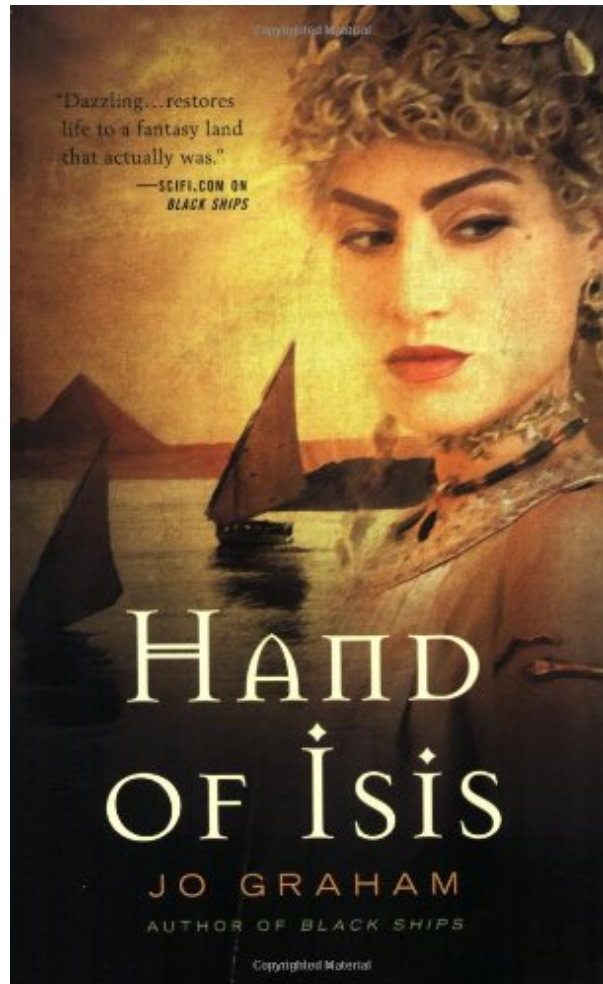
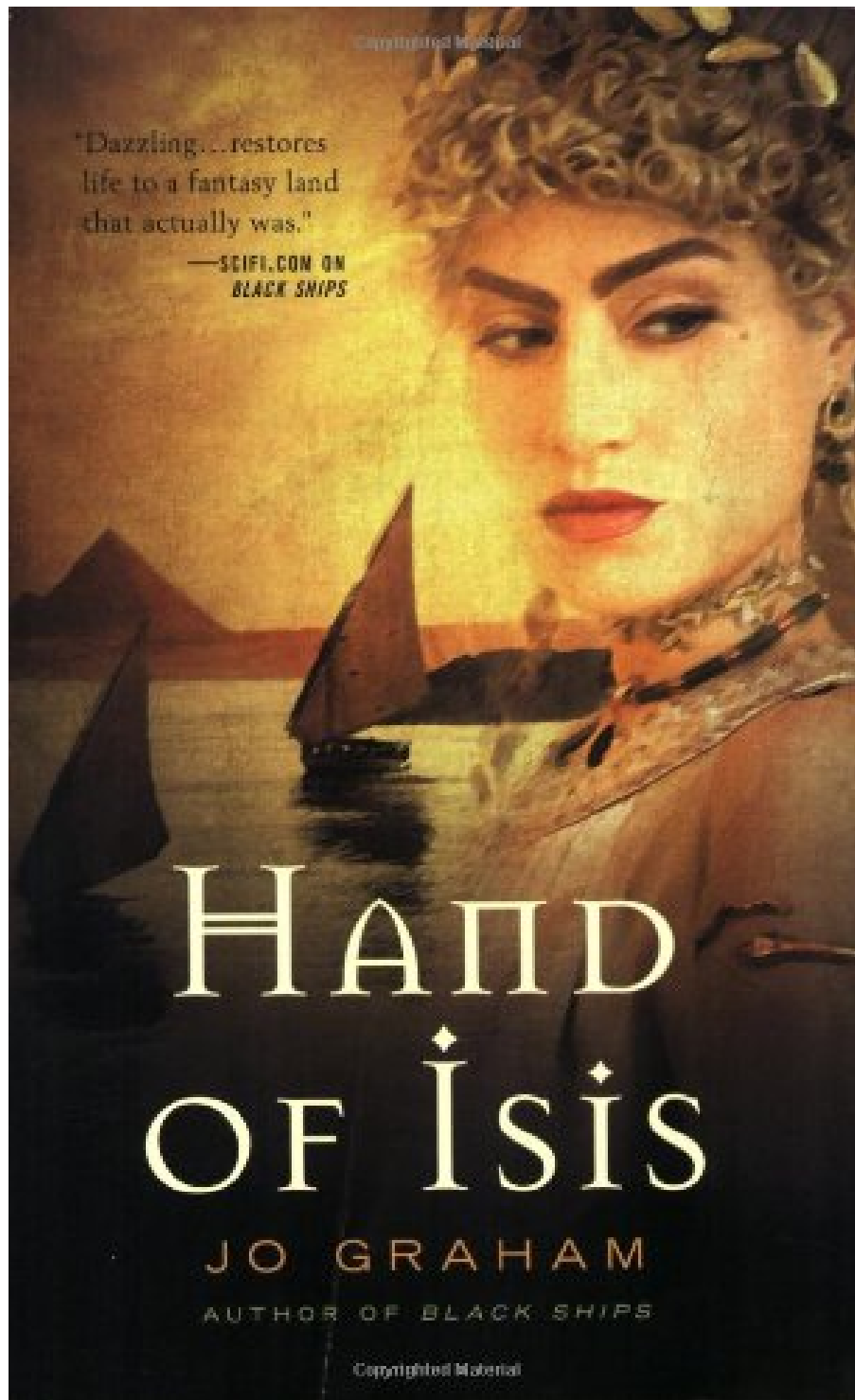


