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Tomas Torres never thought that saving his baby sister would only be the start of his problems, but from the moment he threw the fireball at the robber at the corner store, his life went from bad to weird. First he found himself using his new power to set fires for the local loanshark, then he was facing a choice between prison and being stuck in a reform school in the middle of nowhere. Now he's being bossed around by a (literally) hot little chica, facing off monsters, and trying not to flunk math. Oh, and not die. And it's only Tuesday.

Arcanum 101 Details

Date : Published January 9th 2012 by RosettaBooks (first published January 7th 2012)

ISBN :

Author : Mercedes Lackey , Rosemary Edghill

Format : Kindle Edition 179 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Young Adult, Urban Fantasy

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From Reader Review Arcanum 101 for online ebook

Elisabeth Waters says

I found this on Kindle and thought it looked good, and besides, eluki and Misty are two of my favorite authors. Then I started reading it and discovered that it was a sequel (or perhaps a spin-off) of the Bedlam's Bard series. I read it straight through, but I'm keeping it on my currently-reading shelf because I'm going to re-read the books before it and then read it again. I love this book, and I really hope they're going to write more of them.

Eric Mesa says

I kept going back and forth between 2 stars and 3. I'd probably consider it 2.5 stars, but that's not an option and I felt like giving the book the benefit of the doubt. I purchased the book as part of one of the first book-related bundles I ever bought. (I *think* from Storybundle) This wasn't the book that made me buy it.

When I looked around on Goodreads, there doesn't appear to be an Arcanum 202 or other such direct sequel. It looks like the author has a few books in the same universe, but not direct sequels to this one. (According to Goodreads, this is the series: <https://www.goodreads.com/series/4048...>) The reason I mention this is that this story does not flow like a traditional story. It's a metric ton of world-building and nearly no story. The antagonist, to the extent that one exists, is presented and dealt with in the final couple chapters. That's what pushed this book more towards 2 stars for me. It's essentially a personal growth story, but I feel that's probably the weakest part of the book.

Switching gears for a moment, the best thing about the book is that Ms Lackey does a pretty good job depicting teens. I wouldn't say it's stellar or the best characterization I've ever read. But the kids seem to react pretty realistically to teen power dynamics and hormones without falling into too many cliches.

Our main character, Tomas, was a little annoying to me in the way he interacted with others. Granted, my friends and family are a very small sample size, but as someone who is also bilingual, I found the way he spoke to people odd. So, in South Florida, sure we did a lot of code switching, that is we'd mix English and Spanish in one sentence. But only in cases where everyone there was also bilingual. Tomas, on the other hand, is constantly using Spanish with people who have given no indication they speak any Spanish. Maybe, given he's from Texas, that's how people speak there, but it just struck me as odd. The random Spanish in his inner monologue - sure, that scans. But I wouldn't just randomly call someone in Maryland (where I live now) "chica", even though that's a word most people have been exposed to. It just seemed weird.

One last bit of a misuse of Chekov's gun, in my opinion. At once point in the story Tomas is working for a pretty bad element and It's suggested that his disobedience will lead to consequences with his family. This is dropped as soon as our character ends up in the X-Men-like school that is the story's main location. Frankly, I kept expecting this to be a big growth point. I thought they'd go after his family and he'd have to have a personal growth moment where he realized he shouldn't kill people with his powers or something.

So, if you like world-building and fantasy, it's a pretty quick read. Despite what the read length says up there, I only read it for about 10-15 minutes at a time five days a week, and it only took me a couple weeks once I really got into it consistently. Just don't go into it expecting a traditional story.

Elizabeth Spencer says

Arcanum 101 is a very average YA urban fantasy. Its plot feels like paint-by-numbers YA, but (as you'd expect by something touched by Mercedes Lackey) it's solidly written. *Oh my gosh*, it is slow.

Arcanum 101 is about a 15-year-old Hispanic boy who has just moved to New York, has discovered that he is pyrokinetic, and is about to start down a bad path. He finds himself caught up with the local mafia-equivalent and, after a brush with the law, is sent off to a school for the gifted that's half X-Men Academy and half Hogwarts.

Tomas, the main character, is arrogant, proud, and a little misogynistic. His mentor, VeeVee, is OK, but she's a little too perfect and she's awful as a narrative character. Every time she takes over the POV she dumps a metric ton of exposition.

