



Closer to the Chest

Mercedes Lackey

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Herald Mags, the King of Valdemar's Herald Spy, has been developing a clandestine network of young informants who operate not only on the streets of the capital city of Haven, but also in the Great Halls and kitchens of the wealthy and highborn. In his own established alternate personas, Mags observes the Court and the alleys alike, quietly gathering information to keep Haven and the Kingdom safe.

His wife Amily is growing into her position as the King's Own Herald, though she is irritated to encounter many who still consider her father, Herald Nikolas, to be the real King's Own. Nonetheless, she finds it increasingly useful to be underestimated, for there are dark things stirring in the shadows of Haven and up on the Hill. Someone has discovered many secrets of the women of the Court and the Collegia—and is using those secrets to terrorize and bully them. Someone is targeting the religious houses of women, too, leaving behind destruction and obscene letters.

But who? Someone at the Court? A disgruntled Palace servant? One of the members of the Collegia? Someone in the patriarchal sect of the god Sethor? Could the villain be a woman? And what is this person hoping to achieve? It isn't blackmail, for the letters demand nothing; the aim seems to be the victims' panic and despair. But why?

Mags and Amily take steps to minimize the damage while using both magic and wits to find the evildoer. But just as they appear to be on the verge of success, the letter writer tires of terror and is now out for blood. Mags and Amily will have to track down someone who leaves few clues behind. They must thwart whatever plans have been set in motion, and quickly—before terror turns to murder.

Close to the Chest Details

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From Reader Review Closer to the Chest for online ebook

Anne Morgan says

People who have read Lackey's Collegium Chronicles in the Valdemar series (Foundation, Intrigues, Changes, Redoubt, and Bastion) will already be familiar with almost all of the characters. That series followed Mags and his friends as they came to the Collegia for school and, in Harry Potter-like fashion, had adventures that shaped them into the adults we see in The Herald Spy series. That said, there are definitely references to events that a reader starting off with Closer to the Chest will not get. I don't think it would affect enjoyment of the story, although probably going back and reading the Collegium Chronicles series (as well as the first two Herald Spy books) would enhance Closer to the Chest.

The Valdemar series continues to have everything a fantasy reader would want to see: magic and mystery; royalty, nobility, and peasants working together (or not!); and, of course, the magical, horse-like Companions. Closer to the Chest is a bit slower paced than Lackey's usual books and has a more relaxed style of writing than her earlier works. I find I still prefer her earlier books to these later ones with the different writing style, but that doesn't stop me from enjoying them. Chest contained more repetition than I think was necessary- there are only so many times I need to be told that this was the hottest heat wave in memory for instance.

However, Closer to the Chest was a fun, light read. I enjoyed following characters I already knew and watching them grow into their new roles as adults and their new responsibilities, and when the mysterious Poison Pen letters begin to escalate to worse and worse things the mystery picked up and got interesting. Fans of Mercedes Lackey will enjoy returning to the world of Haven. Fantasy lovers and Harry Potter fans looking for their next series will enjoy a good introduction to Mercedes Lackey- and hopefully get hooked into reading the rest of the Valdemar saga!

I received an ARC of this book through NetGalley for an honest review.

For my full review, go to my blog:

<http://bookwyrmreader.blogspot.com/20...>

Jenna says

I enjoy Ms. Lackey's series ever since the first book about Herald Talia.

And I really enjoy Mags and Co.

However, I admit to be a trifle disturbed/perplexed by how closely this particular book follows the plot of Dorothy L Sayers's most famous work Gaudy Night: Lord Peter Wimsey Book 12, down to the discussion of the Poison Pen, discussions of whether or not the servants could be responsible, burning effigies in the yard, and debates about the position of women in society and whether someone is a "womanly woman." It is bit too close for comfort, even though it certainly is given its own twist set in this world.

Nonetheless it is still a fun read and I look forward to the next book in the series.

Update: Upon a re-read I still enjoyed it as a part of the series, but the blatant re-telling of Sayer's Gaudy Night, re-told in Valdemar is still annoying.

