



Land of Shadows

Priscilla Royal

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A royal birth, a nobleman's death, a scarlet woman's murder...

In March, 1279, Edward I takes a break from hammering the Welsh and bearing down on England's Jews to vacation in Gloucestershire. The royal party breaks the journey at Woodstock Manor. And there one life begins as Queen Eleanor labors to birth a new daughter, and one draws to an end when apoplexy fells Baron Adam Wynethorpe.

Hotfoot to the baron's deathbed comes his elder son, Hugh, a veteran of Edward I's Crusades, who can't shake off the battle horrors he's witnessed. The baron's daughter, Prioress Eleanor, has already arrived, bringing along both her sub-infirmary, Sister Anne, and the monk, Brother Thomas, to tend her father. Awaiting Hugh is his bastard son, Richard, a youth filled with rebellion...and a secret.

The royal manor is packed with troubling guests including a sinister priest, an elderly Jewish mother from nearby Oxford mourning a son hanged for the treason of coin-clipping, contentious and greedy courtiers, and a lusty wife engaged with more than one lover. Quite soon, the wife is found hanged. Eleanor and Sister Anne persuade the High Sheriff of Berkshire that Mistress Hawis' death was not a suicide. In fact, many at the manor had reason to wish Hawis dead. One suspect is...Richard.

Land of Shadows Details

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From Reader Review Land of Shadows for online ebook

Paula Mildenhall says

In her wonderful medieval mystery series, Priscilla Royal portrays a world that is both alien to our modern sensibilities and one we can identify with on so many levels. There is a murder and a mystery to be solved, but, as ever, there is so much more to these books. With prose that makes your heart sing at the pure joy of words and insightful observations on the human condition, this novel is a delight.

"I must beg your forgiveness. If one man condemns everyone for the sins of some, does that mean I should do the same? It is wrong, yet I have just committed that error. You are a rare man, here to seek truth and not convenient conclusions."

The deep scars to the body and soul carried by those who have soldiered in far away lands. The lives of those who we think are different to us but at their core are just the same. The evils of avarice and the sins committed to attain more. These are just just some of the themes addressed amongst a compelling narrative. Familial relationships strained and healed. Power and the abuse in hierarchical orders. Corruption, greed and the willingness to sacrifice the innocent. This novel may be short but it has great depth.

A wonderful read. If you are familiar with this series you will thoroughly enjoy this latest instalment. If you are new to the works of Priscilla Royal, do yourself a favour and add them to your wish list straight away.

Vicki Cline says

Since this is an even-numbered book in the series, the action takes place away from Tyndal Priory. Prioress Eleanor, Brother Thomas and Sister Anne have come to a manor near Oxford because Eleanor's father has had a stroke and is near death. Soon after their arrival, the nude body of a woman is found hanging in her room. Sister Anne determines it was murder and not suicide. Eleanor's nephew had lost his virginity to her the night before, and thought he saw his father come to her room, so he confesses to the murder. All the Tyndal folk do what they can to disprove this confession and are helped by the sinister Father Eliduc, who had saved Thomas from prison years earlier and used him over the years to spy on various people. Other suspects are a Jewish grandmother and her granddaughters, who were sheltering in the manor overnight, after her son was unjustly hanged for coin clipping (i.e. shaving the edges of coins to collect the metal). I always have a hard time discerning the culprit in these books, but the characters are interesting.

Tracey says

Note to self: always check a book's position in series before requesting from Netgalley ... I didn't realize that this was the *twelfth book* in its series ... That may account for the feeling of being lost at sea that prevailed through much of the reading. Obviously, I haven't read any of the rest of the books, so my opinions are all based on taking this by itself.

Have you ever noticed how once you learn a new word you seem to see it everywhere? This book does something like that, only different: once I noticed that characters had blushed three times in just a handful of pages, for odd or silly reasons, it seemed like that was all I could see as I read on. Not just blushes – lots of characters' faces turned all kinds of colors.

Thomas flushed.
Thomas felt his face grow hot.
Her face turned pink at his kindness
He blushed.
Eleanor flushed with anger.
Walter's face now faded to a dull pink.
face flushed with shame.
Richard turned as pale as milk.
the heightened color of his lord's face,
his face turned a light shade of purple.
The knight turned pale.
The man was as pale as moonlight.
He flushed
Maynard blushed again,
He turned purple with profound humiliation.

I don't think that's all of them, but it's most of 'em. And it's plenty. When something like that recurs over and over, it might be a sign that the writer needs to find a new way to express her characters' emotions.