And it is, as I said before, **slow**. It starts out well, but languishes once it hits the middle. You're introduced to a slew of powers and creatures and classes and concepts, but nothing is fleshed out. (After reading some of the other reviews, I'm guessing this is because the book is set in an established world. Meh. I shouldn't feel left out of the story because I didn't read those.) Outside of a few pockets of action, it basically devolves into a slice-of-life story about a magical boarding school. Nothing truly major happens until page **147 of 159**. Then the book realizes that it's *got to end* and hysterically ties up two romantic conflicts, one family crisis, and one magical crisis in the span of 12 pages.

Also, does this book take place in the early 2000s? It'd make a lot more sense if it did. It was published in 2012, but all the technology is... *dated*. At one point, someone's playing a GameBoy. (The last GameBoy-branded console came out in 2003... or 5, I guess, but the late 2000s definitely belong to the DS.) There's a big Dance Dance Revolution setup at the school, when DDR had its heyday a decade ago. They talk a couple times about the wireless LAN at the school, which is technically accurate, but weird. Why not talk about the *Wi-Fi*? Of course, there's always the chance that the technology research for this book went wrong, too, because at one point a kid on a bus pulls out a DVD player and starts watching it. I guess there *are* standalone DVD players with their own screens, but... something feels wrong.

Oh, yes! And there are also too many one-sentence paragraphs.

You know, like this.

Sometimes there are two or three in a row!

Drama!

Overall? It's a decent read (despite all the impact paragraphs), but the concept is nothing I haven't seen done before. And it's slow. It'd work for someone who really wants more diversity in their urban fantasy, but it's nothing remarkable.

Amber Marshall says

I'm definitely not one to accuse any book of ripping off another just because they share a premise (a school for gifted children - everyone says Harry Potter but nothing about X-Men with this one). This isn't my first time with the Secret World Chronicles, since I read another collection that I got in (maybe this same) Humble Bundle. My main takeaway is it's interesting but doesn't grab me enough. It was all right but not great.

I was a little annoyed with the random insertion of Spanish words in the middle of sentences. Do people really talk like that? All the people I know whose first language isn't English will only slip into their native language when trying to figure out what English word corresponds to what they're trying to say. They don't just throw it in there like punctuation. Maybe for words like "hermana" and "mamacita" because that's what he calls his sister, his mother, etc, but the rest of the time it's like "pick a random word to run through Google translate."

Tomas's arrogant macho 'tude turned me off, but that's just a personal taste thing.

Overall not intense or nuanced enough for my tastes.

Jess Mahler says

I really enjoyed this book, but before I say why, let me put in a disclaimer/warning: If you aren't a long time fan of Lackey's Elves on the Road world (Bedlam's Bard mostly, but also Urban Elves, and Diana Tregard series) move on. This book is less a novel in its own right and more fan service for folks who want another taste of their favorite world and characters.

And actually, that's pretty much why I enjoyed the book. Tomas was an interesting enough character, though he could have been more thoroughly developed. VeeVee has potential, but spends more time infodumping her own history than interacting or moving the plot. Cameos or secondary character roles for Eric Banyon, Hosea Songmaker, Kayla Smith, Dottie (mechanic from Fairgrove) and a few others turned an otherwise mediocre story into a really fun read just from the excitement of seeing what they were up to and the anticipation of who was going to pop up next.

Ending was a bit of a disappointment, very rushed and it felt like the authors tried to cram 3 or 4 potential plots into the story without fully developing any--Tomas' struggle to accept magic, family drama in the Torres family, two romance plots...

I'm happy I bought it, and I'll pick up a sequel if they write one just to see my old fave's again, but I hope they'd put more effort into a well developed plot and characters

Teresa Carrigan says

Urban fantasy, YA type. Main character is a 15yo Hispanic, male, with psychic powers that let him start fires. Several of the minor characters are people who were major characters in other books by Lackey, such as Eric Banyan. Not great but definitely worth reading, although somehow an awful lot of extra "that" words

snuck into the text, sometimes even "thatthatthat".

C is for **censored says**

The star rating given reflects my opinion within 'the official goodreads rating system'.

1 star: Didn't Like it

2 stars: It's Okay

3 stars: Liked it

4 stars: Really Liked it

5 stars: It Was Amazing

I don't really give a rat-fuck that there are some who think I 'owe' an explanation for my opinion. Nope, nada, and not sorry about it.

