



## Shadows of the Realm

*Dionne Lister*

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This is an epic fantasy adventure book with lots of action, intrigue, creatures and dragons, for young adult to adult.

Bronwyn and Blayke are two strangers being drawn into the same war. Their world is facing invasion from the Third Realm. While they move unknowingly toward each other, they are watched, hunted, and sabotaged. When the Dragon God interferes, it seems their world, Talia, will succumb to the threat. Can they learn enough of the tricks of the Realms before it's too late, or will everything they love be destroyed?

The young Realmists' journey pushes them away from all they've known, to walk in the shadows toward Vellonia, city of the dragons, where an even darker shadow awaits.

This book's been given the Grub Street Reads seal of approval.

## Shadows of the Realm Details

Date : Published April 24th 2012 by Dionne Lister (first published April 12th 2012)

ISBN :

Author : Dionne Lister

Format : ebook 474 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Dragons, Young Adult, Magic

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## From Reader Review Shadows of the Realm for online ebook

### Evgeny says

Bronwyn and Blayke are two realist (local mages) apprentices of their distant relatives. A great threat is coming to the land of Talia which forces their masters to go on a long and perilous journey. It sounds cliché, but I cannot say anything more without giving away some spoilers, but I will say that the plot is not what I made it sound like.

This is the author's first major work and as such it has some rough edges, but nothing too serious. On the positive side, the magic system is very interesting and original. It takes a while for the plot to get moving, but once it does it gets very interesting; I was not able to put it down to go to sleep until I finished it. I also like some of the details that get overlooked in a lot of books, like the fact that when somebody is forced to kill a human being in self-defense it really leaves a long-lasting impression.

The characters range from excellent leaving breathing 3-dimensional almost real people to somewhat less developed ones. The two teens I mentioned in the beginning seem moody at times, but considering their age this is realistic and justifiable.

I already mentioned some rough edges. As an example the scene of a dragon sitting on a bench somehow does not compute for me. I also noticed some minor formatting problems in my ebook.

All in all, a very solid effort which made me want to read the second book and which deserves 4-star rating.

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### John Dolan says

It is some time since I read a fantasy book in the Tolkein vein. While I am a longtime admirer of the sword and sorcery writings of Michael Moorcock, Tolkein himself has always left me cold: impressive if verbose world-forming but too many seemingly endless journeys and (at least to my mind) laughably naive and one-dimensional female characters.

So I must admit, I approached Dionne Lister's "Shadows of the Realm" with a degree of trepidation. Many of the elements of the Tolkein epic feature strongly: the disorganised, squabbling, ill-prepared forces of 'good', the undertaking of a quest, rites of passage for young, inexperienced protagonists, 'wise' elders, mythical creatures and a ruthless, bloodthirsty adversary.

However, where Ms Lister scores over Tolkein for me is the way she vividly creates her world of Talia with a few deft strokes. Her characters are people we can identify with, possessing recognisable human failings and frailties – and she creates 3D female characters (some of whom are happily rather snarky). They are 'real' individuals, not 'representatives of races' imbued with generic characteristics.

The story moves along at a cracking pace and the author skilfully structures the progress and interaction of the various strands of the story. The writing is tight and literary in tone and requires the reader's concentration. Although I was reading fantasy it certainly did not feel like YA material.

The novel ends on a cliffhanger – well, several actually – and there is clearly a lot more story to unfold

presumably over several other books.

In summary, I'm a convert. Well played, Ms Lister.

Look after my sword, would you, while I settle down to read the second instalment? And keep your eyes open for flesh-eating Gormons while you're at it.

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### **Cats of Ulthar February Weird Fiction says**

This debut novel is the first of a series (The Circle of Talia) and is a smooth-reading, delightful, high fantasy. Even readers who don't usually head for the fantasy shelves can find much to delight in here, as did I. The writing is excellent, and author Dionne Lister deserves much more than five stars for her ability with lyrical description, which makes the reading flow so well.

