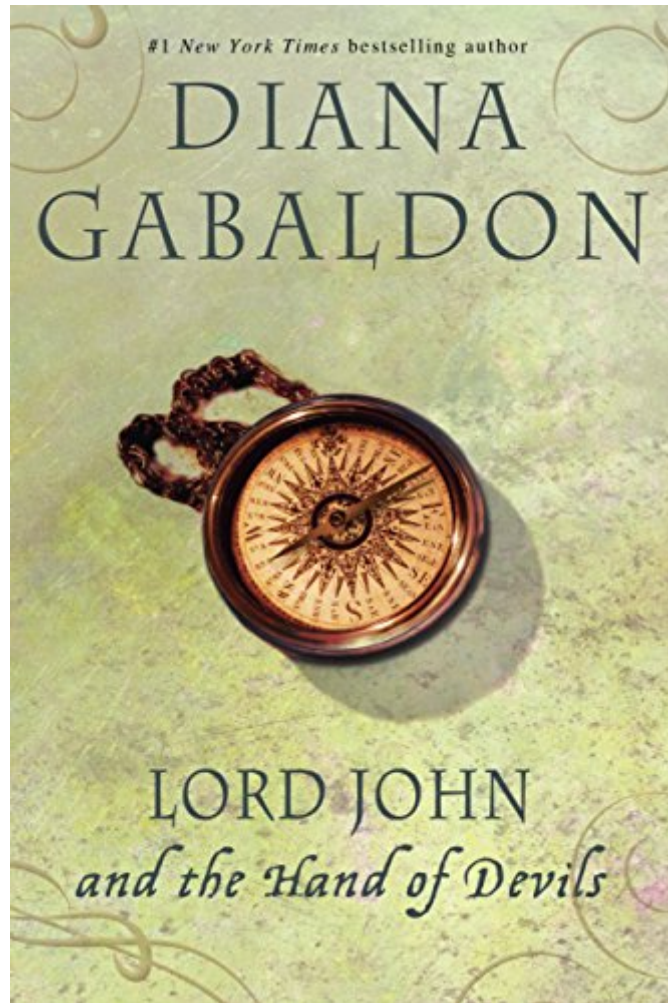


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Lord John And The Hand Of Devils: A Novel (Lord John Grey Book 1)



Synopsis

Diana Gabaldon, the New York Times bestselling author of Lord John and the Brotherhood of the Blade and the wildly popular Outlander novels, delivers three tales of war, intrigue, and espionage that feature one of her most popular characters: Lord John Grey. In the heart of the eighteenth century, here are haunted soldiers . . . lusty princesses . . . ghostly apparitions . . . dark family secrets. And here Lord John will face enemies who come in the guise of friends, memories in the shape of a fiery-haired Scot named James Fraser, and allies who have the power to destroy him with a single blow. . . . In Lord John and the Hellfire Club, Lord John glimpses a stranger in the doorway of a gentlemen's club "and is stirred by a desperate entreaty to meet in private. The rendezvous forestalled by a sudden murder, Lord John will wade into a maze of political treachery and a dangerous, debauched underground society. . . . In Lord John and the Succubus, English soldiers fighting in Prussia are rattled by the nocturnal visitations of a deadly woman who sucks life and soul from a man. Called to investigate the night-hag, Lord John finds a murdered soldier and a treacherous Gypsy, and comes to the stark realization that among the spirits that haunt men, none frighten more than the specters conjured by the heart. . . . In Lord John and the Haunted Soldier, Lord John is thrust into the deadly case of an exploding battlefield cannon. Wounded in the same battle, Lord John is called to testify and soon confronts his own ghost "and the shattering prospect that a traitor is among the ranks of His Majesty's armed forces. Capturing the lonely, tormented, and courageous career of a man who fights for his crown, his honor, and his own secrets, Diana Gabaldon delivers breathtaking human drama. And in tales seething with desire, madness, and political intrigue, Gabaldon once again proves that she can bring history to life in a way few novelists ever have. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

