

**OUR
LADY
OF THE
ISLANDS**

SHANNON PAGE • JAY LAKE

**• THE BUTCHERED GOD •
BOOK ONE**

OUR LADY OF THE ISLANDS: THE BUTCHERED GOD BOOK ONE
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For Jay.

PRAISE FOR *OUR LADY OF THE ISLANDS*

“This satisfying feminist tale (...) features an empathetic middle-aged, middle-class protagonist managing the roles of businesswoman, mother and grandmother, fugitive, and unwilling savior with realism and grace (...). The second half of the book [is] (...) a celebration of female friendship and cooperation. Page has done a phenomenal job of completing Lake’s work after his death, honoring his contributions and vision while giving the novel an emotionally authentic, coherent voice.”

— *Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“When a dead giant — a god, perhaps? — washes up on Alizar’s shore, the ruler orders it butchered and fed to the poor. (As one does.) That choice sets the stage for (...) a powerful, thoughtful tale that stays with you long after you turn the final page.”

— Jim C. Hines, Hugo-winning author of *Libriomancer*

“A tale of political and religious intrigue in the midst of changing times. Page and Lake’s voices blend perfectly, with her eye for character and his eye for setting, making *Our Lady of the Islands* a great, fast, and meaningful read.”

— Ken Scholes, author of the *Psalms of Isaak* saga

“A gorgeous tale of courage and friendship, with appealing characters and an epic sweep.”

— Tina Connolly, author of *Ironskin*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In 2009, Jay Lake and I decided to write a novel together. We'd already enjoyed collaborating on stories; this was the natural progression.

It was also a natural decision to make it a fantasy novel. We decided to set it in a remote corner of the world he'd already built in his *Green* and *Flowers* novels (Alizar is mentioned in passing at the very end of *Kalimpura*). And who would be the main character? "A young woman —" Jay started, but I was having none of that. "No more coming-of-age novels. Let's write someone who's already OF age. Someone who thinks her story is, if not over, then at least comfortably established."

Thus was born Sian Kattë, a respectable middle-aged business-woman whose life is upended by an unlooked-for magical 'gift.'

The process of writing *Our Lady of the Islands* was initially smooth. Jay wrote a complex, detailed outline; I quibbled with it until we got something we were both happy with. (The one thing I remember really putting my foot down about was the tired old 'she cuts her hair to disguise herself' trope. Honestly, would that ever actually work?) Then I wrote the first draft, leaving a few 'Jay to fill in here' blanks, mostly about nautical details.

From there, Jay took the manuscript, filling in those blanks, and adding lots of nuance, detail, and flavor. We passed it back and forth several times, then sent it out to a few first readers... and then life interrupted, and all progress stopped. The book sat, trunked, until early 2013, when Jak Koke, managing editor of Per Aspera Press, asked me, "Whatever happened to that book you wrote with Jay? Can I read it?"

By this time, Jay was valiantly struggling with metastatic colon cancer. He was happy to see the book marketed, but made it clear that he would not be able to work on any revisions. So I agreed to take

that on, and soon Jak made us an offer ...contingent on some major reworking.

I began that reworking in early 2014, with crucial and generous editorial input from Mark Ferrari. We were hoping to finish by June, for Jay's birthday, but it needed more work than that deadline permitted.

Jay entered hospice on May 21, and died on June 1.

I think Jay would like this version of the novel, though it diverges from the draft we worked on in a number of places. His world and his characters remain; the story is still the one we set out to write. I am deeply sad that he won't be able to read it. This book quite literally wouldn't exist without Jay Lake. I hope it does honor to his memory.

But even a collaborative novel isn't the product of its two authors alone. I've already mentioned Mark Ferrari: his insights and creative contributions enriched the story greatly, and he kept me honest whenever I tried to rush through the revisions (hyper-focused on the deadlines as I tend to be). Mark also drew the gorgeous original cover and the beautiful map. Jak Koke provided several iterations of insightful, sharp editorial advice. Any remaining flaws are entirely my own. Early readers Aaron Spielman and Michael Curry provided much valuable input; Michael's detailed dissection of the novel is part of what made everyone realize how much work it still needed, though I know he didn't mean for us to trunk it! I thank Ken Scholes for years of love and encouragement in general and for his lovely blurb now. Holly King listened to parts of the story as Mark read them aloud; that process was invaluable for me, both in her feedback and in just hearing the book brought to life. Karawynn Long not only copyedited the manuscript, but finalized and improved the cover and designed a beautiful interior.

And I thank you, dear reader, for joining us in this journey — a story is nothing without an audience. Welcome to the world of Alizar. I hope you have a lovely time here.

Shannon Page
Portland, Oregon
July 26, 2014

AUTHOR'S NOTE, 2021

Everything does always take longer than you expect it will, doesn't it? Sometimes WAY longer! But at long last, I am delighted to welcome the re-release of *Our Lady of the Islands*, and to resume writing its sequel.

This novel has been out of print for several years now, since its original publisher closed its doors not long after the book was published. I am so happy to be able to bring this book back to readers.