I liked the story – murder and anti-Semitism in 1279 England, and ... well, yes, Goodreads description, of course this is going to bring Brother Cadfael to mind when it's set in a medieval English abbey, though I would have gone with Sister Frevisse. But I found the details confusing at times; this time my excuse for choosing a book in the middle (late middle) of a series – did I mention that this is #12? – is that I missed that bit in the Netgalley description. It was obvious – there were half-formed references throughout the book that obviously meant nothing to me.

This was another book that took a lot longer to read than it ought to have. The muddle left by my cluelessness of the previous eleven books' events, along with some slightly clunky writing and a heaping helping of head-hopping to add to the confusion ... Someday I would be interested in tracking down the other eleven and starting at the beginning. I don't recommend starting here.

The usual disclaimer: I received this book via Netgalley for review.

Christy says

An enjoyable medieval mystery set in the 13th century, at the time of Edward I and his Queen, Eleanor. Queen Eleanor is giving birth again, something she did rather often, so royalty and nobility have gathered. Baron Wynethorpe, suffering from a stroke, is also at the manor and his passing explains the presence of his son, daughter and grandson. These two events have brought together a great deal of people from all walks of life, and there are several secrets, intrigues and quarrels, both political and religious. When Mistress Hawis is found hanged and the Sheriff (after some persuasion) agrees it's not a suicide, an investigation must take place, with a whole host of suspicious characters available.

This book was immersive, taking me back to the political machinations and cultural problems of the 13th century. At a time when injustice was everywhere, I enjoyed following the mystery and unraveling what had happened. A thoroughly enjoyable medieval whodunit, with a complex societal dynamic.

Cel Jel says

For a gentle very interesting read the books of Priscilla Royal are great. Gentle in the sense that they do not include horrid descriptions of violence in the deaths that occur, but they allow you to put your own imagery to fill in the gaps.

This book is good to read.

Michelle L says

Although many recommend against starting the series with this, twelfth , installment, my issues are with the telling. Way too much endless conversation, more affirmation of faith than necessary, even with church characters. I like character driven stories, but despite stylish writing, the characters and story seemed parked.

Kathleen says

" A royal birth, a nobleman s death, a scarlet woman's murder In March, 1279, Edward I takes a break from hammering the Welsh and bearing down on England's Jews to vacation in Gloucestershire. The royal party breaks the journey at Woodstock Manor. And there one life begins as Queen Eleanor labors to birth a new daughter, and one draws to an end when apoplexy fells Baron Adam Wynethorpe."

Priscilla Royal's Medieval mysteries are many layered and complex and this one is no exception. Prioress Eleanor, Baron Adam's daughter with her entourage which includes Sister Anne and Brother Thomas are at Woodstock at her father's deathbed. Enter her brother Hugh and his son Richard who get enmeshed with a series of murders, involving the Jewish community and members of the King's household knights.

I received a copy of this book through NetGalley and it is a series so pay attention to spoiler alert.

Always a super read with mystery and injustice entwined for the principals to unravel. Recommended for all.

Kathy says

I found this at my library and finally caught up with the series, though reading this one out of sync. I have to say I did not enjoy this one at the same level as all the other books. Sister Eleanor and Brother Thomas are attending Baron Wynethorpe, Eleanor's father, during his waning days. Eleanor's brother is on his way after the Holy Wars with King Edward and has to deal with his son's situation, a false murder confession, as well as the death of his father. There are several historical topics featured in this, one being the king's treatment of Jews.

Gretchen says

I received an ARC of this novel from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

The Medieval Mystery series is currently one of my favorite mystery series. The author manages to write with a consistency I find extremely appealing. There was one novel that fell well below my expectations but the overall quality of the books in this series is quite good. This latest addition to the series does not disappoint.

Part of what I find so appealing about this series are the characters. The exclusion of Crowner Ralf from this novel was a tiny letdown. Prioress Eleanor continues to grow and it seems her feelings toward Brother Thomas have finally calmed to the point where they are no longer a distraction, not only to Eleanor but also the reader.

With this novel, I felt the author did an excellent job capturing the attitude of the era towards the Jewish population in England. (view spoiler)

I look forward to the future adventures of Prioress Eleanor, Brother Thomas, and the community of Tyndale.

Albert says

A terrific mystery set in medieval times. Royal delivers another good read in this series.

Jill Meyer says

A good novel of historical fiction can teach as well as entertain. And that's certainly evident in Priscilla Royal's "Medieval Mystery" series. Featuring Prioress Eleanor of Tyndale, Brother Thomas, and other relatives and religious, the books are somewhat less "mysteries" and more about life in Edward I's England. Her latest, "Land of Shadows", has the requisite murders but is much more about relationships and duties (to Crown and Church and Family). Anybody buying "Land of Shadows" for the "action" may be sorely disappointed.