The characters are superbly delineated, and the action is realistic and intriguing. A good balance is achieved between destiny and free will in the lives of the characters, an effect not always managed in fantasy stories. The world-building is also very accomplished. In fact, I encourage readers to keep an eye on author Dionne Lister and anticipate, as I am, the next installments in The Circle of Talia series.

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### **Johanna says**

I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

I think Shadows of the Realm is a very entertaining read. As I progressed through the book, I wanted to learn more about the many characters that were introduced. I think the fantasy world in which the Realm was set was different and interesting, and the interweaving of the various strands of character action made sense. I liked the fact that there were both human and otherworldly villains in the story.

While I am certainly not an expert writer myself, it seemed that the transitions from one piece of story to another jumped kind of abruptly at some points in the book. I guess what I mean is that the flow of storytelling is a bit uneven in places. One thing I was happy to see is unlike some other indie novels that I have read on my Kindle, the book contains few, if any, grammar mistakes. If they are there, they are certainly small enough not to distract a math teacher from the story.

Ms. Lister should be very proud to have produced such an excellent first start for her fiction career. Overall, I would rate this book at 3.5 stars, and I am looking forward to learning what happens to Bronwyn, Blayne, and their companions in the sequel.

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### **Abigail says**

Dragons are one of those creatures of fantasy I have always had an attraction to. I drew them, collected

cards with images on them and instead of reading Judy Blume at the age of 11 I was reading Anne *Dragonrider* series right along with my horror books. Sure, an odd duck for a preteen girl, but than again ... I also played hostel take overs with my brother's GI JOE with the Barbie collection with the occasional Jedi Mind trick of having Barbie serve GI JOE tea (again odd duck=me). I played Dungeon and Dragon's at lunch with the chess nerds and did not bother worrying THAT much about lipgloss (I did but I was more excited about the new sparkly set of purple dice I found at the comic shop!).

"Here be Dragons".~ Early European map makers' warning

There have always been dragons, and not just on the pages of fantasy books. I would like to think that someday we will discover bones of a real dragon which make the early map maker's warning be true. But in the case of Dionne Lister's books, these dragons are both terrifying as well as loveable.

One critic claimed she thought she was reading high fantasy and found she wasn't. Obviously does not know the definition of high fantasy. Dionne Lister complies to all the aspects of what high fantasy is suppose to do. It has characters who are young and not worldly. There are wise mentors with mysterious pasts raising and guiding the youths into the future. A way of life and world is in need of saving and only a few can do it and are prophesied too. There is magic all around and in every part, not just with a wave of a wand or a wiggle of a nose but in the prose. Mystery and darkness, good and evil are present and at odds. Honor, dishonor and a past event which changed the world and paths of all, happened at one point affecting the main players. And the big part?? DRAGONS!! This time they are not just hanging on a wall or in legends, the story is steeped and truly centers around them! How does it make it any different and why should you try this series out?

...these same dragons had also started rumours that some of them occasionally liked to eat people. Zim, however, was not one of these dragons." - *Shadows of the Realm - on the prince of the dragons.*

I would like to say Dionne waved her magic wand and sent a big bad Dragon to threaten to clear my McDonald's of workers and prevent my occasional feasting on nuggets, but the truth is she wrote an epic fantasy that was not an 800 page tome with so many convoluted names and so many different storylines my 13 year-old, as smart as he is would be put off! Don't get me wrong, I occasionally live for those tomes, I am a huge fan of David Eddings and Robert Jordan and Zelazny but the themes are not approachable for all the ages. Then she comes up with these absolutely beautiful images, the descriptions are not that of a police blotter. She is able to say how someone looks and how they are as a person all in a couple sentences.

