

SHADOW MAGIC



Lengua:	INGLÉS
Categoría:	Literatura
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Plaza de edición:	LONDON
ISBN:	9780553591385
Año edición:	2010
Editorial:	BANTAM BOOKS

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Starred Review. This entertaining sequel to 2008's fantasy epic *Havemercy* extends Jones and Bennett's successful blend of cultural diversity and social commentary into postwar diplomacy. After defeating the Ke-Han Empire, loosely based on Japan's shogun tradition, the kingdom of Volstov, reminiscent of imperial Rome, sends an odd peace delegation to the Ke-Han capital, which is reeling from defeat and the consequent ritual suicide of its emperor. Quirky magician Caius Greylace and brusque General Alcibiades present Volstov's view of the convoluted political intrigue that ensues, while the appealing young Ke-Han prince Mamoru and his ultra-loyal personal servant Kouje flee the wrath of Mamoru's brother, the insane new emperor Iseul.

Deft characterizations even of minor players, broad humor, convincing dialogue and sure-handed timing, especially in the dueling scenes, make this novel an outstanding example of world-building and good old-fashioned fun. (Aug.)