

= Lord of Scoundrels =

Lord of Scoundrels is a Regency romance novel by American author Loretta Chase . Published in 1995 by Avon Books , it is the third installment of her *Débauchés* series . Set in 1828 , the story follows the Marquess of Dain , a half English half Italian aristocrat known as " Lord Beelzebub " and the " Lord of Scoundrels " for his unscrupulous , immoral behavior . Hardened due to a difficult childhood , Dain meets his match in Jessica Trent , a 27 year old bluestocking more than capable of trading wits with him .

Chase had a love for Italian culture , and decided that this background would provide ample motivation for Dain , being the product of his parents ' inability to understand each other 's cultures . As with many of her stories , Chase made her heroine a strong female , deciding to model Jessica after the type of women who lived a few generations previously and who had " a more practical , frank attitude toward sex " . Lord of Scoundrels is a retelling of the fairytale Beauty and the Beast , with the author stating that like the Beast , Dain is an outcast and misfit among his society .

Lord of Scoundrels was positively received upon its release , and in 1996 it earned the RITA Award for " Best Short Historical " , a prize given annually by the Romance Writers of America . Also during that year , Lord of Scoundrels won the Romantic Times ' " Regency Historical Romance " award . Literary critics and romance readers have since described it as one of the best historical romances ever written , praising the novel for its wit and well developed characters .

= = Plot summary = =

Background

In the story 's prologue , Sebastian Ballister is born in Devon to the 2nd Marquess of Dain and his Italian wife , Lucia Usignuolo . The Marquess is disgusted with the child , describing him as the " Devil 's spawn " and a " wizened olive thing with large black eyes , ill proportioned limbs , and a grossly oversize nose " . Eight years later , the tempestuous Lucia abandons her husband for her lover . Unloved by his father and told that his mother is an " evil , godless creature " , Sebastian is sent off to Eton where he is teased by his classmates over his appearance . The boy grows up learning to hide his feelings ; given no inheritance by his father , Sebastian acquires clever ways to make his fortune and uses money to unscrupulously get his way .

Plot

The story begins in 1828 , Paris . Sebastian , now the intelligent but immoral 3rd Marquess of Dain , meets his match in Miss Jessica Trent , who has arrived in the city to rescue her unintelligent , nearly penniless brother Bertie from Dain 's bad influence . Dain and Jessica are instantly attracted to the other , though each seeks to hide their feelings . Dain has developed a hard , sarcastic personality ; he is hostile to noblewomen , as he believes they care only for money . Jessica , a 27 year old beautiful , strong willed bluestocking , has refused dozens of marriage proposals over the years and wishes to maintain her independence .

The two exchange wits ; Jessica requests that Dain send her brother back to England in exchange for a valuable religious icon she will sell him , while Dain wants the icon or else he will destroy her reputation and ruin her brother . They reach an impasse , and while her reputation remains intact , Dain spends the week personally overseeing Bertie 's disintegration from excessive drinking and gambling . Jessica angrily confronts him and the two unexpectedly kiss . Later , at a party they almost consummate their relationship before being discovered by other party goers . Dain coldly departs , assuming Jessica invited the others to force him to honorably marry her , leaving her angry that he would leave her reputation in tatters so casually .

Jessica sues him for the loss of her reputation . To her surprise , Dain converts this proposition into a marriage proposal , and they are wedded in London several weeks later . En route to his estate in Devon , Dain assumes she is repulsed by his " gross blackamoor 's body " , when the opposite is true . Filled with self loathing over his appearance and personality , Dain initially avoids consummating their relationship despite Jessica 's efforts to seduce him . They eventually do , and Dain apologizes for what he realizes has been his difficult behavior .

Later , they enter into a disagreement over his illegitimate son ; Dain despises the eight @-@ year @-@ old boy 's calculating mother and wants nothing to do with them , while Jessica sympathetically wants to rescue the boy from his poor living conditions . The boy , Dominick , is becoming ill @-@ behaved and reminds Dain self @-@ loathingly of himself at his age . Eventually , with Jessica 's prodding , Dain is persuaded to rescue the neglected boy from his mother 's clutches . While doing so , the Marquess comes to terms with his mother 's abandonment and realizes that Dominick is just as scared and lonely as he was as a boy . Dominick is invited to live at the Ballister estate , while the boy 's mother , to her pleasure , is given a large stipend and told to find her fortune in Paris .