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From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Historical fantasist Graham (Black Ships) heads to Egypt with this elegant, engaging memoir of Charmian, half-sister and handmaiden to Cleopatra. The two young women and their other sister, Iras, are inseparable from childhood, getting one another into and out of numerous mishaps. As teenagers, they vow to Isis that they will protect Egypt from the covetous Romans, and in return for their devotion, the goddess rewards Cleopatra with the throne. Graham never resorts to melodrama even at the murder of Julius Caesar or to cliché when Charmian recalls her past lives, and she supplies plenty of superb historical detail, but doesn't let it overwhelm the narrative. Charmian's shy hopes, failures and devotion to Cleopatra and Isis make her one of the most memorable witnesses to history to emerge from fantasy in quite some time. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

About the Author

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HAND OF ISIS BY JO GRAHAM PDF

Following her acclaimed debut, Jo Graham returns to the ancient world with a novel that will captivate lovers of fantasy, history and romance.

Set in Ancient Egypt, Hand of Isis is the story of Charmian, a handmaiden, and her two sisters. It is a novel of lovers who transcend death, of gods who meddle in mortal affairs, and of women who guide empires.

Praise for Black Ships

"Graham re-creates a vivid picture of the ancient world, a mysterious place in which gods and goddesses speak to their chosen." --- Library Journal (starred review)

"A first-class, very readable novel." --- Booklist (starred review)

"A refreshingly different approach to a legend we only thought we knew." --- Locus

"Graham's thorough, detailed tale of ancient Greece is one that fans of that period are bound to love." --- Romantic Times

"A dazzling debut novel reimagines the Aeneid and restores life to a fantasy land that actually was." --- Scifi.com

"A bittersweet saga with enough action, romance, and intrigue to entertain and enthrall." --- Romance Reviews Today

"Graham...has packed the novel with exquisite detail, bringing to life a time long gone." --- The St. Petersburg Times

"Inspired and relentlessly entertaining...an auspicious debut." --- Realms of Fantasy

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About the Author

Jo Graham lives in Maryland with her family, and has worked in politics for many years.

Most helpful customer reviews

19 of 19 people found the following review helpful.

Behind every great woman...

By Kelly (Fantasy Literature)

I loved *Black Ships*, and I didn't know if Jo Graham could top it. The answer, I am happy to report, is a great big YES!