"...had a short white hair; a long white beard adorned his lined face. He exuded the calm and mystery of a still lake. His dark, intelligent eyes were full of life, twinkling with the promise of jokes yet to be told, mischief yet to be unleashed." *Shadows of the Realm - on Agmunsten*

Dionne's story and characters are written into a realm that is approachable and readable for anyone from the age of 12 to 99. Everything which is taken to be the conventions of an epic fantasy novel is here but written with the young adult in mind. She has woven the characters and stories in with humor and given her readers real people to believe in and cheer for. Her teens in this coming of age are real, they are moody, snarky, occasionally rude and in need of discipline and guidance all the time. They are not savants in the realm of propriety and manners, they are like the same gifted children you have in your house, their appetites are bottomless, they huff and puff and think the world revolves around them They grow, learn and realize as the stories go on the world revolves around everyone and more than that, especially in this series. Like any good

fantasy, there is much more than meets the eye. These things alone makes the story a wonderful read for young adults! She makes the dragon's a little over the top, superior and full of pomp and circumstance, but best of all, she makes them funny and likeable.

There are some very real and serious situations that come up that are intense and frightening, I found myself holding my breath at times waiting to find out what the story held for the characters I was so invested in. From the very first sentence I fell in love with a young boy who was interested in catching frogs yet who dreamt of a frightening creature threatening his life and following with the introduction to our female teenager who was going to throw herself off a cliff because of being forced to leave the only life she had known.

Epic is right, over the top and yet at the same time real. A teacher once told me a reader does not get invested in the story, they get invested and care about the characters, the story just follows behind them. This was certainly true with both of these books. I can't even put my finger on one specific thing she has done, it is everything from her wonderful colorful writing to her believable loveable and despicable characters. I laughed out loud, I sobbed with grief and sighed with relief all the while unable to stop reading (I am not kidding, go check my sharing on this book). The magic system is original and touching, the evil is dark, the good are not perfect and even though there are gruesome scenes of real horror these just lead to it all being an amazing tale.

This is the first book, and it has an incredibly intense cliffhanger. I was so glad I had book two. You will find a place in your heart for so many of these characters, I wonder though, which one is yours?

Dionne has managed to take all these lovely ingredients, bringing them together in this series to create a n incredible feast. These books are not a box of chicken nuggets more like a love pair of roast pheasants.. or goat.. or the whole cow slaughtered in award winning BBQ. My only issue? She has not written book three yet...

((I received this book as a gift when I was sick last year from the author, I ended up buying it on Kindle because I wanted to own both as a pair after reading 15% of this one and falling in love. I never promised a review but I am so glad I did read and review it, it is an amazing fantasy read!)

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### **Julie Powell says**

I won a copy of this book and yes, I was lucky. The story is steeped in imagination, magic and enchantment, with characters that bring it alive in the most realistic way.

The writing is superb, with wonderfully rich descriptions, creating fantastic detailed worlds. The building of characters was excellent, so that readers have no choice but to care about what happens to them...rooting for the good and hating the bad - and with the right degree of uncertainty.

I also found the story original in parts and was fascinated by the ideas of several realms and how they could be used for 'magic'. The 'bonding' sequences were particularly intriguing and were portrayed amazingly well.

The only downside was that I will have to wait until the next book to find out what happens!

I do not give spoilers, but will say that overall this book hooked me from start and I didn't want to put it

down - an excellent tale that I highly recommend.

Please hurry with the next installment :)

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### **Ben Ditmars says**

Author Dionne Lister has created something wholly unique and unexpected in her debut novel, *Shadows of the Realm*. The words are as dazzling as the cover. I found her use of realms and magic, a fresh perspective in the age old struggle between good and evil. The author reimagines dragons brilliantly, making them sentient, thoughtful creatures the equal of humans in compassion and rage. But, more than that her understanding of the period (that feels long ago) draws you in and won't let go. Lister knows horses and fighting like the back of her hand. Despite the higher price tag \$4.99, this is a book you don't want to miss. It's worth every cent.

I had few issues, loving most of the book. There are some instances of passive voice, but it does not affect the reading. The only thing I really would have changed would have to be the antagonist called Gormons. They were frightening enough but I would have liked to see more complexity. The "good" characters are well-rounded, having vices and conflict with one another and I guess, though Gormons are "evil" I would have liked to see something deeper in them. But there's always the sequel for that, which, I am very excited to get and devour like a hungry Gormon.