Sometimes I may add notes to explain what my opinions are based on, and sometimes I don't. I do this for me, on my books, in my library and I don't 'owe' any special snowflakes a thing. Fuck off if you don't like it and stop reading my shit.

Particularly given the 'modifications' to reader's personal content going on (and outright censorship), unless particularly motivated I will not comment in detail.

It would help if GR was forthcoming in the new 'appropriate' and would make a site-wide announcement delineating the new focus from a reader-centric site to one that is now for authors and selling.

Sarah says

I was really excited by the first section of this book, the male main character Tomas trying to figure out his magical powers while working for the mob. The sudden switch to a magic school didn't bother me so much as the sudden change of the main character--once he gets to school, Tomas's personality seemed completely washed out, like he was a different person. None of the characters seemed very believable, and the setting was just too safe and perfect. Even Hogwarts has dangers and antagonists.

Sara says

I keep holding out hope that Mercedes Lackey will go back to the genius that was the Valdemar series (especially her early work), and I keep ending up disappointed. I'm like a girl who keeps going back to the guy who used to treat her like a princess but now just kind of ignores her while he drinks beer and watches football. I know she's no good for me any more, but I just can't seem to let go of what we used to have.

Lackey USED to be a genius at both world building and character building. Her characters have at times been real and deep enough to move me to tears (I will NEVER get over the Vanyel series, ever), and her

worlds have felt real enough to be the stuff of my own teenage fantasies back in the day. This though... well. This. Basically, it felt like some sort of hack-handed urban Harry Potter, only less original, less magical, and less engrossing to read. I think it's cool she wants to try her hand at a Latino protagonist. Rock on. Really. But it just felt completely forced and unnatural. And the best she could do was a Latino kid who wants to work on cars? And build some sort of low rider hot rod thing? I mean, really? Because stereotypes are awesome.

As for the fantasy part... run of the mill, nothing exciting. A little Harry Potter mixed with some Wizard of Oz, mostly. The teen drama romance stuff was just a complete yawn, and the ending was completely ridiculous.

Basically, some of Lackey's work has been better than others, but I think this was downright the worst of all of it. Basically, this should probably be one star, except it was mildly entertaining at certain parts, and, basically, for old time's sake I give an extra star.

I'd like to say that I won't read any more of Lackey's new works, but I know that's a lie because I keep holding out hope that we'll get that spark back and be able to live happily ever after, even though I know that she'll probably just keep yelling at me from her arm chair to bring another beer.

Oh, Mercedes. Why can't I quit you?

Carolyn says

Apparently there is a Diana Tregarde story of the same name by this author, this is not that story. It is however set in the same universe, with Guardians, magic and bad monsters needing to be dealt with. Set in a small private school in upstate New York, it is a similar setup to Professor Xavier's special school for the gifted in the movie 'X-Men: First Class'.

Pretty simple plot lines and characters, this is a good read for the advanced 11/12 yo reader, but best for a bit older kid reading YA books.

Note: poor editing for mechanical problems (ie. missing words, repeated words "thatthat", etc.)

Nicole says

More like 3.5 stars. I liked it, and it was a quick read with interesting characters, but there was just something lacking that I can't put my finger on. Some of the dialogue was a little awkward - sometimes trendy just ends up being dated.

Kathy Davie says

An urban fantasy for young adults and focusing on Tomas Torres. There is another "Arcanum 101" by Mercedes Lackey in her Diana Tregarde series, and it appears to be a different story from this one.

My Take

This took an unexpected twist with an Hispanic family leaping into magic. Nothing unusual in it, just unusual for Lackey/Edghill.

How is working for Prestamo any different from working for the drug dealers or being in a gang? And how could he be so stupid as to not use care? I'd also like to know how the cops knew he'd be going to the bridal shoppe.

I am rather surprised that Mama is so intolerant about her children being gifted.

I do love how VeeVee introduces Tomas to the school. And it's so much fun to see all Tomas' expectations of the school get debunked. It's exactly what kids need. No judgements. No lies. An atmosphere in which to flourish in the arenas which interest them. I also like that not everything gets handed to them. They have to earn certain privileges. AND the school is determined to graduate kids who get jobs in fields they love. No one will "starve in a fast-food or mega-mart job". Oh, wow, these classes, even the "bonehead vocational classes" are a dream come true. There are a few I'd love!