As I mentioned in my note from 2014 above, even the path toward the initial publication of *Our Lady* was not a smooth one. But when it did finally get out into the world, it was very well received: starred reviews from *Publishers Weekly* and *Library Journal*, highlighted by i09, and then *Publishers Weekly* went on to name it one of their Best Books of 2014—a rare honor! It was a finalist for the Endeavour Award, and it sold very well for a micro-published book from a press with a very small footprint.

Jay and I had always intended a sequel. Mark and I planned, outlined, and even started writing one, though when our publisher closed, the entire project was orphaned.

Time passed. I worked on other things; Mark worked on other things. The rights to this project were tangled up, as so often happens when an author dies before a work is completed. Several other publishers expressed interest, though nothing was ever able to get all the way to a signed contract...much less this book in your hands.

But I never stopped wanting to finish this story. And it continued to sadden me that this complex, fun, well-received book had not reached a wider audience—and could reach an even tinier audience while it was out of print.

Those sad days are over, at last. Welcome *back* to the world of Alizar. Whether you're meeting Sian, Arian, Pino, Reikos, Escotte, and all the others for the first time or becoming reacquainted with them as old friends, I hope you enjoy your sojourn here...and that this whets your appetite for further adventures to come.

Shannon Page
Orcas Island, WA
February 2021

The Island City-State of
Alizar
In the Sunward Sea



— PROLOGUE —

A century and a half after the island nation of Alizar had freed itself from continental rule, in the seventeenth year of Viktor Morrentian Alkattha's troubled reign as Factor, a giant corpse washed up onto the eastern shore of Cutter's, at the island cluster's very center. The greatest typhoon in generations had blown spume for three days over the walls of even the mightiest houses on the highest hills, swamping the rotting, coastal boat-towns altogether, drowning legions of the poor, and flushing every darkest alleyway and sewer tunnel with a boil of cold, salty rage.

On the storm's fourth day, dawn was accompanied by a peculiar pearlescence to the east, as if the clouds were loathe to release their clammy grip. Those first few to venture out onto the streets of Cutter's — guards, priests, looters, the desperate — found on the shingles of Pembo's Beach a body so large and long that all agreed it couldn't possibly have been a man. And yet, it had the form of one.

Its pale complexion was, by then at least, the color of a Smagadine, that unhealthy tone indicative of life lived underground, or solely under moonlight, far from any sunlight's benediction. Its wrinkled fingers were the size of longboats. Its gelid, unseeing eyes as large as the wine tuns stored beneath the Factorate House. The cock across its thigh, a toppled watchtower.

The corpse was an instant nine-days' wonder, and a panic. Nearly two hundred years earlier, gods had returned to faraway Copper

Downs. Had they at last come to Alizar? The nation's streets were flooded for the second time in days, this time with rumor, prophecy, and hushed prognostication. Had the storm birthed this monster or slain it? Would it rise to lay waste to the city, vanish back into sea like a dream half-remembered, or just putrefy, poisoning Cutter's scenic bay and vast commercial port as it rotted on the beach? Might it be an omen of some even greater calamity in store?

While the Mishrah-Khote, Alizar's ancient priesthood of physicians, maintained a careful silence in regard to their position on the corpse, the nation's Factor did not find the unexpected arrival of a *'dead god'* convenient in the least. Already struggling to navigate his country's growing pains, he had no need of ominous portents inciting the poor and ignorant to erratic imaginings and potentially volatile assessments of his governance. He just wanted the great body gone! Though not in any manner that might make him look defensive or afraid, of course.

Fortunately for him, Alizar was virtually swimming in very poor and hungry citizens after such a devastating storm. His advisors assured him that the giant carcass was still at least as sound as many others hanging in that tropic nation's butcher shops on any given day. Why not address two problems with a single cure? Thus, the Factor demonstrated his consideration for the city's starving masses by ordering the inconvenient corpse butchered quickly, before it started rotting, and distributed — for free — to all and any wishing to fill their bellies with its meat. Since animals alone — never people, much less *gods* — were ever butchered and consumed, he asserted dubiously, the corpse's fate must somehow prove its nature. Whatever superficial form it might have borne, this creature had been “nothing but a great sea monster of some sort.”

Huge crowds rushed to Cutter's bloody shingle to accept their portion of this windfall, by which their desperate families were kept fed for some weeks after. Despite this fact — or perhaps because of it — memory of the giant corpse did not fade as hoped. If anything, the common folks' awe of this *dead god* increased. New tales began to circulate, of teeth and bones extracted, giant fingernails pared, and

god-meat scraped from long, pale flanks not just to feed the desperate, but to bless and heal them as well. From the furtive repetition of these stories, a new cult emerged around the *Butchered God*, if at first just in cautious whispers and anonymous graffiti.

After a while, as no other evidence of returning gods appeared, the wealthy and the comfortable middle class put the event aside. Life went on. New urgencies seized attention — new wonders, scandals, and attendant gossip.

Old storms are eventually forgotten. Old flotsam always drifts back out to sea.

As long as what is buried stays that way, and its memory is left unstirred.