Hand of Isis is set within the same continuity as *Black Ships* and continues the story of some of the characters from that novel, who have now been reincarnated as players in the Egyptian-Roman power struggle. You don't need to have read *Black Ships* first, but you'll probably get more out of *Hand of Isis* if you have. The story is told from the point of view of Cleopatra's "personal assistant," Charmian, who is Gull reincarnated. As the novel opens, she stands before the Egyptian deities in the afterlife and tells her tale. The story begins with three little girls, half-sisters (in this novel Cleopatra's handmaidens Charmian and Iras are illegitimate daughters of Pharaoh), who become inseparable friends. As teenagers, they make a pact with the goddess Isis, vowing that if she will place Cleopatra on the throne, the three women will act as her hands in the world and do their best to make Egypt a better place. Later, when Cleopatra does become queen, Iras and Charmian are her closest confidantes and most valued advisors. We then follow Charmian as she helps facilitate her sister's legendary reign and has some adventures and loves of her own along the way.

The city of Alexandria is almost another character in its own right. Graham does a great job of painting a vivid picture of Alexandria, from its brilliant scholars to its take-out food. It's a cosmopolitan melting pot where people have more freedom than they do in many other places in the ancient world. We can see exactly why it's worth fighting for.

I know I'm reading a good book when I know the story ends tragically but still can't tear my eyes away. There's sadness here, certainly, but *Hand of Isis* also has its moments of joy, romance, friendship, and humor. It seemed to me that the overall mood was more upbeat than that of *Black Ships*, despite the eventual fates of the characters, and I think the humor is one of the major reasons. I laughed my head off at the scene where Caesarion finally meets his father and says...well, you'll have to read the book to find out what he says, but it's hilarious and so true to what a little boy might say at that moment. Graham is wonderful at keeping her characters human even when the world wants them to be larger than life. It makes both the triumphs and tragedies more real to the reader. The ending had me blubbering.

Graham is also great at weaving mythology into her tale, showing the ways the characters' lives echo and are shaped by divine archetypes.

The pace is surprisingly fast. (I say "surprisingly" because historical novels often move slowly.) If there's anything I'd change about *Hand of Isis*, I'd just want there to be more of it! I could read another few hundred pages of this. In particular, I'd have loved to see more of Iras. She's wonderful when she's "onscreen," and the logistics of Cleopatra's schedule result in Iras not being as prominent in the middle of the

novel as she is at the beginning and the end. Cleopatra often travels and takes Charmian with her and leaves Iras behind to take care of things at home, or vice versa. Since Charmian is the POV character, this means Iras is often absent. I loved her character and would be thrilled to get inside her head.

Enthusiastically recommended.

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

Historical Fiction set in Egypt in the age of Hellenism

By Marianne Frye

I got this book through the Librarything Early Review program. I already had the first book Black Ships but have not read it yet. It is a choice for a RL book group of mine for May.

Luckily the books stand alone in the sense that the stories are different. I think some of the previous characters come back via reincarnation, but as different people in this book. I was in no way lost in this book or the overall story arc by not reading book 1 (yet).

At the start I found the writing to be OK, but rather pedestrian. It wasn't choppy, but it didn't flow. It just seemed to lie there on the page. It was easy to put the book down. Reading the story in small chunks just didn't make it compelling or make the story come off the page and live.

I was also daunted by the size of the book. Its hard to enjoy a huge tome if you think it might not be worth your time. The print is rather large so it really isn't as much as it seems. Once I was able to invest some uninterrupted hours, it became very worthwhile.

The story is set in ancient Egypt. though it is Egypt in the age of Hellenism. The story starts during the end of the reign of Ptolemy Auletes the father of Cleopatra, who was the last Egyptian Pharaoh. The narrator is Charmian who is a slave/handmaiden of Cleopatra and also her half sister. She and another half sister, Iras, also a slave/handmaiden are with Cleo from the age of 6 until the end. The story covers Cleo's early years and her interaction with Julius Caesar and Marc Antony, and the end in Alexandria.

Of course we all know the story and how it ends. In fact at times I felt I was reading scenes from the movie Cleopatra. Perhaps the author could have been more inventive, but she chose to follow the traditional story line. She filled in the details of what happened off stage so that we got a glimpse of their lives outside the spotlight.

