



An Embarrassment of Riches

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro

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More than two decades strong, the Saint-Germain cycle is one of the most compelling works of dark fantasy and horror of our age. Historically accurate, often involving key events or figures from throughout world history, these deeply emotional novels have a devoted readership. Each novel is written as a stand-alone and they are not chronologically consecutive, so readers may enter the saga with any book and move backward or forward in time as they choose, from Pharaonic Egypt to Paris in the 1700s, from the fall of the Roman Empire to World War II Europe.

In *An Embarrassment of Riches*, the vampire Count finds himself a virtual prisoner in the Court of Kunigunde in Bohemia in the 1200s. Rakoczy Ferncsi, as Saint-Germain is known, passes his days making jewels to delight Queen Kunigunde and trying not to become involved in the Court's intrigues. In this, the vampire fails. Handsome, apparently wealthy, and obviously unmarried, he soon finds himself being sexually blackmailed by Rozsa, an ambitious lady-in-waiting. If he does not satisfy her, she will denounce him to the priests and he'll be burned at the stake, resulting in his True Death. Despite his care, the vampire makes more than one enemy at the Bohemian Court, and by the end of *An Embarrassment of Riches*, the Count can see only one road to freedom...through death.

An Embarrassment of Riches Details

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From Reader Review An Embarrassment of Riches for online ebook

Jimyanni says

Twenty-ninth in the Saint Germain series, twenty-fourth if you don't count the novels that center around Atta Olivia Clemens and Madeline de Montalia, Saint-Germain's two long-term lovers and fellow-vampires.

The Saint-Germain series is a series of "historical romances" set at various different times, in various different settings, featuring a main character who is functionally immortal. He is officially a vampire, although if you prefer your vampires to be traditionally super-powered, you may find this series somewhat disappointing; other than his longevity and a bit more strength, speed, and durability than a normal human would have, there is very little to distinguish Saint-Germain from a fabulously wealthy, urbane, elegant, handsome and educated man. Also, there is nothing of the anti-hero about him; by the standards of most fictional vampires, he is practically a boy scout. He is most definitely a traditional, clear-cut hero, unless you object to your heroes having sex lives.

This is one of the stronger offerings in the series; there isn't much action in it, as has been true in many of the last dozen or so of the novels, unlike the early offerings that basically involved Saint Germain being a James Bond style action-romantic hero. But the characterizations in it are interesting, and it addresses an issue that had bothered me in earlier books; we have often seen Saint Germain refuse a lover because she was "too young", in spite of the fact that in any century prior to the twentieth, she would have been considered a perfectly beddable age. This struck me as odd and unreasonable, since there is no reason for Saint Germain to have 20th century reactions to age of consent 500 years or more before such attitudes would develop. In this book, he takes one 15-year-old lover, and refuses another because she is "just a child", and when questioned, explains that it is basically a matter of a subjective judgment as to the relative maturity of the individual. This is an explanation that works for me.

This book is set in the mid-thirteenth century in Bohemia, and the historical research that creates the setting for the story is, as in all of the books in this series, marvellous. And while there are a few sloppy proofreading mistakes to be found, more than I care for, there are far fewer of them than there have been in some of the books in the series. This is fairly weak as a four-star rating, but too good to be reduced to three stars. Call it three point seven stars.

Old Renton Book Exchange says

I really like Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, I just wish she could think of a new way to end her Saint Germain novels other than the Comte and Roger are in peril, the Comte then fakes his own death and all is well, the end.

Stephanie says

In all fairness, I had no idea this book is #24 in a series - perhaps if I had read from #1, I may have enjoyed the book more - as it was, while vividly researched and chock full of fine detail, I found it extremely difficult to stay with it - the storyline seems to move extremely slowly - I've read close to a third of the book and don't seem to have gotten anywhere with it. I plan to read on a bit more though at this point, it is highly likely that

this one will be returned to the library unfinished.

Anita says

I confess, I knew little to nothing of medieval Bohemia. On a map, I could have pointed you to the general location of it's whereabouts, but that's about it. Not only does Chelsea Quinn Yarbro provide us with an interesting story of our beloved Count, she also presents her readers an historical travel log.

