



Valentine Pontifex

Robert Silverberg

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The national bestselling saga of Robert Silverberg's stunning imagination continues in the first new hardcover "Majipoor" novel in nearly a decade. As a prequel to Silverberg's earlier "Majipoor" novels, "Sorcerers of Majipoor" provides a deep, dark vision for the background of the conflict in Lord Valentine's Castle and Valentine Pontifex. Treachery and wizardry run rampant under the reign of the mighty Pontifex, as both the rightful and the unworthy heirs to the throne anxiously await his demise. Korsibar, son of the current Coronal, plots with his twin sister and ambitious companions to seize the power of the Coronal when his father ascends to the throne of the Pontifex.

But the burdens of the crown and scepter exact more of a price than Korsibar is prepared to pay. His rival fights to take his appointed place as keeper of his beloved Majipoor...and to resbackse order to the utter chaos that has befallen their world.

"Silverberg has created a big planet, chock-a-block with life and potential sbacksies." -- "The Washington Post"

Valentine Pontifex Details

Date : Published March 1st 1996 by Eos (first published 1983)

ISBN : 9780061054860

Author : Robert Silverberg

Format : Paperback 478 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Science Fiction, Fiction, Science Fiction Fantasy

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Buck says

This is the third in a series known as the The Majipoor Cycle. Unlike LeGuin's Hainish Cycle, The Majipoor Cycle is a regular series and should be read in sequence, though it wouldn't hurt if the second were read before the first. I had read the first two books, *Lord Valentine's Castle* and *Majipoor Chronicles* in the previous 14 months. I wish I had read the series more closely together, so that the previous books had been fresher in my memory. The earlier books establish the history that lead to *Valentine Pontifex*; and there were many references in *Valentine Pontifex* to events in the earlier books.

The books in this series are science fiction books by virtue of the planet Majipoor having been colonized by humans (and other species) over the last 14,000 years. Aside from that, it is a fantasy. There is an element of telepathy in this series which reaches a crescendo in *Valentine Pontifex*. It put me very much in mind of the kind of telepathy and mental powers, the shining, in Stephen King's *Doctor Sleep*, which I had just finished reading.

Robert Silverberg's writing of this series is quite enjoyable, and it is quite different from the stories in his acclaimed earlier novels *Dying Inside* and *The Book of Skulls*.

Nicolas says

Valentin de Majipoor nous raconte la fin des aventures de Valentin, le coronal(1) de Majipoor. Celui-ci doit faire face à des problèmes inconnus sur cette planète où la vie est facile pour tous : famine, insurrection, et surtout une guerre raciale menée par les métamorphes, qui furent les premiers habitants de la planète et vivent désormais dans une réserve. Grâce à ses amis, et à sa clairvoyance, il viendra à bout de tous ses soucis, et Majipoor redeviendra une planète heureuse et sans histoire. Ce tome nous démontre comment, à partir d'une bonne idée de base, un récit peut s'enfoncer peu à peu, tel le Titanic, dans les flots de la médiocrité. Car c'est bien de cela qu'il s'agit : une histoire médiocre. Très vite, on est déçu par les aventures quasi inexistantes des différents protagonistes, qui se déplacent sur Majipoor, discutent entre eux, mais qui sont vraiment bien protégés (normal, pour le maître d'un monde de vingt milliards d'habitants). Et rien ne vient troubler cete quiétude, sauf, peut-être, pour Valentin une stupide expédition chez les métamorphes qui tournera au naufrage par la faute des métamorphes ? Même pas ! Tout simplement une tempête de sable qui viendra retourner les différents engins de la suite impériale. Devant un suspense aussi insoutenable, on essaye de se réfugier dans la beauté de l'écriture de Silverberg. Las ! force est de constater que les récits entrecroisés, qui ont fait les beaux jours de nombre de pavés de fantasy, ne parviennent pas à sauver ce pavé, qui au final n'inspire qu'un sentiment de gâchis. Etonnement, lors de ma dernière lecture, qui remonte tout de même à mon adolescence, j'avais trouvé énormément de choses dans les aventures de ce coronal pacifiste, en proie à une guerre raciale d'oppressés. En fait, je crois que c'était surtout à l'époque le souvenir du chateau de Lord Valentin qui m'avait tenu en éveil. Cette fois-ci, je n'ai peut-être plus les mêmes exigences. Toujours est-il que les rebondissements me semblent au mieux téléphonés, l'intrigue est d'une légèreté toute

arachnéenne, et les personnages ne peuvent même pas soutenir ce récit, tant leurs personnalités sont diaphanes. Au final, ma déception est grande, et je ne peux recommander qu'une chose : passez votre chemin.

