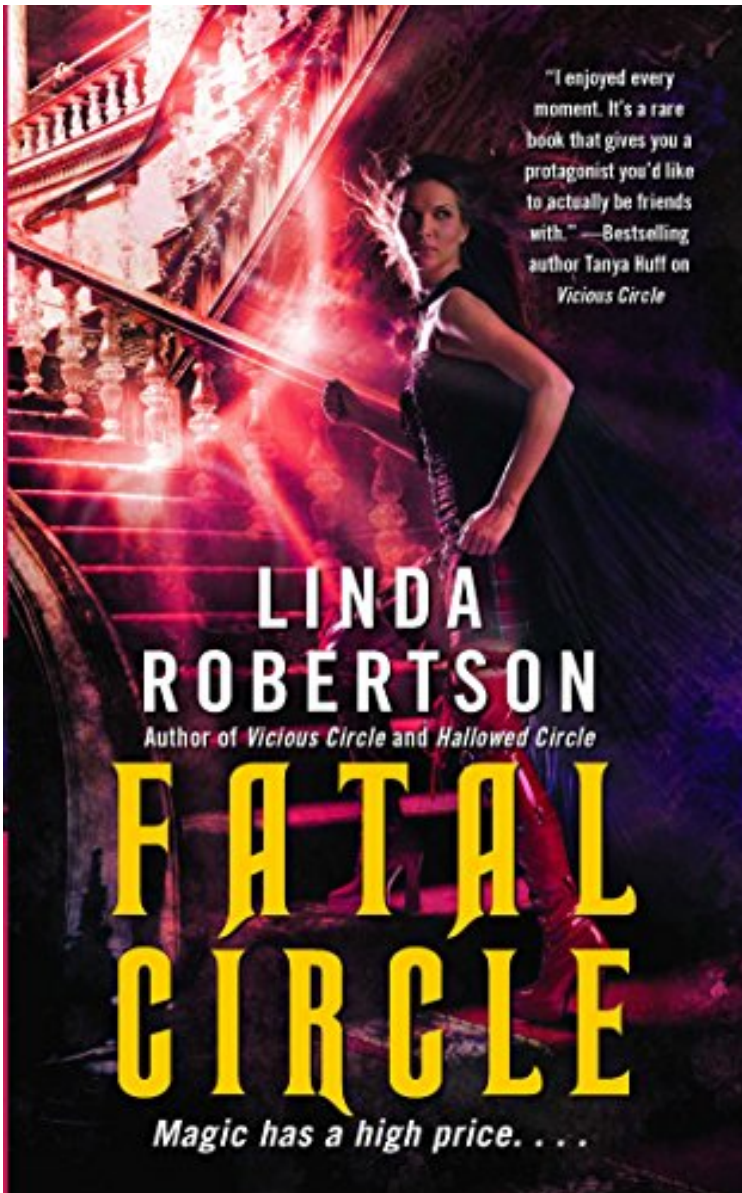


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Fatal Circle (English Edition)



Par Linda Robertson
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Par Linda Robertson : **Fatal Circle (English Edition)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Fatal Circle (English Edition):

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurDestiny sucks. . . . There was a time when Persephone Alcmedi thought her life was hard to manage, what with wondering how to make sure she took adequate care of both her grandmother and her foster daughter, Beverley, whether shed end up in the unwanted position of high priestess of a coven, and whether her wrewolf lover, Johnny, would resist the groupies who hang around his band Lycanthropia. But that was before the fairies started demanding that Sephs frightening, unpredictable allythe ancient vampire Menessos be destroyed . . . or the world will suffer. Seph and Menessos are magically bonded, but thats a secret she dares not reveal to her fellow witches lest they be forced to reject her and forbid her use of magic.

And, despite the strain this casts on her relationship with Johnny, as a showdown with the fairies nears, she and Menessos badly need the wewolves as allies. Life, death, and love are all on the line, but when destiny is calling, it doesn't help to turn away. With the individual threads of their fates twisted inextricably together, can Seph, Johnny, and Menessos keep the world safe from fairy vengeance?