They do each get a laptop with access to the Internet, that Student Union is to die for!, and the auto shop...whoa... They have school dances with music provided by student bands, but no one is forced to go. They have field trips — some normal and some *not* so normal. The not-so-normal trips are the learning experiences.

Poor Tomas. He's skated along in all his classes previously. Here the classes are too small for him to go unnoticed, and he'll actually have to do the work if he wants access to the auto shop in his off hours.

There are some fun challenges as well as some scary ones. VeeVee lays down a challenge on the dance floor that Tomas picks up. There are also monster hunts where Tomas learns that this school is for real. The more mundane conflict is that field trip date that VeeVee has to pass on and can't tell Tomas. Talk about misunderstandings!

I suspect it's the field trip Underhill that lays to rest Tomas' skepticism about magic. It's certainly a shocker when Lord Moonlight appears without illusion!

The Story

So much for the American dream for the Torreses. There's no work for Mamacita in El Paso, and while she can find laborer jobs in New York City, it's not enough to do more than barely survive in this expensive city.

It's that robbery at the bodega that Tomas discovers what he can do. It's a way to make money. To help Mama.

For that, Tomas is willing to forego his promise to himself, to get entangled in criminal enterprises. Only, for such an intelligent boy, he's not too bright.

The challenge at St. Rhiannon's will be to ensure this boy with his pyrokinetic powers chooses the side of right.

The Characters

Papi Torres left them, and it's **Mamacita** (Consuelo Torres) who is trying to support **Tomas**, who is *very* good with cars, and **Rosalita** (she talks to her invisible friends) in New York City with a useless education degree from the University of Mexico. **Carmelita** is Mama's cousin who sent the bus tickets.

Valeria Victrix "VeeVee" Langenfeld is a Fire Witch, skilled in combat magic and a techno-shaman with a secret passion for sewing. She'll be Tomas' mentor at the school. One of her ambitions is to be made a Knight-Mage Underhill and a Guardian like her parents: a Finnish Witch (**Moira**) who can whistle up storms and a father who is an hereditary German vampire hunter descended from the Van Helsing.

St. Rhiannon's School in upstate New York is...

...a boarding school for gifted children: **M-tracks** are magicians whose power comes from magic while **P-tracks** are kids with psionic powers which come from the mind. The teachers include **Eric Banyon** who is a bard from the Bedlam's Bard urban fantasy series and part of the overall Elves on the Road series. He's also Sieur Eric, Bard of Elfhame Misthold and liegeman to Prince Arvin. **Hosea Songmaker** also teaches music; **Jeanette** is his possessed banjo. **Inigo Moonlight** is the headmaster, a 1,000+-year-old Magus Major elf, a.k.a., Lord Moonlight. **Grace Fairchild** and **Tucker Bell** are his assistants and do most of the work. **Sarah Clifford** is the school counselor with a passion for Lord Peter Wimsey mysteries (oh, yeah!). The school founder is a half-Elven Mage and a multi-billionaire, **Ria Llewellyn**. She's a bit handicapped due to who her father was, **Prince Perenor**, an Unseleighe Prince who almost destroyed Elfhame Sun-Descending. **Doctor Carter** and **Nurse Irene** live at the Infirmary. **Daniel Bishop**, a psychometrist, trains the psionic students and teaches History. **Mr. Balinsky** teaches English. **Ms. Bosworth** teaches Bio and Chem. **Kayla Smith** is a healer who teaches advanced Computer Science. **Mari Morales** is the librarian. **Ms. Mallozzi** teaches algebra.

Dottie Davies (she's a character in the SERRAted Edge series) is the mechanic teaching Auto Shop. Tomas' fellow students will include **Aaron Clark**, **Brian Walker** is a water witch, and **Destiny** is an artificer.

Some of the students include **Chris Shackleford**, a precog, is the residential assistant with a Goth bedroom. **Johnny Devlin** can do apportation, **Annabelle Young** calls storms, **Sarita** and **Kurt Richards** heal, **Lalage Chisholm** is a witch who can talk to plants and has an eye for Tomas, **Kenny Chandler** can do telekinesis, **Gordy Riley** is a telepath, **Aimee King** is a sensitive, **Tyler**, **Ethan Harris** is an astral warrior, **Megan Bennett**, **Jamilla Adams**, **Destiny Campbell**, **Chloe Howard** has bardic gifts, **Nina**, **Vanh**, and **Gareth Moore** is an OCD mage and dating **Lauren**.