(1) Ou roi, si vous préférez

Mike says

The first Majipoor novel was so good that its readers will likely feel emotional attachment to just about any followup set in the same world. That said, Valentine Pontifex is a bit of a letdown. While the book provides a much-welcome reunion with Valentine and friends, his companions are relegated to supporting roles, and Valentine himself becomes annoyingly passive.

Gone is the adventurous optimism of the first novel. Majipoor is beset by a crisis, and the "young, happy world" so lovingly described two books ago is thrown into civil unrest. The marginalized Shapeshifter population is in revolt and disrupting every aspect of human society. A comatose Pontifex provides no support for the relatively new Coronal, whose support staff fights amongst itself. This in itself is a fine backdrop for the story; after all, Majipoor has had it good for millennia, so a little disruption of the established order makes for a good plot conflict.

The problem is that Valentine in this book is a moping, wistful, and largely ineffectual character. He spends most of the book blaming himself and/or the Divine for current events, and only towards the very end kicks into a kind of active mode. It's far too long to wait, and the experience is frustrating to a reader who enjoyed his idealistic heroism in LVC.

Hissune, a minor character from the first novel and the framing device for the second, comes into his own as a secondary protagonist. Seeing him take decisive and bold action is far more satisfying than watching Valentine mope. But Hissune ultimately doesn't get enough spotlight to carry the novel.

Valentine Pontifex does deliver a somewhat satisfying ending, even if it takes way too long to get there. It's recommended for big fans of the earlier Majipoor books - with a caution to keep expectations in check.

Kerry says

I got half way through this and got stuck. I was too worried about what the bad guys were up to and not invested enough in the good guys to keep reading.

I recently read a review that said while this was a solid book, it didn't have the magic of the previous two. I decided to take that, along with the fact I haven't read any of the book for the better part of a year, as good reason to make this officially a DNF.

Shawn Thrasher says

Like he did in Majipoor Chronicles, Silverberg plays around with narrative point of view (although it's always in third person in *Valentine Pontifex*) and even non-linear storytelling (the first part of the book isn't in a specific order, and a scene is told from several view points). The plot moves more slowly than Lord Valentine's Castle, and by book 3 in this series, I think the reader is able to poke some holes in the balloon that is Majipoor. These holes won't necessarily take away from the enjoyment of the book (it's a nice enough end to this part of the trilogy), but I did come away thinking that as fantasy worlds go, Majipoor seemed very sexist (there are no women in any real positions of power, certainly not wielding power in a political way) and alienist (after 10,000+ years, no alien or woman has ever become ruler of this world); the denizens of this planet also seems to have somehow conquered the problems that face enormous empires (British, U.S.S.R.) but without really giving the reader a clue as to how this was done. This book in particular doesn't stand up to a lot of scrutiny; that said, it was fun to hear it read aloud on audio, narrated by many different voice actors. If you like your fantasy with a dash of science fiction, or your science fiction with a spice of fantasy, then Robert Silverberg's Majipoor is for you; just don't start here.

Paul says

A satisfying, high-stakes conclusion to the Valentine trilogy that effectively blends the narrative structures of its previous two books.

Rebecca says

Mmmh. I loved the first two books in the series for the world-building, for the exploring of exotic places with exuberant flora, fauna, and architecture, which made up for weak plots and characterisation. In Valentine Pontifex, however, there's a lot less world-building and more political plot, and it doesn't work well, imo. Most of the world-building is reduced to name-dropping, which there's lots of and which requires that the reader remembers those places well from the previous books, otherwise I imagine it gets very exhausting.

The basic premise(view spoiler) is something I find very interesting, but the execution feels very dry. There are lots of long-winded monologues and boring political conversations, and only towards the end the action picks up a little and was able to properly capture me, but sadly, the ending feels a little sudden.

Lyn says

This was a very Frank Herbert kind of book.