In the novel, "An Embarrassment of Riches", King Bela of Hungry, holds the fiefdom of Saint-Germain hostage in order to guaranty that Rakoczy Ferancsi does not make alliances with his enemies. Under orders, the Count is exiled to the Court of Kunigunde of Bohemia, King Bela's granddaughter. Using his skills as a alchemist, he has been instructed to provide jewels to the Queen and her family for their enjoyment. Though his cell is the beautiful Palace Court, it is no home; Saint-German remains very much an outsider and a political prisoner.

In 1269, Bohemia is a wealthy country due to it's natural resources of precious metals. As in most cases when a medieval King finds his coffers full, he looks to build a large military. Konig Otaker is no different and soon his impressive army is on the march; depleting the Palace Court of eligible and entertaining men to distract the ladies of the Queen's household. With looks, manners and wealth, the Count soon has their attention.

In one of her interviews, CQ Yarbro, tells us that the story of Saint-Germain is not just centered on him, but is also a story about the women in his life. In this novel, our Count's cup runneth over and that attention he attracts comes with great personal peril. There are four women in this story that have a strong impact on his life; three Court ladies that seek a sexual liaison and the Queen herself (who's personal story I find compelling). It would be easy to judge these women, by today's standards, as frivolous, shallow and self-indulgent. And that is true to some extent, but their personality and life were shaped by the upper-class, gilded cage constructed by culture and church. The only one with any real power was the Queen, but even she had to bow to others (the men in her family and church) in making the important decisions and even deciding her own future. It took a great deal of courage for her to stand up to the Bishop in defending her ladies from examination from the church.

Of the three court ladies Rozsa of Borsod, I find the least sympathetic. She took personal delight in controlling Saint-Germain through the threat of blackmail, first for sexual pleasure and later for financial gain. The Count summed it up well on page 111, "He was aware of her arousal, and her satisfaction, but he knew beyond all question that she did not want to include him in her fulfillment." I did find myself questioning why Saint-Germain continued to take her blood after the first encounter when he found the taste "flat, and he knew it would provide little nourishment, for there had been no real intimacy." As the story unfolds, it finds him worried that their contact would soon reach that magical number of six, when she could become a vampire upon her death. On page 128, he speaks to Hruther (Roger) about his concerns, "..., I have no wish to bring a woman like Roszsa of Borsod into my life, but if she insists"

Imbolya of Hevees, the second lady to seek out the attentions of Saint-Germain, starts as did Rozsa, by using threats in order to force him to become her lover. Yet, she later backs off and merely treats the relationship as a rebellious adventure (before her family arranges a loveless marriage where she fears she will disappear). The Count is trouble by his attraction for Imbolya and tends to make excuses for her behavior, blaming it on youth. Personally, I believe he was too kind because both she and Rozsa admit that the worst that could

happen to them, if discovered, is their being forced into a nunnery. But death would be a certainty for, Saint-Germain. Her lack of concern for the Count's well being was alarming. On page 182, Imbolya tells Saint-Germain, "See?" she persisted. "that's why I want you. You think of me before you think of yourself."

The last of the three ladies is Iliska of Szousa. I'm not sure of her age, but guess around fifteen because her family were looking for a suitable husband for her. In many ways she reminds me of Jenfra, as a child, in the book "Blood Rose". Iliska is strong willed to the point of being obnoxious and no amount of discouragement from Saint-Germain seems to stop her from a head long pursuit of him. Her brother takes matters into his own hands and hires assassins to kill the Count. Fortunately, drowning a non-breathing vampire is not easy.

In this story I found the Count to be more affable than in recent memory. It warmed me to read of his insecurities about what to wear and how to entertain a female visitor. After three thousand years of being undead he still has much of the same vulnerabilities as we do. It makes him more human and I like that in an all-but-immortal hero.

Best quote: Roger, " You've been dangerous to know for the twelve hundred years I have known you."
page 128

And of course: Rakoczy, "I do not drink wine". Page 50

Anita

Nicki Markus says

It is no secret that I am a huge fan of Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's historical vampire series. In fact, if I could pick an author I'd most like to be, she would be high up the list if not the first choice.

