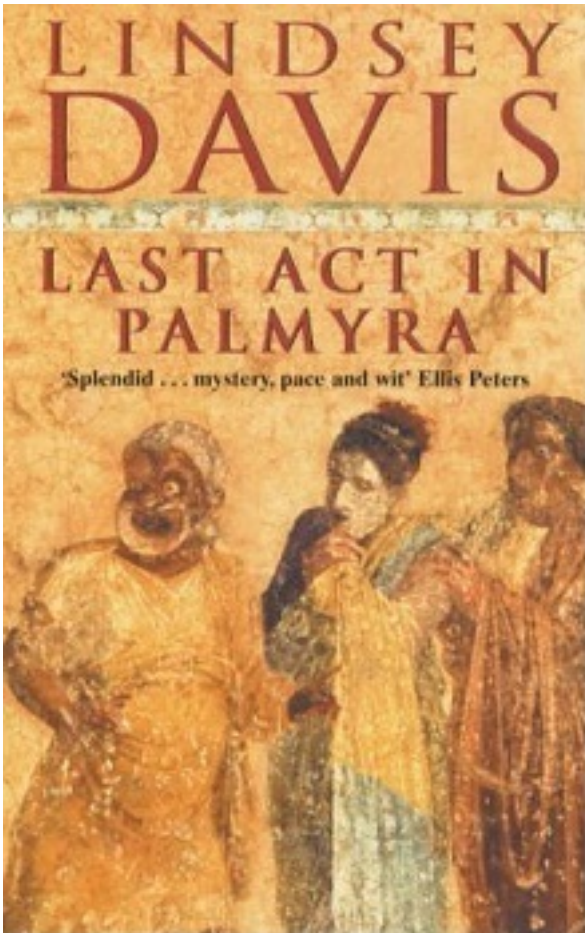

Lindsey Davis

Last Act in Palmyra (Marcus Didius Falco #6)



Title: Last Act in Palmyra (Marcus Didius Falco #6)

Author: Lindsey Davis

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Description

The spirit of adventure calls Marcus Didius Falco on a new spying mission for the Emperor Vespasian to the untamed East. He's picking up extra fees from his old friend Thalia the snake dancer as he searches for Sophrona, her lost water organist. With the Chief Spy Anacrites paying his fare, Falco knows anything can go wrong.

A dangerous brush with the Brother, the sinister ruler of Nabataean Petra, sends Falco and his girlfriend Helena on a fast camel-ride to Syria. They join a traveling theatre group, which keeps losing members in non-accidental drownings. The bad acting and poor audiences are almost as bad as the desert and its scorpions - then as the killer hovers, Falco tries to write a play...

Insightful reviews

Marcus: Well, it was only to be expected – Lindsey Davis' steady cruise from a high point to a high point has finally been interrupted. 'Last Act In Palmyra' is a slow-paced, somewhat dull detective story that dragged on and on. Davis' characteristic witty writing style is still there, but somehow subdued, without any really memorable moments. The saving grace of this book is colorful characterization of supporting characters. I really hope that Lindsey Davis returns to her previous form in next book of this series.

Johnny: This is the first Lindsay Davis novel which has disappointed me. My indifference to *Last Act in Palmyra* may be more my problem than the author's. Ironically, it is the very nature of the "realism" in the book that seems to have removed my "suspension of disbelief" for the story. I realize it is somewhat oxymoronic when I say that the realism of Falco's investigative procedure is what undermined my immersion into this first century setting, but the plodding itinerary of the investigation with very few discoveries of possible clues worked against my enjoyment. I'm glad this isn't my first experience with this marvelous series because I believe it would have been a bad first impression. This disappointment will not keep me from reading other novels in the future.

Of course, with a title like *Last Act in Palmyra* it is no surprise that the important revelations would occur in the Roman settlement (*nee* Tadmor) named Palmyra. I just think the pacing was too weak to make that exciting. I think part of my disappointment may be predicated on the fact that there were, as often is the case, at least two mysteries being solved in parallel. The plot begins with "theater" and the beads of events and clues are strung on a tour with a traveling drama troupe. At first, I thought this was going to be an excellent structure, but it eventually prolonged the mystery so artificially (and mundanely) that I had trouble staying with the book with any sustained intensity. For more than two-thirds of the book, Falco (even with the help of the delightful Helena Justina), Falco draws "blanks" which don't even have the value of taking the reader on a rabbit chase (or convince the reader to fish for a "red herring." The initial motive

is a “missing persons” case, but if you know Falco, you know it won’t be long before at least one homicide occurs.

Unfortunately for my level of impatience, *Last Act in Palmyra* is so realistic that it resembles the complexity and ambiguity of “real life.” Perhaps, I was hoping too much for simple escapism—even in this historical fiction/mystery hybrid. Though there was a large portion of the novel where I suspected that there was a small conspiracy to have committed the murder(s), I was never really derailed from the solution I suspected—whether perpetrator or perpetrators.