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### **Brian Randleas says**

Wow! Let me say again. Wow!

It is not often that you find talent stepping out of the shadows to stand beside authors such as Lewis, Tolkien, or McCaffrey. I will not be surprised to see Lister join the ranks of the great fantasy writers who have become household names.

Dionne's new book *Shadows of the Realm* starts with a flourish immersing the reader into action from the start and keeping pace throughout the story. Intrigue is your constant companion as you travel the long dusty roads of Talia with Bronwyn and Blayke, two young Realmists' who must leave childhood behind to face adventures ahead.

What lies ahead? Dragons of course!

Lister moves her characters ahead at a fast pace being chased by unseen assassins and hidden plots to prevent them from fulfilling their quest to save the world from impending evil.

I found the characters in this story not only believable but very likable. The story line was fresh and exciting, and ended much to soon leaving me anticipating book two.

-Brian Randleas

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### **Derek McPhee says**

Fantasy is trite.

I carried this opinion with me for a number of years, despite (in my youth) being a very avid reader of the genre. Something happened, as I got older, that left me soured and embittered on the genre as a whole. It was

all the same. You changed the characters, you changed the themes, but as a general rule you could count on a number of things being universally true about all fantasy novels:

- All stories were about the youthful and inexperienced.
- There was always a wise old mentor.
- Dragons entered, somewhere, in the story (if in no other place, heraldry).
- Magic was present.
- Mysteries dripped from the pages.

Let me say something that, while reading *Shadows of the Realm*: These things are, while in many respects tropes, quintessential to the proper telling of a fantasy novel. That is, in the end, why we read them. What is unfortunately true for most fantasy novels, is that these points of interest in novels are rarely handled well and, as a result, feel abused and boring.

Dionne Lister has found a way, quite a mystery to me, to make the stories of these plot points actually quite fresh. There is a vigour to the writing styles and a sort of, unabashed reality, that (despite being in the fantasy genre) makes the story feel very real. Perhaps it is the unique way in which she's created the magic system for her world, or perhaps it's the way in which the characters feel like they have been there, living their lives, before our intrusion, but whatever the case may be... The story is enthralling and highly reminiscent of why I loved fantasy novels as a child.

I hope that the author does not dawdle... I am waiting for the sequel with no small degree of excitement and interest (to a minor extent, annoyance that it hasn't already been finished).

Highly recommended, you should have read it yesterday.

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### **Amber says**

Dionne Lister's *Shadows of the Realm* starts out with a scene that grabs you, and does not let go, even after you've finished reading. Exceptional in the fact that it is a completely unique novel, Lister creates a new world that is so realistic, it makes the reader want to grab a ticket and head over for a nice permanent vacation. I fell in love with the characters, and was disappointed when the novel ended, and am ready for more. I will be impatiently waiting the rest of the books in the series, and am desperate for more!

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### **Helen White says**

I picked up this book knowing a little of what to expect, dragons, adventure, good vs evil. I started reading and then could not put the book down until I had finished. I lost track of time reading it.

The book centers around a secret group called Realmists, possessed of magical powers who are sworn to protect their world, Talia, from the evil race that exists in another realm. This race once lived on Talia and were banished, but are determined to return.

The book contains a surprising variety of characters, ranging from teenagers through to adults and magicians of advanced age. And of course the dragons, who in this case are portrayed as being on the side of the realm. The dragon characterisation is fascinating. The words used to draw a picture of their intelligence, strength,

and their nature are so powerful that the reader has absolutely no difficulty in accepting them as part of the world we are drawn into. Equally the human characters are drawn as individuals, each with their own backgrounds, faults, opinions and reactions. Again it makes it very easy to find yourself drawn into their world.

Realists can bond with one selected animal, a *creatura*, and even these are well drawn with a great variety of animals used. I found it a pleasant surprise to be able to read about, as it were, familiars who range from rats to panthers. Another pleasant surprise is the way that the *Creatura*'s point of view is also presented.