Nierin ap Bedwyr is an elf VeeVee knows. **Aaron** is Kurt's normal little brother.

LlewellynCo is...

...an alliance between Ria Llewellyn and Eric, a small group of Guardians, and mages allied with the Elfhames to monitor for problems.

In New York City

Mr. de La Yedra owns the corner bodega. **Tiburon Prestamo** is el padrone, a man you do not disrespect. **Jorge** is one of his enforcers. **Ms. Lyons** is the Family Court judge. **Mrs. Rodriguez** is one of Tomas' victims. **Linda Kenyon** is from the DA's office and a Guardian. **Marty Mitchell** is the public defender. **Mr. Blaylock** is Tomas' probation officer.

The **Guardians** are a loose organization of Talented and Gifted chosen to stand between the Mundanes and things that go bump (or boom!) in the night. They are the elite of Mages, required to protect and defend. A **Magus Major** is one of the most powerful magicians the elves produce.

Underhill is a series of Domains powerful elves carve out of the **Chaos Lands** with each anchored by **Gates** and a **Node Grove**. **Low Court elves** are tied to their Node Grove or they've been sealed into a Domain. **High Court elves** are Dark or Bright, Unseleighe or Seleighe.

The bad guys include **Shadow Warriors, vampires, nightflyers, a revenant, and a Trollking**.

The Cover and Title

The cover is a black background with a boy's head haloed with a corona of heat. The truly hot is the ball of flames he's holding in the hand he's thrusting at us. The oranges, yellows, and reds are also reflected in the title and the authors' names.

The title is a blend of the magic and class basics, for Tomas is heading for *Arcanum 101*.

elizabeth tobey says

Humble Bundle really has to stop selling me YA books. Seriously - I don't read the descriptions. I pretty much read blindly, wanting to be surprised as the story unfolds. Unfortunately, Humble Bundle seems to have latched on to the kids-doing-magic-means-instinct book thing and it's pretty much the worst.

SPOILERS AHEAD

Arcanum 101 wasn't even the worst book. It had some pretty unbelievable shit in it, but it's magic, so I guess I can also suspend disbelief and think a mob boss would let their peon get arrested and shipped off to a school without giving a damn that they lost their magical arson worker bee. Fine. The worst part of the book, for me, was the last 85%. It's like the author got bored and just mashed a lot of really important plot points into a very, very short amount of time. I almost felt them saying "and blah blah blah there was some love triangle shit and blah blah blah she realized that guy that had liked her forever actually was into her and totes got over that other dude and got with the dude that liked her and HAPPILY EVER AFTER WHATEVER I DON'T WANT TO WRITE THIS BOOK ANYMORE. MAGIC."

:(

Dorian D-W says

The opposite of Jumper, this book started off so promisingly, but turned into the most boring book I've read since Anne of Green Gables.

Meet Tomas, recently moved to NYC, who at 15 discovers that he can set things on fire using only his mind. Naturally he is approached by the mob and offered a job as an enforcer (because hey, if the police can't prove the cause of a fire, they can't convict anyone of arson).

There's so many exciting places you could go with that storyline. But instead Tomas is caught and sent to a school where people like him can safely learn to control their powers (booooring).

At school, the teachers are all perfect (ie, boring), the students are mostly perfect (ie, boring), and those students who aren't perfect tend to have just one character flaw that Tomas will be able to fix by the end (the only thing more boring than a perfect character is a near-perfect character becoming perfect).

There's no overarching plot or storyline to drive the book. Instead we get a series of monsters appearing, to

be defeated by Tomas and friends. Think boring 80s TV series monster-of-the-week style. I suppose the romantic storyline could be considered a plot (I'm having to stretch the definition of plot here quite a bit), does or does he not get the girl? Spoiler: (view spoiler).

One more annoying thing - Tomas throws in plenty of Spanish phrases. That's fine for a latino character, though it does feel very constructed, as if the authors were trying for an educational angle: Dora the Explorer for young adults. But surely they should be phrases that make grammatical sense? As in, not messing up simple things like gender, tense, or voice. Or maybe even using the correct prepositions.

I guess the only thing more useless you could do with your time than reading this book would be staying up until 12am writing a review of it on the internet. Fool me twice...

Mako.allen says

Terrible. Bad writing, bad editing. Just bad.