Lara says

Got somewhat determinedly preachy in spots--Rolan reminding Amily that there is no "one true way" in Valdemar, the constant repetitions of "we think the person writing all these hateful obscene letters to women and trashing shops owned by women and burning woman-shaped effigies is a man, but in fairness, it *could* be a woman"--but there is 99% less Kirball, and multiple people actually *do* things as opposed to sitting around talking about them.

Also, please have more Companion Seraf, let her Choose Lirelle and have scholar-Herald adventures.

Liana Smith Bautista | Will Read for Feels says

***I received this book for free from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review, which was first posted on book blog Will Read for Feels.

***Actual rating: 4.5 stars

Any release of an all-new book set in Valdemar is cause for celebration in my book, and Closer to the Chest, book 3 in the Herald Spy series, is no exception. Valdemar is Mercedes Lackey's fantasy kingdom where spirit-horses called Companions pair up with humans, called Heralds, and together not only ensure the safety and supremacy of the government and their overarching law ("There is no one true way") but preserve the integrity of the nation.

In this book, newlywed Heralds Mags and Amily find themselves facing an altogether different sort of intrigue. Rather than the game of preemption and prevention they're used to--especially given that both Mags and Amily's father are spies--they must investigate a set of crimes and attempt to stop the perpetrator (or perpetrators) before they can escalate from mayhem to murder.

I relished the challenges put to the characters in this volume of the Herald Spy series because Mags and Amily found they had to employ a new way of thinking, focus on playing detective rather than spy, even as they worked to adjust to their newly married state.

This second aspect of the challenge they faced was a bit subtle but I liked how, because they were married now, their relationship problems stemmed from trying to find ways to make each other happy or at least avoid making each other unhappy rather than from working to stay together despite everything that might keep them apart. They ARE together, as is plain to see, and that brings an entirely new set of challenges in the love department. Of course, our heroes hurdle them beautifully.

As far as the big mystery goes, I think I would've liked a teensy bit more intrigue, but that's just because I enjoy it when a book keeps me guessing. Apart from this point, though, I don't have much to complain about.

In fact, one thing I really enjoyed was how relevant the story was to this day and age, so if I had a child in

elementary or middle school I would put this book into their hands immediately, just because the way the book tackles the issues of women's rights, bullying, and victim-shaming are something that could stir open and critical thinking in people who are still forming their ideas about the world and their place in it.

Closer to the Chest was another win for Mercedes Lackey, reinforcing my fandom and leaving me wishing I didn't have to wait another several months for the next installation in this series.

eyes.2c says

An agreeable addition with a few twists, some new characters and same old favorites.

Sean Talbot says

The third in the Herald Spy series which deals with two of my all time favourite characters in Mags and Amily.

I was a bit disappointed as something was missing from these two amazing characters as they seemed to be a shadow of themselves.

The story itself was interesting and dealt with many of the wondrous things that always happens in Valdemar. it just had something missing and really is a 3.5 star read.

I am looking forward to more of these characters and can't wait to see what's next.

Kirsty (Amethyst Bookwyrm) says

Thanks to Netgalley and Berkley Publishing Group for giving me this book to review.

Closer to the Chest is a very enjoyable book which goes at a variable pace which starts off slow and builds to a crescendo by the end. The story can be a bit predictable as it follows the outline of many other Mercedes Lackey books, it does not mean it is any less enjoyable for that.

My favourite character is Nicholas, because whilst most Heralds are meant to be practically perfect, Nicholas shows that they still have some human foibles. The villains are a new one, and it can be predictable because you know that they're going to be beaten however it is always interesting to find out how they lose, and why they're doing this.

I enjoyed Closer to the Chest and would recommend it to readers of the earlier Magsseries and readers of other Mercedes Lackey books.

This and my other reviews can be found at Amethyst Bookwyrm

Silvara Wilde says

Check out my other reviews, discussions and link ups at Fantasy of the Silver Dragon.

I received this book for free from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review.

This book wasn't as fast-paced as most Valdemar novels. It was still interesting and kept my attention, but if you love the ones full of action, this book is more in the line of intrigue. Mags, Amily and a number of their friends from the last book, spend most of this book hunting a bully.

You know exactly who is responsible from the beginning, but finding enough evidence to prove it takes most of the book. I liked getting to see how Mags and Amily were settling into their roles. I also liked that we got to see more of Prince Sedric.