This latest offering in the Saint Germain series more than lives up to my high expectations. Once more the Comte must carefully weave his way through court intrigues and plots, avoiding exposure of his true nature. There was no 'big romance' with one particular woman in this story unlike some of the others, but I liked how the different personalities of the ladies-in-waiting were shown and how the grip of the church affected their behaviour.

As always, the attention to historical detail is sublime and really draws you into the world of the story. One of the things I most admire about Yarbro's writing is the amount of research she must put in to recreate the various times and places in the series.

Saint Germain himself is as dashing and alluring as ever and he is a character I doubt I will ever grow tired of following.

This series of books will be treasured by readers who like their vampire romances to have more depth and less teenage angst. If you enjoy paranormal, literary fiction and historical fiction, or are looking for vampire books that do not follow the usual clichés, then I can highly recommend the writings of Chelsea Quinn Yarbro.

All Things Urban Fantasy says

A meticulous novel, **AN EMBARRASSMENT OF RICHES** brought to mind an elaborate version of **THE HISTORIAN**, told from the vampire's perspective. As much a historical novel as anything else, the supernatural elements of the story were as realistically imagined as any other aspect of daily life. To further add to the feeling of reading primary source material, Yarbro intermixes letters between the chapters, a device that made me feel as threatened and engaged as any of the main characters trying to unwind the political and religious intrigues around them.

Despite the many books that have come before **RICHES** in this series, Saint-Germain's perspective is easily accessible to a new reader. I had no difficulty feeling involved, perhaps because Saint-Germain is as much as an outsider in his surroundings as I myself was.

And as pivotal as Saint-Germain's perspective was to maintaining my place in the story, I believe that is also why the emotion that dominated my mood when I finished this book was "melancholy". The realities of daily life in court are grim, made even more so by the machinations of the Church. All of the women in **RICHES**, other than Saint-Germain's epistolary vampire companion Olivia, were stunted in some way by the political and religious realities of their lives. I thought it was fascinating how Saint-Germain responded to threats of violence and rape, but his mute reaction to exploitation was as sad as these women's inability to trust, love, or find physical satisfaction in any relationship that wasn't a power struggle.

While this particular snapshot of Saint-Germain's life was both fascinating and sad, I still felt like there were hints of happier times both ahead and in his past. It was the sadness in this book that knocked my rating for **RICHES** from four bats down to three (as not everyone will enjoy the tension and somber tone), but I will definitely come back to this series for more fascinating history and perhaps a happier Saint-Germain.

Sexual Content: References to oral sex and non-consensual sex.

Kathy says

The Comes (Count) of Sant Germain is a complex man, not surprising considering that he has "lived" for 3200 yrs. And he lives under the complex pressures of feudal Bohemia while trying to not to reveal that he is a vampire. I will never read a vampire book the same way again. Amazingly vivid and unusual setting: 13th century Bohemia

Veerle says

An Embarrassment of Riches

This 24th episode in the life of Saint-Germain, Rakoczy Ferancsi, Comes Santu-Germaniu in this book, takes place around 1270 at the court of Queen Kunegonda of Bohemia. At that time, Bohemia was a very rich country. And the count is moving through Kunegonda's court with his usual grace and elegance, and so wealthy that his wealth is an embarrassment to the riches of the court.

But for the Comes, the bohemian court is not a pleasant place to be. He is very restricted in his movements,

being held as a kind of hostage to the welfare of his fief, his estate in his dear Carpathian Mountains! The Comes is trapped between two kings, between the scrutiny of the Church and the Council, between the attention of the women in the court. They want his wealth, his land, his title, the pleasure he can provide them, but they do not want him, for himself. That is for the Comes a very unsatisfying way of making love. At the end there is no way out for him, only through death, and although I read it in the book description, it comes as a surprise!

There are many strange words and names in this book, but when you get accustomed , they do add to the authenticity of the historical setting of medieval Prague. And the rats are everywhere...