CHAPTER ONE

My living room clock read two-forty-six A.M. It was no longer Halloween night, but All Hallows Day. Or, as some called it, All Saints Day. But it was no saint who held me in his arms; it was a wewolf. I think you'd like my apartment, Red. Red. That's me. Persephone Alcmendi to the rest of the world. Seph to some. Red only to Johnny, my not-exactly-Big-Bad-wewolf. It has that open-living concept. I wasn't fooled. It's a glorified dorm room, isn't it? If by glorified, you mean it has a private bathroom, then yes. Johnny sniffed, affecting annoyance. Something I sacrificed when I moved in here. I'd had to forfeit my home's vampire defenses three weeks before to save a friend's life and Johnny had temporarily moved into the third-floor attic room for protection purposes only. The defenses had been reinstated, but he'd remained. He being the epitome of tall, dark, and handsome, I hadn't complained. Come on. Johnny's deep blue eyes glittered seductively. His voice dropped low. Nothing's more romantic than a bachelor pad. We'd both had a hell of an evening. Words like hectic or demanding didn't begin to cover it. But evidently I was the only one suffering from fatigue. His band, Lycanthropia, had played at the Halloween Ball. Johnny was the vocalist and guitarist for the techno-goth-metal band and he'd given his all on stage. He should have been as exhausted as I was. Of course, I'd made quite an effort on that stage, too. I'd fought and killed a fairy in front of hundreds of witnesses, who'd applauded afterward thinking it part of the Halloween show. Killer fairies and rock'n'roll: that was only a small part of what we'd dealt with this evening. Do you honestly want to show me your apartment now? My one bulb is burned out so there's not much you'd actually see. His lean-muscled arms slid around me. I felt so grounded and safe in his embrace. But I promise, what you feel will make up for it. What Johnny wanted was crystal clear, and so was the reason he thought going elsewhere was a good idea. I'd already mentioned my fears about the rest of the household learning we were intimate, so he was trying to keep the secret. At his apartment we could have assured privacy and we wouldn't have to retire to separate bedrooms as we had to here. Cuddling and sleeping together after sex would have been nice. Apparently, to him, if we weren't actually seen together we had plausible deniability. Not that my live-in grandmother Nana would ever believe that we'd visited his apartment in the middle of the night just so he could give me the nickel tour. Nana and my nine-year-old foster daughter, Beverley, were asleep in their bedroom each just a hall's width from mine. The old saltbox farmhouse had paper-thin walls. Even the layers between the second-floor ceiling and attic floor lacked the ability to dampen noise. I'd heard Johnny playing his guitar up there when his little amplifier wasn't even cranked up to 1. Still, there were things he didn't know. The lucifer is coming here at dawn, Johnny. He pulled me closer. He'd gotten a shower after the show, washing off the smell of sweaty leather stage clothes and leaving only the cedar and sage that was his unique scent. Had to try. His breath on my neck was warm, his voice just rough enough to catch in my ear and send a tingle down to my toes. Parts of me were suddenly insisting they didn't qualify as weary. It made me reconsider the definition of tired. It's just so far to drive. All the way to town, only to turn around and come back here by dawn. But people in the throes of new love do crazy things like that. Did I just think the L-word? You could fly. He was right, I could. Due to my performance a few days earlier in the Eximium, a high-priestess competition, I'd been inducted into the powerful lucifer by the Eldrenne Xerxadrea that was due at dawn. A real witch's broom was one of the membership perks. But . . . You don't want to fly? He nuzzled my neck. It isn't that. Running my fingers through his long dark hair, I looked up at him, his six-foot-two and let him see I wanted him, too. I have a better idea. Do share. Another nuzzle. There's only one place in my house with any kind of privacy and soundproofing. Tiptoeing, I kissed him lightly before saying, Your kennel. Oh, that is sooo hot. He ran his hands up and down my backside and couldn't suppress his grin. Carrying a lit jar candle and blankets, I led him outside and around the house to the cellar. Johnny pulled the slanted metal doors open and I descended the concrete stairs. While Johnny shut the doors behind us, I placed the candle in the middle of the floor and spread the blankets over the fresh straw on the floor between the cages. I glanced into the shadows at the door of the rearmost steel kennel. This was where his beast was unleashed, where the animal in him took over. A shiver of desire ran through me. When I heard Johnny's footsteps had reached the bottom stair, I asked over my shoulder, I don't suppose you could help me out of this costume? He stopped in his tracks. I tugged on the lacings of the bell-sleeved velvet midriff bustier part of my costume for the Ball and smiled. Actually his voice was a little higher than he intended. He stopped to clear his throat and started over. Actually, I can help with that. He was by me in an instant, deftly working the knot. Seconds later, the