There was another scene with Haven's Heartstone, and I'm really hoping that if there are more books in this era of Valdemar, that they finally start learning what it is and how to use it. Instead of going to it as almost an afterthought, or when in the middle of a crisis.

One thing that irked me slightly, is that there is a discussion about Amily getting one of Lady Dia's mastiffs for protection from the Poison Pen letter writer. And she says she will talk to Dia about it the next day. But then there is no more mention of it, and no dog appears except the muff-dogs the courtiers own. Not sure if it was forgotten about or if it was forgotten by the characters or what.

I liked Lirelle and her siblings, they were very smart and it would be fun to read more about them. And for once, Mags was not kidnapped or held hostage!

This review was originally posted on Fantasy of the Silver Dragon

Tim Lucier says

Each and every one of Lackey's Valdemar novels feels like home. I did enjoy this book, but what I write here is in comparison to the other books which are Absolutely Brilliant. If you're like me and you've read and re-read every single other Valdemar book... You know you've got to pick this one up too, because it's going to be new. If you're looking at these as a first-time reader, let me instead recommend the Arrows of the Queen trilogy or Brightly Burning as a stand-alone. (personally, I started with Owlsight.)

I'm finding the books in The Herald Spy trilogy to be a little bit light in comparison to some of the others. Short reads, I'm finishing them very quickly and am not able to bask in the wonderful world of Valdemar for very long.

My gut instinct is that the books that have to do with Mags are for a newer reader who is not yet familiar with Valdemar, and who may be at a bit of a younger reading level.

Some of the characters feel like repetitions of characters we already know and love - long-time readers of the

series already know and love Skif as a herald-spy and Talia as the new female Monarch's Own, so there's not much new happening. Plot points haven't grabbed me and the conflicts that are happening are somewhat laughable in comparison to what we've seen the Heralds deal with before.

Loose ends are getting wrapped up a little bit too tidy, and conflicts resolved a little too easily. Maybe it's harsh to say so - maybe the intended audience is a bit different for these books. Still, they feel like "Valdemar-Lite."

Buy this book if you can't get enough of Valdemar and you've read all the others. You'll re-enter the world you love and you'll glimpse some new storylines & new history to learn about.

Skip it if there are other Valdemar books out there that you haven't read yet - guaranteed, they are probably better.

annapi says

Mercedes Lackey seems to be running out of really good fodder for her Valdemar series. Lately her books have been less than stellar - good enough for fans but with too much contrivance to be excellent. I enjoy them still, but not as much as her earlier stuff.

She's really milking this character for all he's worth - this is the eighth book starring Mags, the orphan boy who was Chosen to be a Herald and who eventually becomes a spy for the king. A bit of a Gary Stu but not enough to be overly annoying, Mags in this volume deals with a more mundane problem than in previous books - instead of a threat to the kingdom from a foreign nation, he is investigating an anonymous writer of poison pen letters targeted at women, who gradually escalates his activity to attacks on them. It makes a nice change from the "preventing the end of the world as we know it" type of story.

It's a blatantly political statement on misogyny, feminism, and women's rights, which is all well and good for a young adult audience. What I'm a bit skeptical about is the setting in which she places this story, as this happens in an earlier time in the history of Valdemar, which to me seems a little out of place. But over the years she's changed Valdemar so much in order to fit her stories in that it really requires more suspension of disbelief than it used to to enjoy them. Still, for longtime fans she retains the core of what we love about the world, so I give this 3.5 stars, though I would round down instead of up.

Dawn Livingston says

So disappointing. The story was bland and slow. It was easy to read in that the way it was written wasn't an impediment i.e. the sentences weren't too long or complicated. After awhile though I realized I was really bored, waiting for something of interest to happen. I almost gave up but because I'd read the first two in the trilogy I didn't want to give up on this one.

Again, the story was so-so at best. It was more of a young adult book than an adult book. There was nothing that wasn't suitable for teens. There was no sense of danger because it is pretty clear none of the major characters are going to die or suffer permanent injury.

On the plus side I really liked Mags way of speaking. He doesn't speak like any other Herald portrayed in the

other Valdemar books, or at least I don't think so. He clearly was uneducated, unpolished. And he retains elements of that in that he continues to speak that way even as a Herald though he can speak more correctly when he tries. For me this dialect (I guess that's what you call it) was not difficult to get used to and wasn't an annoyance but helped cement the character.