As always this is not really a vampire novel, but a real Saint-Germain novel, in my opinion a very satisfying one. There is a constant tension in the air of suspicion, betrayal and danger.

I liked this book, but I always like to read about Saint-Germain. The historical setting is great, the characters are very real, and I find Rosza one of the most unpleasant female characters of all the books!

Julia says

A meticulous novel, this book brought to mind an elaborate version of THE HISTORIAN. As much a historical novel as anything else, the supernatural elements of the story were as realistically imagined as any other aspect of daily life. The letters intermixed with detailed "present events" created a compelling atmosphere, and I felt as threatened and engaged as any of the main characters trying to unwind the political and religious dangers around them.

The ultimate feeling upon completion was one of melancholy, the realities of daily life under the fear of the Church are grim. All of the women in this book, other than Saint-Germaine's epistolary companion Olivia, were stunted in some way by the political and religious realities of their lives. I thought it was fascinating how Saint-Germaine responded to threats of violence and rape, but his mute reaction to exploitation was as sad as these women's inability to trust, love, or find physical satisfaction in any relationship that wasn't a power struggle.

As many books that have come before (and presumably will follow), Saint-Germaine's perspective is easily accessible. This is the first of Yarbro's books that I've read, and I had no difficulty feeling involved. This may be because Saint-Germaine is as much as an outsider as I myself was.

Full review at All Things Urban Fantasy.

Diane K. says

An excellent installment of the series, better than some, not so good as others, but always enjoyable. I always love the historic backgrounds, including the meticulously detailed clothing, which says so much about history and culture.

I was rather startled to find Saint-Germain so hedged in on all sides by threats. Unlike most of the books in the series, Saint-Germain had been spending a deal of time on his native turf, his "fief", and had the misfortune to be squeezed between a power play between the king of Hungary and his son.

Another unusual threat came from one of the waiting-women of the Queen of Bohemia, who forced Saint-

Germain to become her lover under the threat of being denounced as a rapist to the authorities, which would have led to his True Death in extremely horrible fashion. This, unfortunately, led to Saint-Germain appearing to be...somewhat stupid. Not because he allowed himself to be extorted; he really didn't have much choice in the matter. However, at one point he expresses concern because they have almost had enough "encounters" to ensure her becoming a vampire after death, which he doesn't want to have happen. It doesn't seem to occur to Saint-Germain (or Yarbro) that, given the nature of his "encounters" he could very easily satisfy the lady's desires without gratifying his own; there's no law that says he HAS to drink her blood if he makes love to her.

Another irritating point was when an attempt was made to destroy Saint-Germain's house. He is left convinced that it was a deliberate attempt...and that's where it's left. No explanation for why anyone would want to destroy his house; it would just lead to the inconvenience of having to find new quarters.

I did enjoy all the details of Saint-Germain working to put his new house in order, and his "eccentricities" developed over centuries, such as having the floor rushes replaced frequently, installing cats on the grounds, and treating his well water to prevent illnesses. Everyone thinks he's strange for doing so, yet they have to admit that his house is freer of vermin than most. (Even in the palace they're troubled with mice and rats running openly around the place!)

I found myself wondering all through the book just how Saint-Germain was going to extricate himself from his difficulties, the more so as I got nearer and nearer the end, with his problems multiplying. The end came as quite a shock, but I could see how he would instantly grasp the possibilities. It surprised me that his bondsman also instantly grasped the situation and took immediate steps, without having to confer with Saint Germain first. The ending was a bit disappointing because I had hoped to have at least a little follow-up regarding various characters. It's just left with Saint-Germain moving on, as usual (and, as usual, to Olivia's annoyance.)

Chris says

Yarbro's Saint-Germain series is the longest running vampire series today. The Count is used, in part, to explore various historical periods and places. The books have romance, action, and horror. Yarbro is a great writer, and unlike some writers I could mention, she does her research. The Count has a huge following consisting of men and women, and I am proud to count myself as one of thier number. This addition finds the Count in the Bohemian court, serving as jewel maker.

This is not a bad book though it is not the best entry in the series, but there is something disquieting about the portrayal of the female characters. In some ways, the book is a character study of those three women, yet it doesn't quite work as one.

