of Cleopatra.

Bradshaw has a lot of fun with this idea and with Caesarion - brought up to be king with all the privilege that involves, but now thrown upon his own wits and a low-born but decent Egyptian family who help him. He must throw off all his prejudices against the common people and begin to appreciate their inherent goodness, as does Octavian himself at a late stage in the book.

There are some terrific scenes in this novel: Caesarion waking on his own funeral pyre and walking away from it; his discussion on the merits of Greek and Latin poetry with the cultured Roman general Gallus, friend of Vergil; his haughty dismissal of Aristodemus, Ani's Greek rival; his reconciliation with Rhodon, his betrayer and supposed killer; his constant battle with epilepsy; his growing love for the family of Ani, his saviour, and especially for his daughter, Melanthe.

One suspects Caesarion cannot survive, especially when he is arrested and brought before his 'second-cousin', the emperor Octavian. These scenes are among the most moving in the book and work through to a very satisfying conclusion.

JulianaW says

R(rated by my system)

Rachel says

I read this book for the second time recently, recollecting my joy in Gillian Bradshaw's style, and her choices of subject matter, but not the specifics of what I liked and disliked. In truth, were were about equal portions of each.

The premise of the book is that Caesarion, the (alleged) son of Cleopatra VII and Julius Caesar, survived the attempt on his life by Octavian/Agustus Caesar. I love alternate history, I love this era, and I love Caesarion, so the premise itself is really enough to endear the book to me. And, as is normal for her, Gillian Bradshaw, fills the book with lovely historical details that leave me comfortable and content in the world she creates - I did mention that I love this era, didn't I?

Additionally, Bradshaw has one tiny bit of characterization that I love, and had forgotten till I went to reread: she gives Caesarion epilepsy. This is quite genius of her, as it's a well known fact that Julius Caesar had epilepsy, and characterizing Caesarion as having it as well both takes a definitive stance on the (in my opinion, ridiculous) controversy over his parentage, and gives Bradshaw a starting place from which to build her character - a good thing when you have a historical figure about which so little is known.

However, despite all this, I still finished the book feeling vaguely dissatisfied. First of all, *Cleopatra's Heir* seemed to be written for a younger audience than most of Bradshaw's books, and she occasionally took some of the shortcuts common to inexperienced authors of young adult fiction, giving us only vaguely sketched characters and relationships, especially in the sense that many of the characters seemed to have only a vague hint of personality other than the way they interacted with Caesarion. And the plot/character arc of arrogant Caesarion learning to respect 'the common people' and accept living as a normal person rather than a prince, while an interesting one, sometimes felt as though it was slipping into irritatingly cliched patterns.

The ending also felt incredibly anti-climactic to me, largely because Bradshaw's portrayal of Octavian just seemed...confusing. She seemed to be avoiding taking a deliberate stance on how she wanted to portray him, and so he merely ended up having far less personality than the amount necessary to sustain a character that pivotal in the protagonist's life. I could deal with her unapologetically negative portrayal of Cleopatra VII, and with odd fact that, while Caesarion constantly thought and worried about his youngest brother Ptolemy Philadelphos, the twins Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene were mentioned, at most, half a dozen times and completely in passing. But the lack of any distinct portrayal of Octavian meant that the story lost a lot for me.

It's definitely still worth reading, though, if you have a particular liking for the era or are already fond of Gillian Bradshaw's writing. There's plenty that's good about this book, but there are a number of things about it that will irritate a good many readers.

Natalie says

This book is on my top-ten historical fiction books, what number it is exactly, I cannot say. I have never been able to pick out a Number One, but this one could be it.? I have always loved Ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt, and Cleopatra's Heir blends all three cultures beautifully. I have read it three times since I first discovered it.

Caesarion, son of Cleopatra and Julius Caesar, was supposed to die. History says that he was killed, betrayed, but what if he survived? What if, somehow, he escaped? Wounded, wracked by epileptic seizures, he stumbled away from his own funeral pyre, stumbling as far as he could before collapsing on the road. The merchant Ani, a pious Egyptian, came across this wounded boy in the desert and took him in, caring for his wounds with absolutely no idea what he was getting himself into.

Caesarion is a proud, arrogant, determined and utterly impractical person who is portrayed in a completely believable fashion. One would think that such a person would be no fun to be around, but I found myself hoping as the story went along that he would somehow survive and find a new life.