As far as how this book rates in the trilogy I'd say the 1st one was the best followed by this one and then the 2nd. But as a Lackey series it ranks toward the bottom. At least I was interested enough to read them so that's something.

I can only recommend them if you're really bored, like Mags or like to read every Lackey book no matter what.

One thing that I noticed in the 2nd book but didn't mention and it was more heavy handed in this last book is the author's stance on Christianity. It seems clear to me that she targets Christianity more than any other religion because she paraphrases the bible (or so I recall). Maybe I'm just jumping to conclusions? I don't think so.

In the 2nd book it's made clear that "there is no one way" religion-wise. This is not a real surprise because I think this view was clear as far back as the Vanyel books (Magic's Price, etc.) but it was vaguely, briefly uncomfortable in the 2nd book because of a few pages and way too heavy handed in this one. The villains in this book are religious fanatics of a Christian fundamentalist-on-steroids point of view. Don't get me wrong, I think the point of view (extreme) needs to be discouraged/put down. But in the book it seemed that any Christianity is wrong/bad and that bothered me. All religions that believe in "one true way" are intolerant, but if you believe that there is no one true way and are intolerant of religions that disagree than that seems to be okay, according to the book.

I couldn't find the passages that really bothered me, sorry. I skimmed back as far as page 200 and couldn't find them. Oh well, it might not even be something you notice. If you read the books you can decide for yourself if it's an issue or not.

So, go ahead and read the books if you want, but don't say I didn't warn you that they were bland and slow and written as if the author was on auto-pilot.

Kathy Davie says

Third in The Herald Spy subseries and eighth in the Collegium Chronicles, both of which are a subseries within Lackey's overall Valdemar universe. This subseries revolves around Mags and his Companion, Dallen.

If you're interested, there is a chronological listing of the Valdemar books on my website.

My Take

As angry as the conflict made me, *Closer to the Chest* is a story with a warm and cozy feel for its day-in-the-life of Mags, Amily, and the royals, as Mags and Amily and the king and his son and wife endear themselves to the populace and take care of their people. Makes you wish our politicians would care half as much. I do love how thoughtful Mags is towards those who are not so well off; Amily has also learned to be more aware, and we get to learn right along with her.

I absolutely LOVE the message Lackey sends in *Closer to the Chest* about how wrong it is to say that women should know their place. To think they're only good for what is considered traditional women's work. I'm already a believer, and Lackey pokes and pokes away at how disgusting these beliefs are.

I'm confused as Lackey initially gives the impression that Teo is a collector for a moneylender, but then she has him working as a bodyguard for the goldsmith who may be the moneylender??

It's irritating how long it takes Mags and his friends to figure out who the likely culprit is. It's one thing to have to scrounge for evidence, and another to be so obtuse.

I had to laugh about the servants appalled that Lady Dia actually *sleeps* with her husband! More laughter ensued with Mags' wish that "a plague would target only stupid people". Yep, it's one of my dreams as well, lol.

It's a world with the kind of values you want your children to have — the Heralds and the king and prince who are so concerned with ensuring everyone's well-being. And this particular story is a good one for kids to read, if only to help hammer in that this attitude towards women is wrong.

The Story

A series of seemingly unrelated attacks and burglaries against women has the town of Haven and the Court up in arms with Herald Mags and King's Own Amily helpless to stop it.

The evildoer leaves few clues behind, and Mags and Amily must thwart whatever plans have been set in motion, and quickly — before terror turns to murder.

The Characters

Mags, a.k.a., **Harkon** (Willy the Weasel's nephew), **Magnus, Lord Chipman's cousin**, or **Geb Lackland** who infiltrates an organization, is the King's Herald Spy gifted with Mindspeech and married (*Closer to the Heart* , 2) to **Amily**, the King's Own Herald, who has discovered her own Gift. **Dallen** is Mags' Companion; **Rolan** is Amily's.

Herald Nikolas had been the King's Own until he died (*Closer to Home* , 1), and Rolan's bond passed to his daughter, Amily. He's also "**Willy the Weasel**", his undercover role as a pawnbroker who deals in information. "Willy" has a staff now: **Jem**, **Eller**, **Sam**, and **Luke**.