Strangely enough, in spite of my disappointment with this novel, I did find two lines that really grabbed me in the course of reading this novel. Even stranger, after plodding through what I considered a lethargically presented story (emulating the story’s trip through the Transjordan region and the Decapolis all too well), the two best lines in the book were only three pages apart. The first came after Falco identified the leader of the dramatic troupe as one of those fortunate who always seem to be bailed out by Fate (or the Fates, as Falco insists). “I knew they never learned from their mistakes because they never had to suffer from them.” (p. 251) The funniest described the typical politician of any age: “He loved the fine idea of democracy, like most men who couldn’t organize an orgy with twenty bored gladiators in a woman’s bathhouse on a hot Tuesday night.” (p. 254)

In addition, those who regularly read my reviews know that I love the use of colorful words. On page 394, I was delighted to read, “If someone got stabbed, the blood would not be cochineal.” Only in my archaeological reading on dye have I seen reference to the Phoenician process of creating purple-like dyes/inks.

Of course, pacing is a matter of taste. I personally think the “last act” for which *Last Act in Palmyra* came too far after the intermission. Others may find it all to be as frenetic as the “last act” itself. As I mentioned earlier, it won’t stop me from reading other Falco stories (even though I don’t always read them in their virtual-chronological order).

Damaskcat: Falco has been asked by Thalia to try and find one of her employees who has disappeared. Fortunately he can combine the search with a commission from the Emperor Vespasian so he decides to combine business with pleasure and take Helena with him. After finding a dead body at the top of a hill at a shrine, Falco and Helena have to move on hurriedly and a priest, Musa, goes with them. They join forces with a travelling theatre group and Falco acquires the job of tracking down the murderer who was one of the group.

I am enjoying reading this interesting series. I love the wry humour of the writing and the characters of Falco and Helena. In fact all the characters in the books are well drawn and first century life is vividly and evocatively described. I find the historical detail fascinating and I can almost believe I am there with the characters when I’m reading.

If you like your mysteries set in an historical background then there are few authors who write as well as Lindsey Davis in my opinion. This book is the number six in the series of twenty which started with ‘The Silver Pigs’ they can be read in any order but it is preferable to read

them in the order in which they were published in order to track the development of the series characters.

Nancy: Love the series, yet now not this installment. The publication has much less sparkle at the whole, notwithstanding the writing is so assured, with traces like: Above us soared a sky undesirable lyric poet would definitely have referred to as cerulean. yet we get dragged round too many wilderness cities attempting to resolve the whodunit murder-mystery regarding a touring theatrical troupe. Falco feels a similar way: I had had enough. i used to be unwell of stones in my sneakers and the uncooked odor of camel's breath. i wished excellent monuments and towering, teeming tenements. i needed to be bought a few doubtful fish that tasted of Tiber grit, and to devour it looking at over the river from my very own grubby corner at the Aventine whereas watching for an outdated good friend to knock at the door. i wished to listen to that stable roar that slams around the racecourse on the Circus Maximus. i wished impressive scandals and sizeable criminality. i wished to be surprised via measurement and sordidness. i wished to head home. we are all homesick for Rome. i am hoping we are going again and staying put... those street journeys get particularly tedious for a few reason.

Rosanne Lortz: In final Act in Palmyra, Marcus undertakes an Imperial project to the wilds of Syria with orders to studies again at the political weather there. whereas traveling the wilderness cities with Helena, Marcus discovers the murdered physique of a member of an performing troupe. made up our minds to convey the killer to justice, Marcus takes the useless man's task of adapting and updating outdated Greek performs for contemporary day (A.D. 72 performances), and takes the potential for sizing up the entire actors' causes for homicide alongside the way. The e-book highlights the geography of the center East because the team travels during the ten cities of Decapolis. Lindsey Davis additionally subtly educates her viewers at the distinction among the outdated Greek performs and the "New" Comedy. Marcus and the readers proportion an within funny story as he pens his personal theatrical contribution, *The Spook Who Spoke*, the plot of which turns out eerily just like Shakespeare's immortal paintings *Hamlet*.

Ruth: C1994. FWFTB: spying, Nabataean, Petra, theatre, killer. i'm operating my means in the course of the Falco novels and this is often quantity 6. I enjoyed it. i believe i've got stated sooner than that you simply don't learn those books for the murder/crime half yet for the tale of the characters which simply will get higher and better. This was once most likely the simplest homicide to resolve with the least most likely explanation for Falco to become involved yet this can be rather a minor factor (ha ha). The mild humour is absolutely good done. "He seemed like a pleasant banker – one along with his center set on diddling you in your curiosity rate." Even the covers are commencing to develop on me. certainly recommended. FCN: Marcus Didius Falco (our outwardly grumpy hero), Helena Justina (our hero's female friend who has the knack of dealing with our Marcus), Thalia ("snake dancer to the discerning"), Musa (caught up in all of Falco's and Helena's comings and goings), Heliodorus (the victim).

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