The good news is that we didn't have to wait long after Gabaldon's fine work *Lord John and the Brotherhood of the Blade*: the bad news is that we are going to have to wait a while for *Lord John and the Scottish Prisoner* [Jamie Fraser, I presume]. *Hand of Devils* is 3 independent tales of John Grey from 1756 to 1758: two novellas and a long short story. All three tales have very different flavors: I'd give the first two a solid 4 stars, and the third 5 stars. Those who enjoyed *Brotherhood of the Blade* should enjoy this book as well, those who found parts of *Brotherhood* offensive will not find as much to offend here. *Hellfire Club* is the first story, the shortest (less than half the length of the other two) and the most conventional. *Succubus*, set in Prussia, has, by and large, a similar feel to the part of *Brotherhood* that also take place in Prussia, but *Succubus* certainly takes some strange turns, and there are some very funny scenes centering on how the soldiers try to ward off the succubus. *Haunted Soldier* is the most satisfying of the three tales: it has the best historical flavor and interest of the stories. You learn about the making of gunpowder, some of the politics, military life, and morality of the time. There's a wonderful line here--when Lord John goes before a 3-man investigatory commission: "All three of them looked suddenly at him as one, like a phalanx of owls eyeing a mouse". Great writing!

Brotherhood of the Blade is a fine historical novel: Gabaldon had the leisure to develop an excellent sense of time and place--manservant Tom was always busy cleaning the ubiquitous grime of London off Lord John's clothes. The stories in *Hand of Devils* do not have quite the same leisure to achieve a similar depth.

The book contains 3 short stories about Lord John, two of which were published previously. The first, "Lord John and the Hellfire Club," previously appeared under the title, "Hellfire," in the anthology "Past Poisons" (Headline, 1998). It's the shortest at about 37 pages. In the chronology of Lord John books, it comes first (before "Lord John and the Private Matter"). "Hellfire" takes place in 1756, shortly after Lord John's return from Ardsmuir (the prison that held Jamie Fraser in "Voyager"). It deals with the murder of a young man invited to meet with the secretive Hellfire Club. No one knows much about it. But John receives a sobbing induction, is framed for murder, and

saved by Harry Quarry (his predecessor at Ardsmuir) all in the space of about 8 pages - a major feat for Gabaldon. The second story, "Lord John and the Succubus," is clever. It previously appeared under the same title in the anthology, "Legends II: New Short Novels by the Modern Masters of Fantasy." In the chronology of Lord John titles, it falls between "Private Matter" and "Brotherhood of the Blade." The story takes place during 1756 and 1757, when England was at war against France and Austria. While serving as a major in the English army, Lord John investigates rumors and deaths attributed to succubi. I can't speak to the story's cleverness without giving it away, but suffice it to say that the "devils" in this story are quite human and the hand controlling them quite present today and since the beginning of time. The third, "Lord John and the Haunted Soldier," is an original publication. In the chronology, it comes after "Brotherhood of the Blade." It takes place in 1758.

Unfortunately, while Diana Gabaldon as a writer is possessed of many talents, short stories are not among them. And the shorter the story is, the worse it is. Thus the three stories in "Hand of Devils" progress from baffling and banal, to vaguely interesting but ultimately unfulfilling, to something that at least approaches the genius and intrigue of "Lord John and the Brotherhood of the Blade." All the crybabies who were scarred for life after being forced to read a gay sex scene in BotB can calm their fluttering hetero hearts, as there is nary so much as a stray embrace here. Which is a shame, really, as the absence of physical passion makes for remarkably dry and dull relationships overall. It also highlights an issue that is slowly driving me barking mad: Gabaldon's tendency to drop mysterious and ominous hints about various men in Grey's life, with the apparent expectation that we'll know exactly who she's talking about, regardless of the fact that the last time they were mentioned was three novels ago. No, we don't need a recap of every single thing that's happened. But the first time you introduce a character in a particular work - whether it's a novel or a short story - how about at least reminding us who he is and where we've met him before? In the intro to "Lord John and the Succubus," Gabaldon informs us (rather long-windedly) that this story was originally written for a fantasy anthology. She self-deprecatingly admits that she had never written a fantasy story before. Well, I hate to break it to her, but she still hasn't. Despite its promising premise, "Succubus" fails to deliver on every count. "Lord John and the Haunted Soldier" also brings up a supernatural subplot, only to drop it with no explanation.

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