

The Sorcerer Queen

Xianna Michaels

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The lilting tale of a kingdom haunted by an ancient curse, Xianna Michaels's *The Sorcerer Queen* is a captivating volume of narrative poetry, recounted in the spirit of traveling minstrels and wandering troubadours singing legends of old.

The aging King of Caravaille is determined to name an heir from among his three nephews in hopes of sparing his subjects from the curse of Oriana, long the cause of chaos and bloodshed surrounding each succession. With the aid of his trusted adviser, Lord Shin, he realizes that he will need to seek out the mysterious Sorcerer Queen and elusive Goldspun Weaver to unravel the secrets of the tragic prophecy and ensure peace for Caravaille.

The stage is set with five acts and multiple scenes, creating ambience with descriptions ranging from moonlit gardens to the king's privy chambers and royal throne room. A cast of players is listed prior to the entrance of "The Bard," very much akin to a theatrical production.

The entire epyllion is done in creatively positioned and oriented quatrains, with each double-page spread functioning to form visually fluid shapes, patterns, and designs. Pen-and-ink drawings by Michaels are scattered throughout, adding a touch of whimsical detail with depictions of crowns, knights, and courtyards.

The curse itself doubles as a riddle with clues for its reversal. King Sagan ruminates extensively with his royal advisor, Lord Shin; they humorously attempt to decipher the imagery and proclamations. Complete in eight stanzas, the curse is periodically quoted in a chorus-like manner—though Sagan, much to Shin's consternation, often passes out before the recitation has been completed:

*Shin slowly closed the ancient book,
So moved that he could weep,
But when he turned to look at Sagan—
The king was fast asleep!*

Individual stanzas utilize alternating rhymes and maintain an upbeat, rolling cadence that builds suspense and urgency while retaining a sense of fun and excitement. There is a smooth, lyrical rhythm to the quatrains; each functions either as a complete thought or is linked to others with natural pauses. This rhythm is occasionally interrupted by midline breaks.

Sagan is a well-meaning ruler, but he is quick to make up his mind and slow to change it; he is unintentionally comical, if sincere, in his efforts. His nephews are likewise pleasantly agreeable; it is not immediately clear which will break the curse or why the Sorcerer Queen is determined that it must be one over another. As the story is consistently fast paced throughout, answers and resolutions are quickly realized.

A refreshing blend of classic narrative poetry and modern style and creativity, Xianna Michaels's *The Sorcerer Queen* is a versatile gem—perfect for reciting, reading in tandem, performing with a group, or simply enjoying as a fantasy adventure.

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (July 17, 2018)

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