In part, this seems to be due to the length of the book. In some places there seems to be too much talking and not enough showing, as if the talking allows the information to be given in a much shorter scene. For instance, the Count and his man servent Roger have a conversation that relates the questioning that Roger underwent at the hands of some Court functionaries. This would have been far more effective if the reader had actually seen the questioning and not simply been told of it. The fear that Roger felt would have felt far stronger.

In fact, the best parts of the novel are when Yarbro focuses on the women of the Koinge's court. The book

would've been far better balanced with more of such chapters. This is particularly true if one sees the book of a character study, in particular of a study of what an extremely conservative and male dominated culture can do to a woman.

The drawbacks of telling or doing the study though the Count are twofold. First, the Count is a man (how much better this book would've been if told by Olivia). The second is that he is a quasi outsider, as always. While this might make him see the women with a clearer gaze, it also distances him from the object of study. It, therefore, distances the reader even more.

Additionally, there is a problem that exists in some of Yarbro's weaker Count novels. The women, the Count's romantic leads, are generally separated into good and bad. Here, there is very little difference between how the two principal women "seduce" the Count. Yet, one is good and the other bad. This distinction, in this novel, seems to be based on how sexually forward they are. This would be interesting if the Count actually thinks about and he doesn't. It could also be that the Count, perhaps, is influenced by the view of a sexually forward woman as a bad woman (seeing the Count as the object instead of the reverse was a very WELL DONE idea). If this is the case, it wasn't examined. One woman is given culture as an excuse for her behavior, the other isn't. A more in depth study would've illustrated the differences more instead of the Count telling us those differences. Why does one woman draw pity and the other not, for instance? Yarbro has used this device before and with greater success in several of her books such as *Better in the Dark* or *Writ In Blood*.

A few years ago, there was a discussion on the Yahoo! Yarbro discussion list about how Yarbro's publisher had shortened the length of her novels. It was a rather interesting discussion that included book placement in the bookstore. If this restraint is still in place (and a page comparison seems to indicate it is), it harms this book. Such a reverse Stephen King Syndrome cuts the book short. If it had just another 100 pages, the character study would've been far more successful. Yarbro is an established writer, not inexperienced one. She has a dedicated following that has lasted years. While some of her books may not be as good as others, she never, ever majorly disappoints. (In other words, she doesn't lose readers the way Laurell K. Hamilton does). The publisher should trust both the author and the readers more.

Eva says

I was really looking forward to *An Embarrassment of Riches* by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro because it is set in Prague, where I lived for a couple years. The foreword suggested rich historic detail, but the book delivered only accounts of how to get rid of rat infestations and scores of descriptions of outfits the characters wore using language that left ALL to my imagination. Do you know what a "Short cotton biehaut and braccae of braided leather" looks like? Me neither. Yet every time a character appears in a scene we get these mind-numbingly specific costume descriptions and little else. Yarbro doesn't tell us their hair color, age, height, facial expressions or gestures in many cases, making it hard to tell characters apart.

For a romance novel, there was very little love in this book. Some ambitious shrews pursue the Count and blackmail him into sexual encounters, but he is completely passive about these liaisons. And the sex is laughable. For over 3,000 years, the impotent Count has performed oral sex and driven women wild without needing to take his pants off. Doesn't any woman yearn to reciprocate?

It is almost a surprise to learn that the Count is a vampire. His superhuman strength, night vision, alchemy skills, and knowledge of antibiotics are alluded to, but never put to vampire-ish use. The climax, if you could

call it that, is when the Count is nearly murdered in his bathtub by a midget. A midget? In the bathtub? How wimpy. The Count doesn't even put up a fight.

Perhaps Yarbro started the series with more passion for her character and genre. I'm unwilling to invest more reading time to find out.

Monster says

An Embarrassment of Riches is the most recent book in Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's saga of the vampire Count Saint-Germain. I decided to read it after reading a blog post the author wrote for us about libraries and researching for her books. It's clear that she puts a tremendous amount of research into each novel, from the wider sweep of events in the historical period she writes of to the details of daily life, and her world-building is incredible. She creates atmosphere and provides vivid description that will draw the reader in. As someone who has both studied history and worked in archives, I appreciated the lengths Yarbro went to here.