The details of the setting and life at the time in Alexandria are well done, as are the characters. The narrative and description felt relaxed, and didn't seem like it was trying too hard to be 'old' and it wasn't jarringly modern. There are small trips into the real land of Egypt, but mostly it focuses on Greek Alexandria. The pacing is a bit uneven. The time with Caesar is given more depth, while the time with Antony is mostly summarized.

There are wonderful characters: Charmian, Iras, Cleopatra, Dion, Emrys, and the children who pop in and out of the story. It took me a while to get into the story, (250+ pages), but when I did it was riveting. It may be that the long build up to engagement was laying the ground work so I ended up really caring about the characters. Or it might have been that the story blossomed when I was able to read in large chunks. I feared for them, and was crushed by their losses, and happy for their peace and joy. Tissues are needed once the book moves to the end.

There are a few sex scenes and Graham has a wonderful menage-a-trois, where 3 of the characters find

happiness together. I really like it when ancient people are not portrayed as modern Americans who are really republican protestants under the skin (ala the horrible movie Troy - at least Alexander took risks and tried to be real).

There are small sections when the narrator, who is dead when the story starts, is telling her life to the gods Isis and Serapis/Osiris. She must have her heart judged against the feather of Maat to see if she belongs in the land of the dead, or if she will be judged evil and devoured and destroyed. The gods are real and there is a bit of magic in that Isis appears or guides Charmian in life. Charmian is also is a seer who has prophetic dreams. The fantasy bit was well done and worked into the story. It takes the beliefs of the time and makes them real, much as moderns believe in their own religion and do not consider it unreal.

I also thought it was interesting to work in the idea that the battle was between East: Alexandria and the heirs of Alexander, and West: self-made Romans. That the best of the East: spirituality, learning, tolerance, and personal freedom could have pointed the way for the development of the rest of the world. Instead it was the best of the West: organization, rules/laws, uniformity, restless aggression that won out. We live with the consequences to this day. Some are very good, but others are not, and the rest of the world shares them with the West.

I really came to enjoy this book and can't wait for the next one.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Amazing

By Kelly Houser

Synopsis: Set in the desert plains of Egypt, Charmian, the half-sister of the infamous Queen Cleopatra, recounts her life's tale in this epic historical fantasy by Jo Graham. Charmian tells of a sparse childhood being raised by just her mother, who was a servant to the pharaoh. Not knowing that her father was the pharaoh, Charmian is startled when she learns that the Princess Cleopatra is her half-sister. She's even more stunned to learn that she has another half-sister, Iras, and that Iras and Charmian are to be live-in playmates to the Princess.

As the three girls grow up, they become closer than playmates. They grow into the sisters they actually are. While Charmian recounts a seemingly normal childhood for the girls, she details Cleopatra's tumultuous and dangerous rise to the throne and her struggle to keep it. She lends her voice to the details of Cleopatra's romances, first with Julius Caesar and then with Mark Antony. But Charmian has her own tale to tell and she tells of her own passions, of becoming a mother, and of being in the most impossible of love relationships.

When the end finally comes for the great Cleopatra and her sisters, it is Charmian who carries the reader into the afterlife and on the next part of her journey.

Review: I have read nothing else by Jo Graham, but after reading *The Hand of Isis*, I most definitely will. Graham is an extraordinary writer and the author's talent lies within the details of the novel. Almost everyone is familiar with the story of Cleopatra, Julius Caesar, and Mark Antony. Told from Charmian's point of view and with the most dazzling attention to detail, Graham breathes new life into this familiar tale. Graham takes such care with descriptions and details in this novel, that the reader cannot help but feel the sands of the desert blow across them, or to hear the lapping of the Nile river.

Charmian as the narrator pulls you in with her strength and honesty. Her voice is genuine and tangible. The reader feels as if Charmian is sitting with them, telling them her story personally. She adds a dimension to this novel that no other character could, and while Cleopatra is very obviously the focus of the novel, the

reader wants to hear and experience Charmian's life, just as much as they do the Queen's.

I highly, highly recommend this novel.

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