Not that one Grandmaster must adopt the style and tone of another, but I could most definitely see many similarities between this end of a trilogy book and Herbert's Dune.

Silverberg's Majipoor, like the Dune universe created by Frank Herbert, is thousands of years old and the distant, almost mythical origins of "Old Earth" are shrouded in remote collective memory. Silverberg's "water kings" the enormous and mysterious sea dragons are also mindful of Herbert's great sandworms, as is the animist theology built around the great beasts. There was a scene when a poor communicant delivers a holy artifact to the king: a dragon's tooth and that is where I made the connection between the sea dragons and the sandworms.

This is also a very political book, Silverberg delves more deeply into the protocols and constitutional underpinnings of the Majipoor government, as the process of choosing candidates for Coronal amongst the aristocracy and the connections between Pontifex and the other executives within the political structures on Majipoor are explored and made more clear.

Finally, and unfortunately, this book is like the Dune series in that the farther a reader goes from the source book, the more stale the story. This was still entertaining and I have to admit that I really enjoy the complexity of Silverberg's Majipoor creation, but this lacked the originality of the earlier books and somewhat even digressed into melodrama.

The other John says

In *Lord Valentine's Castle*, Valentine, the Coronal of Majipoor, faced a long, hard road to regain his usurped throne. In this sequel, Valentine now finds himself facing some unpleasant duties of his office. One is the threat of war with the native race of Shapeshifters. A Shapeshifter plot is causing havoc in the far reaches of Majipoor and threatening the well being of the realm. Must Valentine, a man of peace, shed blood to save his people? The other duty is that of tradition. It has always been that upon the death of the Pontifex, the Coronal of Majipoor would leave the Castle Mount and take his predecessor's place in the depths of Labyrinth. The Pontifex Tyeveras is ancient, kept alive by machines. With a word, Valentine can release Tyeveras and continue the cycle of things. But he is reluctant to so quickly abandon the world of light and take his role below. Like most sequels, *Valentine Pontifex* is not as good as the original, but it is a great read.

Paul says

I enjoyed this final return to the world of Majipoor. The names alone are worth it - I'm considering naming my next child Voriak if it's a boy, Aximaan Threysz if it's a girl. The story in many ways reminds me of a folk tale or a fairy tale, but with a lot of the edges blunted off. It is not particularly realistic in regards to the nature of government or war or human relations (or, I would assume interspecies relations), but if you are willing to suspend belief on those things, it's a somewhat fun "great man" narrative.

3.5 of 5 stars

Chip Hunter says

I really enjoyed this book, actually thought that it was better than the first two in the series. Hissune and the

other princes on Castle Mount were realistic and cool, Faraataa was a really good (crazy as hell) bad guy, and the sea-dragons were finally revealed as the all-knowing god-like creatures that Silverberg intended for them to be the whole time. Like everybody else, I was disappointed that Valentine didn't toughen up a bit, but it would have changed his character too much and Silverberg's whole message was to promote the power of love, not hate, man! The descriptions and the detail of the world of Majipoor were excellent (and didn't drone on as much as the first book) and the immediate impact of the pestilences and plagues on society was realistically horrible. Something similar would not be out of the question of happening in our world and, unfortunately, I believe that the impact it would have on us would be similar. I look forward to reading the next installment of the Majipoor Saga, the Mountains of Majipoor.

Tristan says

A lovely piece of science fantasy, well-paced and engaging. I didn't like it quite as much as the lush world of Majipoor Chronicles, but it was a fun and interesting fantasy treatment of colonialism and reparation and forgiveness. The struggle with the Metamorphs has come to a head in *Valentine Pontifex*; they have begun to act in an attempt to take back their world from the humans and other aliens that came to Majipoor thousands of years ago. The crops are failing, new and dangerous beasts have appeared, and the world is in turmoil as a group of Metamorphs attempt to drive the rest of the inhabitants of Majipoor either to extinction or departure. Valentine desperately attempts to keep the world together, while he considers the difficult future becoming Pontifex deep in his Labyrinth and how to determine his successor.

I thought that the plotting was well done and it kept me reading. The characters have had ample time to develop, which helped with the relatively large cast and the jumping back and forth between different parts of the world. The treatment of colonialism and forgiveness was perhaps a bit reductive but it was nice to see a story where there was at least something resembling an attempt to make amends to a colonized people.