As a reader, though, the book failed me. When my recreational reading starts with an eight page historical note filled with names and dates, I'm apt to tune it out. When it's followed by a four page long list of names and occupations, I am likely to skim over it. Twelve pages in, I had yet to actually encounter the name of the main character (he appears first not as Count Saint-Germain, but as Rakoczy Ferancsi about two pages in to the list) I usually expect for a lot of this to become clear through context. I also usually expect to be able to identify the main character before page 25. Beyond that, I didn't find the story to be particularly gripping. Most characters weren't well developed, and didn't show much growth, so it was hard to care about them. Saint-Germain himself is caught in a state of paralysis, unable to act. As an exile, he must fulfill the terms set for him or risk the seizure and destruction of his estate. Court women take advantage of his precarious situation, and he can't counteract the political rumors that seem to attach to him. His vampirism rarely surfaces except when it affects his personal habits (like eating) and at the very end (where it's mainly a plot device that sets up the next book).

I understand that this book is part of a series, and there's likely backstory from the other books that fills in some of the blanks in the character of Count Saint-Germain. However, the majority of the book is firmly rooted in its historical period, and mostly, nothing happens. I love the picture Yarbro paints, but I want more action and more character development in what I'm reading in my spare time. I'd recommend this to fans of the Count Saint-Germain books, readers of historical fiction who prefer detail to plot, and large public library collections.

Contains: murder, violence, sexual scenes.

Review by Kirsten Kowalewski

Michele says

St. Germain doesn't get to do much in this book, in part due to the risk of the priests thinking him a heretic/sorceror if he does any medical treatment but also because he is in essence being held hostage at a distance for the safety of his lands back in Transylvania and so he isn't able to act with his usual freedom. The result is an unusually passive and powerless Comte. However, the setting is interesting, he gets to make

lots and lots of sparkly jewels (hence the title), there are two entertaining female characters (one nice, one not), and it's the only book in the series (so far as I can recall) where he actually (view spoiler). I've always wondered why he doesn't use that trick more often.

I wish that Kunegunde had gotten more page time, though, and that she'd stood up to the fanatical bishop who sees evil everywhere he looks. Thank goodness (view spoiler) -- St. Germain doesn't have quite the same track record as Captain James Kirk, wherein falling in love with him means you end up dead, but I was worried about her there for a bit.

Anna says

Yet another brilliant novel in the Saint Germain series! These books are meticulously researched and all the effort definitely shows with the many historical details that are included on every page. It's almost like walking into the given time period and observing a piece of the past come alive.

This was probably one of the most tragic chapters in Saint Germain's existence and it is extremely sad that after so many years he finds himself once again at the whim of others. Rakoczy Ferncsi, as he is known in this time, has many material riches but he lacks the one thing that sustains him...genuine intimacy. His life and circumstances make finding love practically impossible and those that already truly love him, like Olivia, must stay away. He does have Roger to act as his trusted companion, but I've always wished that he could find a way to be near Olivia for more than a few years at a time.

Kunigunde's court was filled with sneaky, selfish people, all willing to accept the gems Rakoczy could provide but unwilling to offer any sort of friendship. Most feared his foreigner status, many had their suspicions about his wealth, and some wanted him dead. The plot was further complicated by conniving women and a war that kept him prisoner. If he was any other type of man he might have simply fled from the miserable Bohemian court, but Rokoczy never shies from his responsibilities, and in this case he stayed in order to protect his land, holdings, and tenants back in his native country.

An Embarrassment of Riches is a must read for fans of Saint Germain but since the books are not told in chronological order they can be enjoyed by new readers as well. I highly recommend and encourage every reader to give these unique and creative novels a try. Yarbro is a pioneer in fiction and no character I've ever read can rival the everlasting quality of Saint-Germain. I started with Hotel Transylvania when I was a teen and I still buy each book as they are released, every one having a permanent place on my keeper shelves.
