



The Secrets of Shadowcrest

Lance McColgan

Cabalian Games

(364pp)

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An honorable knight prevails against considerable odds in the exciting fantasy novel The Secrets of Shadowcrest.

In Lance McColgan's busy fantasy novel *The Secrets of Shadowcrest*, a steadfast knight forms unexpected friendships while on a quest.

In this standalone but series-opening adventure novel, a strained stalemate between two heirs to the throne leaves England on the brink of civil war. The more respected heir, Henry, tasks his most trusted knight, William, with a dangerous mission: William must go to Cabalia, a mystical island, to trade a glowing blue stone for armor crafted from the island's prized metal. He hopes to do so without attracting much attention.

But before William connects with an alchemist, Brinwin, on the island, someone combusts. The event forces the two to flee across a peculiar land marked by magic, monsters, and political strife. William also forms a burgeoning relationship with Brinwin's sister, Zala; both are driven to honor paternal figures, and this shared sense of duty compels them to enter dangerous situations quite often.

William narrates. Though he's trained as a knight with a record in combat, he is at first naive about the world beyond the kingdom of his origins. His more ordinary past clashes with the fantastical realities of Cabalia, which inspires intrigue and wonder in him. Indeed, the island's history seems separate from that of the medieval European land he left behind; its five kingdoms bicker and wage quiet wars against each other.

On Cabalia, strange creatures and unusual magic abound, including ancient serpents, near-unstoppable shadow creatures, and beings of immeasurable power. Despite the prevalence of such challenges, William and his allies manage to outsmart and outfight each dangerous being by thin margins—at times, improbably so. And despite it all, William moves through this challenging world with a sense of focus: he remains determined to follow Brinwin and fulfill his duty to the English king regardless of what obstacles he faces.

William's exciting encounters are punctuated by tender moments during which he connects with others. Here and elsewhere, the novel becomes crowded, though. Indeed, another subplot involves Brinwin's hilarity-marked history with the law and connection to a beat officer, Telnis, who's infuriated by the corruption spreading through the island. Brinwin goads, drugs, and traps Telnis, and plentiful banter and an explosion ensue because of the two.

Introducing a fantastical realm that's ripe for future adventures, the compelling fantasy novel *The Secrets of Shadowcrest* follows a moral knight as he traverses a corrupt magical realm.

JOHN M. MURRAY (June 4, 2024)

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