Priscilla Royal has written about 12 books in the series, and I think I've read most of them. They are all good reading and often bring up things other mystery writers don't bother with. In this book, Royal writes about the Jewish population in medieval England. This book is set in 1279, and English Jews faced an uncertain future. They were eventually ordered out of England in 1290, but trouble had been afoot long before that. The book begins at Woodstock Manor, where Prioress Eleanor has come, along with several other members of her order, to visit her dying father. Also there is Queen Eleanor, who is giving birth to her 11-teenth child. A raid is conducted on the small Jewish community of Oxford by the King's men, trying to root out the "coin clipping" said to be occurring in the community. (Look up "coin clipping" on Wiki if you want to know the definition.) During the raid, a Jewish doctor was falsely accused of the act and is hanged, leaving his mother and his two young daughters. The grandmother and granddaughters travel to Woodstock Manor to attempt to talk to Queen Eleanor and possibly get help from her in order to emigrate to France.

Prioress Eleanor is again at the center of the action and agrees to look for the murderer, as the bodies pile up. Her brother Hugh is there with his illegitimate son, who he's raising to go into the army with him. Richard FitzHugh ("Fitz" in a name connotes a "by-blow" birth.) is accused of one of the murders and his aunt sets forth to exonerate him before the bedridden Queen Eleanor finds out about the murders under her roof. IF the plot sounds a bit convoluted and the characters numerous, it is and they are. However, most of the readers of the book will have read Royal's books in the series before.

I am not recommending "Land of Shadows" to a first-time reader. He or she should read a couple of earlier books first and find out about Eleanor, Brother Thomas, as well as the Abbey at Tyndal. (Brother Thomas has a particularly interesting back-story.) For those who are old readers, I think you'll like the latest in the series.

Paula says

I listened to the audio version and my rating is no fault of the reader. This rating simply reflects my enjoyment of this book. I have read all the other books in this series but this one was in my opinion a mess.

Lori says

It's hard to maintain the momentum of a series 10+ books into it, but Royal manages to do so. The focus of this novel is death, as always, but it also explores the subject in contexts other than that of murder - Prioress Eleanor's family undergoes some tumultuous upheavals that are very realistically and compassionately explored.

Susan in NC says

2.5 stars, which means it was ok, almost good on my personal rating scale. I've read every book in this series and find it is hit or miss for me - sometimes Royal presents a good murder mystery and sometimes it's rather obvious who the villain is (as it was here), sometimes the story moves at a relatively good clip and sometimes the pacing is glacial and the dialogue is stultifying and clumsy. Unfortunately, this book, after several more gripping outings, falls into the second category.

I am drawn back to this series by the characters - Prioress Eleanor of Tyndal, her monk Brother Thomas, and Sister Ann, her infirmarian. The three have become a crime-fighting trio of great repute, and Eleanor has a sainted reputation after receiving a holy vision several books back. The three have been called to Woodstock Manor after Eleanor's father, Baron Adam, collapses and may be dying. The King has moved on but Queen Eleanor is still in residence recovering from childbirth when one of her ladies in waiting is found hanging in her chambers, an apparent suicide - or is it?

There are a lot of characters floating through this mystery, largely because it takes place during a royal vacation to Woodstock; rather than enriching the mystery or creating a sense of urgency, the crowded field causes the story to get bogged down in rather clumsy red herrings. I was also irritated by an occasionally recurring flaw I find in Royal's writing - clumsy, clunky, repetitive dialogue. Granted, given the medieval setting, characters should address each other formally and reflect openly on God, Satan and imps of evil, but

it gets old when unrelieved by the usual humor and warm friendship often expressed between Eleanor, Thomas, Ann and their fellow religious. Here, of course, Eleanor's father is gravely ill, her beloved nephew is a suspect in the murder, and her elder brother appears to be suffering from what we would call PTSD, causing Eleanor to fear for his soul; understandably not a lot of cause for humor. It seems anytime the group and storyline move away from Tyndal Priory, it's a crapshoot whether the mystery will work and be satisfying!

SPOILER ALERT: I will say, the chapter where Eleanor's father dies was one of the most touching I have read; having recently lost my own mother, I have hoped and prayed her passing was as blissful and peaceful and this scene had me in tears. For that, Priscilla Royal, I thank you.**

I will continue to read this series for the beloved characters and the depth of research Royal brings to her mysteries and portrayal of medieval religious life. I hope we are back to Tyndal for the next book!

Rose Lambert says

Another great read

Again the author takes the reader on a wild ride while sprinkling in actual facts about the time in history.