fabric loosened and I took a satisfyingly deep breath. Then his skillful fingers touched the bare skin at my waist, thumbs drawing little circles. Anything else I can help you out of? Im not technically out of this. Oh, he said softly. My bad. He began loosening the lace-up strings even more. Up or down? Definitely up. He was so gentle, moving so slowly, careful of my hair. He was just removing my shirt, but he made it sensual, as if he were rubbing lotion all over me. Tanning lotion. The cellar was suddenly so warm I could have been standing in summer sunlight. The bustier fell onto the blanket-covered straw at my feet. As I kept my arms raised, Johnny placed my hands on the bars atop the open cage door, and squeezed my grip to indicate I should let them remain there. His warm fingers traced every contour of my arms, slowly descending until he could brush my hair away from my ear on one side. He put the line of his body against the back of me and nuzzled against my ear. While he sucked gently on my earlobe, his hands shifted toward my breasts. A trembling resonance fluttered up my spine. Heat was building low in my abdomen. Sensations jolted through me like electricity, and all thought of tiredness fled. Abruptly, the cellar door creaked open and crashed loudly against the ground outside. I locked that, Johnny muttered. Someone was coming down the steps. We turned to see who Menessos. The vampire descended with an elegant gait and casually inspected the cobwebbed space, all but ignoring us. My aura could feel his breath and the warmth of his skin. At least he fed. The heat. The energetic desire. Had it been Johnnys ministrations or the vampires presence that caused it? Menessos presence had stirred a similar reaction in me at the Eximium, but Johnny stirred my proverbial flames pretty damned well all by himself. Menessos had played Arthur Pendragon in my dreams long before we ever met. With his walnut-colored hair in carelessly regal waves and his trim beard, he resembled a king of times past. Of course, in those dreams he wore medieval clothing; seeing him in a suit probably Armani or something equally expensive still seemed odd to me. Amusement lit his features when he saw my hands covering my breasts. He averted his gray eyes and donned an apologetic expression. Pardon my interruption. Menessos sat down on my dirty cellar stairs with no more regard for his designer slacks than if he were seating himself in a cozy chair. He then placed his elbows on the step behind and let his legs stretch out before him. It didnt look like he was planning on leaving any time soon. Howd you get in here? Johnny demanded as he repositioned himself to shield me from Menessos view. He stripped off his overshirt and gave it to me. She reinstated the wards. And I locked the cellar door. I shot my arms into the shirts sleeves and started buttoning. I have my ways. The vampire was smiling; though I couldnt see him from behind Johnny, I could tell by the tone of his voice. Forget how, I said, pushing past Johnny. Why? Id like to have Xerxadreas hanky. The one with my blood. He added, Please. Why do you want it? I asked. She nearly lost it once already and the fairies could he flashed a glance at Johnny use it against me, magically. To keep that from happening, it must be destroyed. I prefer burned. Dj vu, Johnny said. Im sensing a theme here. Red keeps ending up with things that are dangerous to you, and you want them burned. First the stake. Now the hanky. I bet it was some firebug like you who started the whole witch-burning thing way back when. Fire destroys. Water cleanses. Air distributes. Earth absorbs. All equally effective at releasing the threat, but fire is the fastest, surest method. Menessos crossed his ankles; the movement caused my aura to ripple like the surface of water. At the Eximium Id shielded using something akin to the witch hand-jolta friendly way to assess someone elses power and found I was able to reduce the effects of the vampires presence. I drew that jolt-shield tight around me as I darted back into the kennel and bent to pick up the discarded bustier. Id tucked the hanky in my costume earlier and hadnt even considered it when being undressed. I searched the velvet top. The hanky had remained in the bustier. Here. I held the crusty fabric before me as I approached him. Immediately on his feet, Menessos snatched it from my fingertips. He crouched by the candle and held the dirty square of dark fabric over the flame until it had caught, then tossed it to the floor. The harsh shadows caused by the candlelight gave his face a crazed appearance as he whispered, leaning in to be certain every scrap of fabric was consumed. Thankfully, the fabric burned quickly but I couldnt say I was thankful for the smelly smoke it left wafting about the cellar. Now you should go, I said. Wed already established that both of us knew the bond between us had inverted and I was the master. He had to obey. Or so I hoped. It was my strong suspicion that he wasnt going to prove an obedient servant. Hold on, Red. Johnny jerked the pull chain on the overhead light. It was a harsh hundred watts. I want the vampire to explain how he got past the wards. Good question. Menessos stood. Directing his reply to me, he said, Perhaps the details are not meant for your lovers ears? Perhaps youre wrong. Johnny was obviously not going to back down, even for someone whod kicked his ass a few weeks ago. Its a magical secret, and should be hers to share. Or not. Oh. I realized Menessos meant his binding to me superseded the wards Id created. That. What? Johnny asked. Knowing he needed to feel he was one up on Menessos and to be shown that I