All through the book I felt an odd sense of familiarity. I could not pin down why at first, it was not that I had seen the plot or any major plot devices used before. Some elements of the world drawn can be found in other fantasy novels, for example familiars, but that was not it either. In the end I simply had to conclude that it was due to the way the writing drew me in and made me feel a part of the book from start to finish.

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### **Justin Bog says**

Dionne Lister's first fantasy novel introduces a new and original voice in epic fantasy, and even though the book is labeled a YA novel the story gives plenty of time to develop the adult characters, who become richer with intrigue . . . I'd say the book is successful at reaching for audiences of any age, YA or adult. Some of the adult themes and horror elements are suitably gruesome, the villains depraved in their single-minded search for sustenance. I won't talk about the plot, beyond the need for the disparate characters, some infused with magic as realists, to take a journey. Great for a sequel, none of the plot threads reach a conclusion, which is a big risk for a long novel with many characters to keep track of throughout the narrative twists and turns -- so much so that I felt the book was a cliffhanger episode like the weekly serials of old where you'd have to "tune in next week" to see how someone escapes. By the way, I can't wait for the next installment. I am hooked. There is a great voice throughout, and sense of humor too, the same kind of droll and dry humor that I relish -- I would love for this voice, and the writing voice, to grow stronger in future volumes since the original fantasy elements and the dialogue of the dragons, animals, and magical age-defying realists make *Shadows of the Realm* a pleasurable read.

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### **David Lowry says**

"Shadows of the Realm" for me was a good book and kept me enraptured enough to not want to put it down. It's also the first novel I have read fully on my iPad which is saying something as I much prefer the feel of a book in my hand and all other novels on my iPad have remained unread.

This is author Dionne Lister's first novel and it is a good first book. It did keep me engaged and wondering what would happen next and it was fairly original which can be hard in a fantasy novel. I don't remember any other fantasy novel that I have read channeling "magic" from other dimensions or have a "GPS" ability to read where characters are located throughout the world based on their body signature.

There was decent character development, a good plot although I wasn't totally sure of the big picture and a good pace through out the book. What I did like about this book was it didn't feel like I had read it before in some other novel. I didn't get any real sense of I know what is coming next or typical character traits that all "heroes" tend to have. Dionne did a great job of giving us something fresh and a feeling of something

unique. It is an easy read and you don't get lost in time changes and so much detail that if you don't stay on top of your reading, you forget important parts.

My only knocks are not enough political intrigue within the nobility, a quick and unexplained disappearance that I am sure will make itself known in later novels and I don't get enough sense of dread of the consequences if the party fails to accomplish its mission which we never really find out about its purpose in this first novel. I guess that could be interpreted as a good way to bring the reader back for the following books.

All in all a good first novel and I am planning on reading the follow up as the story is pretty solid and the author kept it intriguing enough in general to enjoy the adventure.

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### **Maria says**

This is a fabulous fantasy tale. I'm so glad it's the first in a series because I really didn't want the story to end. There is a race against time to stop the evil inhabitants of the Third Realm destroying the world of Talia. Bronwyn and Blayke, two young realists, have been enlisted to help The Circle in the struggle to save Talia.

The book is well constructed showing the two young realist's journeys; Bronwyn is travelling with her aunt, Avruellen, while Blayke is travelling separately with his uncle, Arcon.

There are many dangers along the way and lots of adventure.

The writing really drew me into the story and I could easily imagine what the different places and characters described in the book looked like. The storytelling is exemplary and contains many insightful observations about human nature and life.

I would recommend this book to young adults and adults who enjoy getting lost in a great story.

This is an outstanding debut novel. Dionne Lister is a very talented writer. I look forward to reading more of her work.

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### **Charity Parkerson says**

Your fantasy shelf will dance with joy when you bring home this epic fantasy. Beautiful world building caused everything to seem so realistic that I was not once pulled from the story. A story that was filled with magic and dragons. If you enjoy fantasy then you will love this book. You will feel as if you've made some new friends and when you lift your head from this book you'll be surprised to find no magical beasts sitting at your feet.

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