= = Background and development = =

American author Loretta Chase began her writing career in 1987 by crafting traditional novels in the Regency romance literary subgenre ; *Lord of Scoundrels* , published in 1995 , was her ninth such novel released . It was the third installment of her *Débauchés* (also known as *Scoundrels*) series , following *The Lion 's Daughter* (1992) and *Captives of the Night* (1994) . As such , some of the characters who feature in *Lord of Scoundrels* , such as the Comte d 'Esmond and Francis Beaumont , also appear in previous Chase works . In 2007 , Chase said *Lord of Scoundrels* was her only book " that came to me as a gift from the writing gods . Every other book is a struggle , some bloodier than others . This book was pure fun from start to finish " .

Possessing a love for Italian culture , Chase decided to make her male protagonist , Dain , a " mongrel English aristocrat " and half @-@ Italian . By giving Dain Italian ancestry through his mother , Chase was able to develop his character and justify his motivations . She explains , " Having Dain be half @-@ Italian fit so many aspects of his story : his background as well as his behavior , which does get operatic at times " . Chase adds that Dain 's difficult childhood stemmed from his parents ' inability to accept each other 's cultures , which then " warps him and makes him a misfit . In a loving household , he would have grown up with a better self @-@ image , and would have dealt with bullying at school in a different way , and thus would have grown up into someone altogether different from the man Jessica meets in that antique shop " .

When writing the novel , Chase knew that her female protagonist had to be strong enough to equal Dain 's forceful personality . Chase admits that because the novel is set in the period leading up to the Victorian era , a woman like Jessica could not have dealt with Dain , writing that " if Jessica were like what we assume to be the typical young lady of her time , she could never handle Dain , and he ? d think her too boring to live " . Chase instead modeled Jessica after the type of women who lived a few generations previously and who had " a more practical , frank attitude toward sex " .

Wishing to depict Jessica as the " Extreme Female " , Chase emphasizes her clothing and gives Dain " a chance to exercise his caustic wit " , as he deems the latest fashions to be ridiculous . Upon their first meeting he silently observes that Jessica is wearing " a blue overgarment of some sort and one of the hideously overdecorated bonnets currently in fashion " . Jessica differs from many other Chase heroines by being interested in fashion ; the author felt that " the way they dress , to a great extent , tells us who they are , in the same way that other heroines ? simpler or less fashionable attire expresses something about them " .

= = Analysis = =

Lord of Scoundrels is typically classified as a Regency romance novel , though its story is set in the post @-@ Regency era of 1828 . It features a strong female heroine , a characteristic that Chase has become known for including in her romances . The author explains that " for most of history , and in too many cases today , women are considered (and too often consider themselves) lesser beings who do not matter . In my books , the women are not lesser , and they do matter . In other words , I make the world the way I think it should be " . Romantic fiction scholars have identified Jessica Trent as a " feminist heroine " with whom the " alpha male hero " has met his match . Chase inverts many qualities typical of the archetypical romantic hero and heroine . Near the end of the

story , Jessica is the one who initiates consummation of their marriage , by seducing Dain . Afterwards , Jessica promptly falls asleep , causing her husband to seethe " that was what he was supposed to do " .

In her entry for The Bloomsbury Introduction to Popular Fiction , Maryan Wherry posits that Lord of Scoundrels represents a modern retelling of the classic fairytale Beauty and the Beast , suggesting Chase 's story is a morality tale of " restoring humanity " that is directed at " all levels of society " (rather than at the lower classes as classic fairytales were intended) . Chase makes direct reference to this fairytale in the novel , when Dain silently compares his relationship with Jessica to that of Beauty and the Beast .