trusted him, I said, The binding allows him access. While that was true, it wasn't the full answer. I hadn't yet explained to Johnny that Menessos was bound to me, and not the other way around. Figures. Johnny pointed at the stairs. But now you can go. Wait. I waved at the smoky air to encourage it up and out into the night. If, despite the wards, you can enter because of our binding, does your binding to the fairies follow the same principle? A gratified expression registered on Menessos's face. He'd recognized my question as somewhat insightful and seemed pleased. I am not certain. That is the second reason for my presence: to stand guard over you until your perimeter wards can be rebuilt. Johnny crossed his arms for bouncer-perfect emphasis. I can protect her. Yes, but with your pants off and your other head doing all the thinking, perhaps it is best to let me have that responsibility for a night. Exasperated, I angled myself between them with my palms out like a boxing referee. I increased my wards after Aquula was here. A mermaid water fairy, Aquula was one of the four fairies bound to Menessos and the only one who didn't resent the connection and wish him truly dead and gone. In fact, she'd actually swooned at the mention of his name. Your wards are strong, Persephone, but now that you've killed one of them you must not take the chance. You require something specifically antifey. Xerxadrea and her talented lucusi are preparing it even now. They let me fly home on the broom and they didn't say anything about it. Of course not. But I am certain they saw you home safely, whether or not you were aware of it. Xerxadrea and I discussed all of this at the Ball. I left early, as you may recall. I did so in order to make arrangements that would allow me to comply with her request. Curious. What was her request, exactly? That I come here and watch over you until they had the wards up. You could have stayed outside and done that, Johnny said under his breath. They're not coming until dawn, Menessos, I said matter-of-factly. You'll have to leave before then. Or perhaps you would be so kind as to allow me to stay down here for the day? Menessos gestured to indicate the cellar. It's not exactly what I'm accustomed to, but on more than a few occasions I've been forced to sleep in worse accommodations. Sleep. Johnny sniggered. Yeah. We'll call it sleep. Menessos spread his arms in a show of conciliation. I assure you. I came only to protect my interests. While my mind easily replaced the word interests with master, I was certain Johnny's mind had inserted property. I needed to tell him the truth. Now was as good a time as any. Johnny Persephone, Menessos interrupted before I could go further. Half of my objective has been accomplished. Will you allow me to make it a complete success? Let me keep watch so that you may rest and know all in your home are safe this night. Something in his voice pleaded with me. Please, rest. Sleep. I had been about to tell Johnny that Menessos wasn't the master here. If the vampire could read my thoughts he might be keeping me from telling so he'd remain one up on Johnny. Male ego games weren't meant to be understood by women. Menessos was also being very courteous and wording things as if to ask permission. It was unlike him and I was suspicious, but this was preferable to a pissing contest that would sooner or later develop into fisticuffs. Johnny could be told tomorrow. But you have to go before dawn, I insisted to Menessos. I know where I belong, Persephone. I pivoted on my heel and was ready to leave, but Johnny stopped me with a gentle clasp of my shoulder, turning me to face him, studying me and searching for any sign I was being given a mesmerizing vampire command. To reassure him that wasn't the case, I stroked his arm. It's okay. I moved toward the steps. Cmon. Menessos added, And you, Johnny. You need your rest, as well. He didn't use a dog reference. My suspicions were soaring. Johnny reiterated, I can protect her. Yes, and you will protect her, if this war is fought. In the meantime, if you want to be foolish enough to claim no rest in my presence, so be it, but do not be foolish enough to let your place at her side grow cold. Because my senses were amped up by the binding with Menessos, I could smell things like never before and, just then, the vampire's insinuated threat riled the wre. A musky testosterone scent filled the cellar. Luckily, neither did more than glare at the other. As for me, the mention of war had knocked all thought of sleep from my mind. Johnny took my hand and preceded me up and out into the night. Menessos extinguished the candle and tugged on the pull chain to turn off the light. He followed us, pausing to shut the cellar door behind us. We walked silently around the house to the front porch. November's eager fingers had chilled the air. A mist was settling in. The bannerlike leaves of the fodder-shocks rustled lightly at our approach, sounding like stiff paper scrubbing together. The jack-o-lanterns tea lights had burned out hours ago and their dark faces seemed sad. Yup. Halloween's over. Johnny opened the door for me. Menessos came around the corner slowly, intently staring across the cornfield. Inside the house, my feet headed directly for the stairs, but I lingered with my palm on the newel posts ball finial. I didn't want to go to my lonely room and climb between cold sheets and sleep alone. What I wanted was Johnny's warm body next to mine, and the security of his arms around me. A few days before, I had felt overwhelmed because it seemed impossible to balance my new life with all its myriad complications, let alone being the Lustrata and somehow bringing balance to the world. Now my own