<http://liedermadchen.blogspot.com/201...>

Marybeth says

Number one way to my heart is to write a novel about Cleopatra and/or her children. Even though this story was fairly ""predictable"" (does anyone write speculative fic about someone who died and then doesn't have

them live at the end?) I still really enjoyed it because it was still suspenseful (not the right word 100%) and got me at least to turn the pages. I thought characterization was pretty good: while at times I was all "Christ Caesarion get a grip" I think it worked in the favor of the novel and went in line with how Bradshaw described his upbringing. I also really liked that the novel didn't end 100% settled and happy because again I think it made him more believable. If he had gone through the last few chapters all totally content with his choices I think it would have been cheap. So yes, I really liked this book. Definitely 4.5 and maybe 5 for the novelty of being a novel about Caesarion.

As an aside one of the more interesting things for me about this book was the author's views about Cleopatra. I really liked how different characters in the book hold these different views too though I am not 100% that I agree with the authors conclusions in the afterword (I probably do about 90% but I'm still going to hold out because I am biased? Who knows.)

Nikki says

This book was bordering on a 1 or 2 star rating, but then I read the author's blurb at the back of the book. This blurb dropped that rating from maybe a 2 to definitely a 1 or lower. During the book I felt like Bradshaw was having her characters parrot her opinions about key players in history, such as Cleopatra, Marc Antony and Julius Caesar. The blurb in the back confirmed that this was in fact the case.

Bradshaw is so clearly biased against Cleopatra. I adore Cleopatra, but I do understand her flaws. But Bradshaw seems to think Cleopatra was one of the worst beings to walk on this earth. To quote Bradshaw, "Cleopatra was a nasty piece of work." Seriously? She even goes as far as to say that she made Caesarion an epileptic in order to make him a "sympathetic" character because he "wouldn't have been much better" than his mother. To top it off, Bradshaw seems to have actually perhaps liked Octavian (Augustus) as she talks of his reign as having "clemency and humanity". Meanwhile Cleopatra is the lowest of the low, including her son, and Antony was a drunkard. How can an author write decent historical fiction when she is so blinded by her own dislike towards the players?

While these opinions would not necessary make for a poor novel, the novel was poor anyway. The characters are not believable, they do not come alive. Adding to that is the fact that nearly nothing happens in more than half the novel. Caesarion spends it traveling with a merchant and his family and the book details everyday life. Could we have perhaps chosen a more interesting route Bradshaw?

Then there is the problem with characters summarizing events to each other in great detail. Events that we as readers were all privy to so these long-winded speeches to others in the book acts as random summaries of events that are absolutely unnecessary. Then a scene near the end is completely impractical, the merchant Ani speaks at length with Octavian about Caesarion's future life or death. Seriously? Octavian is having a one on one conversation with a nobody Egyptian peasant about one of the people who would be a great danger to his standing? I don't think so!

And as to be expected by Bradshaw, there is mention after mention about the terrible things Cleopatra did or did not do and how she was in love with a drunkard. This novel was a joke, I wish another author had written a "what if" story about Caesarion.

Note Bradshaw does not include her sources so it makes me wonder if she was using many materials which contained Roman propaganda from the time period. The Romans to say the least did not like

Cleopatra and spread many terrible rumors about her.

Marcia says

I really enjoyed seeing the growth of the character Caesarion in this book. This is really not so much about the historical character Caesarion as about what it would be like for a person to have been in his exalted position and then have everything fall apart. A good what-if book.

Aldo Giusti says

Un libro entretenido, facil de leer, pero con poca precisión histórica. No pasa de ser una novelita para el verano, con pocos personajes un buen argumento y una narracion agil y entretenida. Pero sinceramente podriamos cambiar la epoca y poner el heredero de Rockefeller y la historia se podria mantener igual. En general busco libros y novelas de corte historico porque me gusta sumergirme en otras epocas y aprender costumbres, vestimentas, modos, etc que no te enseñan en el colegio. Desde ese punto de vista este libro fue una decepción, pero me entretuvo bastante los dos o tres dias que me tomo leerlo. En resumen un buen libro para llevar a la playa mientras tomas sol, no acapara tu cerebro y permite leerlo con distracciones.