In a 2007 interview , the author described the novel as her " Beauty and the Beast story " , stating that like the Beast , Dain is an outcast and misfit among the novel 's society . Chase describes Dain as " truly awful : rude , overbearing , and intimidating ... He consciously uses his monstrosity in the same way he uses his vast wealth and his social position : to control his world and protect himself . It 's sad , in a way , because he 's isolated , like the Beast of the fairy tale trapped in his castle . But Dain is not pitiful by any means : He 's smart , cynical , and sarcastic , with a sharp eye for the ridiculous . He has a sense of humor and is adept with clever comebacks and putdowns " . Jessica represents the Beauty of the story , someone who " enters the Beast 's lair of her own accord " as his equal " no matter how awful " he acts .

Leading up to the couple 's marriage , Dain cynically makes many assurances that he will provide for Jessica financially . At one point , Jessica brings a defamation lawsuit against Dain before they agree to convert it into a prenuptial agreement , leading English professor Jayashree Kamblé to liken their relationship to " a take @-@ over bid " . Kamblé has studied the presence of capitalism and modern economics on storylines in the contemporary romance genre . To her , while Lord of Scoundrels is a Regency romance novel and thus less apt to depict the types of economic pairings seen in many contemporary romances , Kamblé argues that Dain 's repeated monetary promises still contain " echoes of the kind of wealth , monetary security , and financial reward that the heroes of Harlequin Mills and Boon promise as husbands " . The couple is physically attracted to each other , while financial considerations also play a factor .

= = Release and reception = =

Lord of Scoundrels was released in January 1995 by Avon Books , the same publisher that had released Chase 's last two novels . According to Chase 's website , the novel has been published in over fourteen languages . A Spanish translation was released in 2006 , while a Japanese translation was released in 2008 . Its e @-@ book edition , published by HarperCollins , landed on The New York Times Best Seller list in August 2011 . In 1996 , the novel earned the RITA Award for " Best Short Historical " , a prize given annually by the Romance Writers of America . It also won the 1996 " Regency Historical Romance " award , granted by the Romantic Times . In a review by that publication , M. Helfer praised Chase for being " an exquisite storyteller who creates sharply original characters and moves them in new and exciting ways . One of the true treasures of the genre , she epitomizes the essence of excellence in every word she writes " .

Soon after its release , the book also won accolades from other award bodies , including " Best Historical Single Title Romance " by Romance Readers Anonymous and " Best Historical Romance " by Reader 's Voice . In 2014 , romance novelist Madeline Hunter recalled Lord of Scoundrels being " the ' must read ' of the season " when it was published in 1995 , and described it as " witty , heartfelt , with a flawed hero and an indomitable heroine , [and with] pacing so perfect a reader could only hold on for the ride . It was no surprise that a book that pushed so many peoples ' happy buttons ended up winning a RITA that year . I think there would have been a revolt if it had not " .

The novel 's popularity has endured and it is still considered one of the best historical romances ever published . The website " All about Romance " voted it in first place for four years , and it was also deemed the " Best All @-@ Time Historical Romance " by Romance Readers Anonymous for four years . In a 2010 list of " must @-@ reads in romance " for Kirkus Reviews , Sarah Wendell deemed it her favorite historical romance and believed her successful recommendation to a male

professor proved its worth . Author Anne Browning Walker , in a similar list of " Smart Romance Books " for Publishers Weekly , included Lord of Scoundrels and observed Chase 's penchant for " creating smart , thoughtful , witty , and well @-@ meaning heroines " . Also writing for Publishers Weekly , author Beverly Jenkins called Lord of Scoundrels an example of " Chase at the top of her game " and opined that its " characters are full @-@ bodied and evenly matched . The passion is to die for , and every romance reader I know has this book on their keeper shelf " .

Elissa Petruzzi of RT Book Reviews wrote in 2014 , " Some consider Loretta Chase ? s epic tale to be the best Regency ever written " . Novelist Eloisa James recommended Lord of Scoundrels for readers interested in trying historical romance for the first time , saying the novel is " just brilliant , hysterically funny , sexy dialogue " . Chase herself has expressed surprise at the novel 's enduring popularity , writing that she " saw no indication it would become such a reader favorite " . On January 23 , 2015 , fans discussed their views and favorite parts of the novel on Twitter , using the hashtag # LOSlove , and Avon Books randomly gave away signed copies to those participating .