actions were the catalyst for a war. How the hell am I going to fix this? Stay with me on the couch, Johnny? I asked. You bet. Johnny lifted my hand from the finial and led me into the living room. We left an end table lamp on, and he sat near it, on one end of my tan corduroy slip-covered couch. Johnny and I had made love there. Once. This room. This couch. Our first and, so far, only time. Shortly after the intimacy, I'd been confused and hurt that he might have betrayed me with some women at a gig. He hadn't, but at the time his supposed unfaithfulness had been such a concern. Not that we'd discussed exclusivity with each other or anything, but it was the kind of thing I expected and thought was understood. Now, infidelity seemed pretty insignificant compared to war. When he sat, my hand fell away from his. I turned in a slow circle. This space was my sanctuary, filled with all my Arthurian books and posters. Over the mantel was Waterhouse's painting Ariadne. A very impractical thank-you-for-not-staking-me gift from Menessos. The security system for the valuable artwork was supposed to be installed this Friday. So many things had changed in such a short amount of time. Wanna put your head in my lap? Johnny asked teasingly. Some things, like Johnny's constant innuendos, weren't likely to ever change. My exhaustion was reaching complete and the weight of my worries filled the room, threatening to suffocate me. Johnny could probably feel it too. He was trying to ease away the heaviness with humor. I faced Johnny with a genuine smile. You wish. I certainly do. I gave him a mock scowl. Okay, okay. In one motion, he turned out the lamp and moved the couch pillow onto his lap. Now? I laughed and it felt good. Now. As my feet carried me forward, a silhouette crept across the picture window behind Johnny. It was Menessos taking a sentinel's position on the porch, but I could feel his presence, feel how he yearned to be the one inside comforting me.

2010 Linda Robertson Presentation de l'diteur
Destiny sucks. . . . There was a time when Persephone Alcmidi thought her life was hard to manage, what with wondering how to make sure she took adequate care of both her grandmother and her foster daughter, Beverley, whether she'd end up in the unwanted position of high priestess of a coven, and whether her wewolf lover, Johnny, would resist the groupies who hang around his band Lycanthropia. But that was before the fairies started demanding that Seph's frightening, unpredictable ally, the ancient vampire Menessos, be destroyed . . . or the world will suffer. Seph and Menessos are magically bonded, but that's a secret she dares not reveal to her fellow witches lest they be forced to reject her and forbid her use of magic. And, despite the strain this casts on her relationship with Johnny, as a showdown with the fairies nears, she and Menessos badly need the wewolves as allies. Life, death, and love are all on the line, but when destiny is calling, it doesn't help to turn away. With the individual threads of their fates twisted inextricably together, can Seph, Johnny, and Menessos keep the world safe from fairy vengeance?