Kyri is the king of Valdemar; **Prince Sedric** is his son and heir who is married to the pregnant **Lydia**, Soren's niece (*Closer to Home* , 1). The Housekeeper, **Mrs. Pellam**, is another of Nikolas'. **Lady Dia** breeds muff dogs, organized the **Queen's Handmaidens** (a group of women spies who include **Keira Tremainet**, **Joya**, and the deceptive **Kelest**), and is married to **Steveral, Lord Jorthun**, who had been the king's spymaster and Nikolas' mentor. **Tuck** is/was Dia's protégé and brilliant with his hands. **Nils** is one of Dia's trainers. **Miana** is her maid. **Violetta** appeared in *Closer to Home* , 1.

The Collegium are...

...three schools where children are trained in becoming Heralds, Bards, or Healers. The deans include **Caelen** (Heralds), **Melita "Lita"** (Bards); and, **Devin** (Healers). Other Heralds include **Pip** who has just returned from a circuit; **Jakyr** is the one who discovered Mags in *Foundation* ; **Willowby** is permanently assigned to the Haven court system; and, **Kerit**'s gift is psychometry. **Lena Marchand Tyrall** is a Master Bard (her father, **Bard Marchand**, met his fate in *Changes* , 3); she's married to **Bear Tyrall**, an innovative Healer. The **Chronicler** keeps records for the Healers. **Margeritte** is another of the Healers.

Trainee Bards include the gifted **Dani**, and **Sara** is a Trainee Herald. The **Blues** are students and include children of people who live at Court or on the Hill and sponsored children including **Katlie Gardener** and **Kaven**.

Aunty Minda is the house mother for Mags' band of runners and informers; **Trey** is one of them. One of the original rescues is **Coot** who now runs the official runner business.

Teo does debt collection for a moneylender, **Mika Tarneff**, and works as a bodyguard for **Bren Kriss**, a goldsmith (and moneylender?) in Tanner's Quarter. I gotta wonder who **Dettler** is.

Lord Semel Lional (he's one of Cyril's New Men), his wife, **Lady Tyria**, and their sensible children — **Hawken** is the oldest, the gorgeous **Helane**, the brilliant **Lirelle**, and the ambitious **Loren** — come to Court, expecting to move into **Lord Renolf**'s townhouse. **Lord Merriman** and his wife, **Lady Felicity**, have come to Court with their twin daughters. **Duke Henley** believes in his own importance. **Lord Anslott** doesn't like change and doesn't approve of women. **Maegery Ereson** is a tease, **Lady Jemma Teal** is quite clever, and **Amber Larele** is a flirt and poaches. **Lady Harmitege** moves herself and her eight chicks out of the Palace. **Danver Haylie** and his set are ones to beware. **Lady Herra** and **Lady Amberly** are cranky spinsters. **Jared** was a tutor.

Watchmen include **Carter** and **Captains Kay March and Ned March**. **Flora** is the madame at Flora's and also one of Nikolas' contacts. **Cilla** is the House Healer at Flora's. The **Sickle Moon** is another bawdy house.

Hatchet, **Dog-Billy**, and **Rufus** are the latest bad guys from whom Mags took children. The "**Poison Pen**" is a nasty, vicious person whose intelligence is much too accurate and knows his or her way around much too well.

The religious groups in Haven

The Sisters of Ardana are...

...a dying religious group cheated out of their building. **Mother Yllana** is their abbess. *They also have Abbess Reed who may be Mother Yllana??* Other sisters include the unhappy **Klera Coppersmith**, **Aster**, **Loveage**, **Basil**, **Ivy**, **Nelie**, **Thoma**, and **Thistle** who is in charge of the Scriptorium. **Kyle Benson** is the new carter. **Meya** and her husband are some of the worshippers.

The Temple of Betane of the Axe is...

...a militant order of women who work as bodyguards and fill in for the Guard as needed. The prioress is their leader. **Acolyte Asha** inspires hero worship and offers good advice.

Birana the Flower-Crowned concerns...

...itself with growing flowers whose High Priestess is appalled.

The Order of Saint Hitia has...

...the largest library in Haven and is devoted to scholarship.

