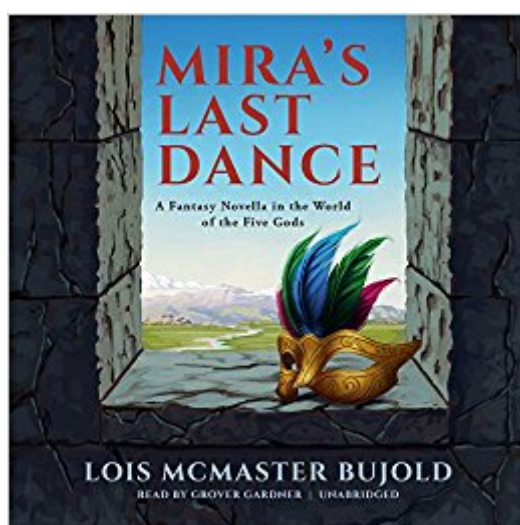


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Mira's Last Dance: A Penric & Desdemona Novella In The World Of The Five Gods (Penric & Desdemona Series, Book 4)



Synopsis

[Read by Grover Gardner] One of the most highly regarded speculative fiction writers of all time presents the fourth Penric & Desdemona novella. In this sequel to the novella Penric's Mission, the injured Penric, a Temple sorcerer and learned divine, tries to guide the betrayed General Arisaydia and his widowed sister Nikys across the last hundred miles of hostile Cedonia to safety in the Duchy of Orbas. In the town of Sosie, the fugitive party encounters unexpected delays, and even more unexpected opportunities and hazards, as the courtesan Mira of Adria, one of the ten dead women whose imprints make up the personality of the chaos demon Desdemona, comes to the fore with her own special expertise.

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Customer Reviews

Lois McMaster Bujold is one of the most honored writers in the fields of science fiction and fantasy, having won five Hugo Awards and three Nebula Awards. Her second novel, *The Warrior's Apprentice*, introduced young Miles Vorkosigan, one of the most popular characters in science fiction. In 2011, she was awarded the Skylark Award for her significant contribution to science fiction. The mother of two, she lives in Minneapolis.

The latest installment of Penric and Desdemona's story is a quick enjoyable read. I would recommend reading Penric's Mission first, since this story begins directly after the events in that book. It's more light-hearted than the previous book and is more about exploring the characters and relationships than major developments in the over all plot, and by the end of the book there's clearly

more to come. I really enjoy the serial novella format for this Penric and Des's story, which in this case allows the author to flesh out what is essentially a short story interlude in the larger arc. Nicely done.

I love Lois MacMasters Bujold's writing and have since I first ran across the Vorkosigan series sometime in the early 90s. **Mira's Last Dance** is beautifully written and lots of fun. But. Well, there had to be a caveat, didn't there? It's the gender roles. On one hand, she seems to advocate for lots of different ways of being a man or a woman or something else, but any relationship outside of the hetero-norm is usually that of supporting characters and invariably rather one dimensional. The romance she focusses on seems always to be one in which a man courts a woman, usually somewhat clumsily, and the woman has the final yea or nay. *Mira's Last Dance* is no exception. We have a hero, Penric, who has living in his psyche the personalities of, I think it's 12, women, most of them quite sexually interested and and one at least a "courtesan." Yet, when push comes to shove, he is forced into the role of wooer waiting on the woman's decision as to whether she can put up with him. In spite of all the women that are increasingly merging with his masculine self, when push comes to shove, he's a guy wearing his heart on his sleeve and she's dithering and making him wait. Nothing wrong with that, I suppose, but this could have been complicated. We are left with a hero, Penric, who is at the mercy of his various masters, 12 demon ladies and the twists and turns of the international politics of his world, but who doesn't seem to have goals or passions of his own, other than a desire to study other people's books. So, now he's in love with a nice girl who is holding out on him. I mean, with all those various women in there, you would think that at least he'd have a boyfriend on the side, or a love of cross dressing, or a strong maternal drive, or something that bends gender just a little. But apparently, in there the girls all stay on their own side, making fun of the guy over there who remains kind of cute but apparently as clueless as a husband in a cold-remedy commercial. It's worth reading, it's fun, the characters are great, but somehow, Penric just doesn't live up to his potential.

Full Disclosure Statement: I am a long-standing fan of Lois Bujold, and of her "world of the five gods" series, including the "Penric" stories. With that out of the way, let's just say this is as excellent as the all the preceding stories in the WOTFG series. Characters are complex and appealing, story line is suspenseful and intriguing, setting is a fully-realized world with it's own history, cultures, politics and religions. Unlike every other "magical realism" author I've read, including JRR Tolkien, this all takes place in a real world. The magic has "feet." Sorcerers are a particular category of cleric. To become

a divine, you attend a seminary where you study theology . You attend classes, write essays and term papers, sit for exams, etc. The seminary's library is full of books, not ancient scrolls written in arcane scripts. You may occasionally indulge in extra-curricular activities that leave you wine-sick the next day. Upon graduation and ordination, you possibly get sent to a temple in a two-horse town just the other side of the middle of nowhere. (One-horse towns likely get only a lay acolyte.)

Admittedly, this degree of richness comes from reading a lot of/all the books and stories in the series. Biggest criticism of s that this isn't really a stand-alone novella. Instead, it's the latest installment ("Book 4", as you'll see in the title) in a story arc that could be/should be a novel. Consequently, starting with this story may leave you a little out in the cold. You'll get a much fuller experience if you start with "Penric's Demon",

I'm a huge fan of Ms Bujold work, especially the Five Gods series. I've re-read the three available novels at least 4 times each, and was very excited when the first Penric story came out. I suppose that one day they'll all be collected into a single book, but I'm not willing to wait until then, so I'm buying the stories as they're released. The characters are believable, as are the ways they handle the situations that they find themselves in. Ms Bujold does very well at describing the world they live in without endless pages of exposition (I'm looking at you, David Weber) interrupting the flow. If Ms Bujold has broken any of the rules she created for this 'world,' I haven't noticed it yet. My only complaint: I have to wait again until the next one!

A chapter in an on-going story -- I would say at this point a serialised, cleverly unconventional novel -- rather than a stand-alone novella. Bujold's character writing only gets better, and her exploration of the deep implications of ideas introduced in early Five Gods novels is subtle and satisfying. I am entirely in love with the paired characters of Penric the sorcerer and Desdemona the demon, with her multiple embedded personalities. So much so that the fraught ending to this satisfied me deeply: it strongly suggests there's more to come.

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