The Temple of Sethor the Patriarch is...

...the latest religious group to come to Haven with strange beliefs. **Theodor Kresh** is the High Priest. Other priests include **Brother Pakler**, **Precepts Darent** and **Renn Haladane** (he has a twin brother, **Roan**; their father had been a chief priest, **Taryan Haladane**), and **Novice Tomson**.

The **Heralds** are the ultimate law enforcement in Valdemar. **Companions** are magical white "horses" with silver hooves and blue eyes who can mindspeak with the Herald to whom they bond. **Companion Seraf**

appears to be attracted to Dallen. **Kirball** is a game (a sort of cross between polo and soccer) invented when Mags was still a Trainee. The **Sleepgivers** are a clan of assassins with Mags' cousin, **Bey**, its head (*Bastion*, 5).

The Cover and Title

The background of the cover is warm browns with a tone-on-tone graphic of Dallen galloping across. The center is the shape of a decorative shield acting as a frame for a determined Amily holding a dagger and Mags with a tool belt and holding a hammer; they're dressed in a subdued orange. They're separated by a highly carved pillar in the middle with poison pen letters floating between them, one of which is pinned at the bottom of the shield frame, dripping with blood. The author's name is in embossed silver at the top while the title is in an embossed pale gold at the bottom with the series information below it embossed in white.

Oh, yeah, this title is definitely *Closer to the Chest* for Mags and friends, as it affects so many people in Haven and at Court.

Imogene says

I love that she's tackling toxic masculinity and the worst of the men's rights and the repulsive incel issue. She's always had great female and lgbt characters, but extra respect right now

Jon says

The pacing was much better in this one, I feel. It still wrapped up a little rapidly, and the foreshadowing was super heavy, making this one (again) feel like YA. Maybe they are, and I've mis-read the target audience.

I mean, it's more books in a world I love, but I'd like something that feels a little more grown up.

Olga Godim says

I wrote the same review for all three novels of this series. I actually liked these books. The writing is lousy, explaining why I didn't read this writer for so long, but the stories are interesting. They kept me reading till the end.

What I didn't like:

Too much moralizing and explaining, as if all the readers are fools and need all the pontifications they can get from the writer. If Ms. Lackey cut off all her preaching and explanations, the books would've been much shorter and much better.

Also I didn't like the phonetic speech. The hero, Mags, speaks with an atrocious accent, and the author feels it is necessary to spell out each of his word as spoken, with lots of apostrophes between the letters. As a result, half the text is written in such a mangled English, it made me want to hit something.

What I did like:

Closer to Home

There are two interwoven stories in this novel. One is about two young Heralds, Mags and Amily, loving each other and doing their jobs. It's OK, sweet but banal. Another, a much more interesting story is a rendition of Romeo and Juliet, which is a rather more realistic version than the Shakespearean one. While the silly girl Violetta is almost a facsimile of Juliet, her lover is anything but Romeo. No lovelorn beau or romantic ideal, this guy Brand. He is a villainous antagonist the story revolves around. He makes this novel fascinating, provides all the conflict and all the spice, deceives everyone, and changes everything around him. A revolting fellow, really, and a sociopath, but he makes the nice characters even nicer in comparison.

Closer to the Heart

Someone is trying to start a war between Valdemar and one of its neighboring kingdoms. Amily and Mags are trying to find this agent of chaos and stop him before it is too late.

Closer to the Chest

Someone is sending nasty letters to the ladies of the court and to female Heralds and Trainees. Several shops owned by women in the city and a couple of religious women orders are vandalized. Although nobody is being killed or hurt physically, yet, women are terrified. The culprit (or culprits) obviously hates all females, but he is clever and resourceful. Nobody knows who he is. Amily and Mags are trying to find out.

All three books are structurally cozy mysteries. The heroes, Mags and Amily, are a pair of Heralds of Valdemar. They are married and in love, but they also are doing their jobs, keeping the kingdom of Valdemar safe. When a problem arises, they investigate, find the bad guy, and stop him. Searching for clues is a slow business, so all three books move slowly. All three books share the same flaws (see above), but the stories seem interesting, the bad guys clever and intriguing, different from book to book, and my wish to discover the culprits kept me following the heroes to the last page.
