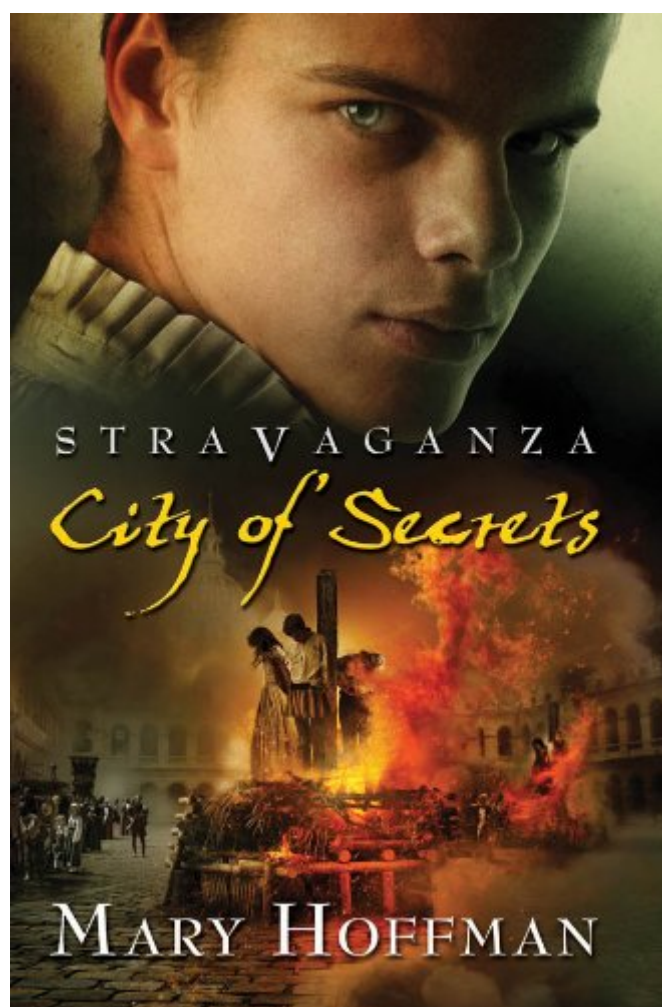


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Stravaganza: City Of Secrets



Synopsis

The latest installment in the critically acclaimed Stravaganza series begins with Matt, the new Stravagante. Despite having a beautiful and very smart girlfriend, Matt is insecure because he is dyslexic. He discovers that he is capable of traveling between two worlds when a leather-bound book transports him from his home in England to Talia, the parallel-world version of Italy, where he meets a fellow-Stravagante named Luciano-who is hiding from the powerful di Chimici family. Luciano has just killed the head of that family in a duel, and is in grave danger. Banding together, Matt and Luciano must resist the di Chimici family, who are on the verge of making a terrifying breakthrough into our world.

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Customer Reviews

With all the hundreds of young adult fiction books that are published each year, Mary Hoffman's Stravaganza books still remain my all-time favorite series since I picked up the first installment seven years ago. City of Secrets continues to carry over a high standard mix of quality writing, fabulous characters and thickened multi-layered plots. One warning about this episode, it is not a stand alone story. One must read all three other novels before starting the City of Secrets. Without

first reading *City of Masks*, *City of Stars*, and *City of Flowers*, you will be totally clueless and will not understand who is who and what is happening. There are many, many references in this book to events and characters in the previous novels that are key to this story's unfolding. The author has clearly put many years and incredible effort into creating her world of Talia, an alternate world of Italy in the 1500's. Each book is about a different character in a different city state of Talia, cities that correlate to real places we have in Italy today such as Venice, Florence, Siena and Padua. The period detail that Mary Hoffman gives to this series of a glamorous Renaissance Italian world is incredible. Every page a work of art as the reader is totally transported out of the room they are reading in, far away to Talia. The writing is totally evocative of the whole culture in Italy at that time, rich in wealth, and steeped in romance, art, religion and history. These stories are so full of adventure, and are enchanting and exciting. The series is about a group of teenagers in London who all happen to meander into an antique shop. Each picking out a trinket to take home. These selected items become their Talismans in which when the teens fall asleep with them, they are transported to the world of Talia.

This 4th installation of the *Stravaganza* series starts out as a formulaic snoozer. We meet Matt, yet another disenfranchised, teen. His insecurities seemingly stem from having dyslexia. Matt is unlikeable & uninteresting, but then I had a hard time feeling very sympathetic with the plights of the last 3 *Stravaganters*, who just seemed drawn in order to preserve Lucian's life making their stories merely backdrops for the Luciano/Arianna storyline. A continued over abundance of political foiling goes on in this book, culminating explosively. I just wish it could have been brought about with less tediousness. Sadly many of the characters are flat props for the story. A troubling recurring instance of the *stravagante* totally disconnecting from the real world began to seem like an addiction to me. Thenot sleeping, not doing homework, not relating to anyone not connected to the *Stravagating*. I began to see the *stravagating* as life sucking for the *stravagator*. Those in the alternate universe are definitely a needy lot. There were some troubling ethics in this book. *****spoiler alert*****1) Matt puts a serious curse on his girlfriend's ex. and the guy lands in the hospital. What's with the introduction of voodoo witch craft all the sudden? *Stravagantes* are turning out not to be very ethical. 2) Why does Matt's girlfriend of 3 months have his house key ? 3) Why don't Matt or his girlfriend's parents have a problem with her staying over night in his room? (they are about 16!) Juxtaposidly, Lucian, has not slept with Arianna, has no intention of doing so, but does intend to marry her as soon as possible. Matt has no intention of marrying his girlfriend...

Ugh. After picking up five exciting books from the library, this was the one I got around to first, because City of Flowers (its immediate predecessor) ended so suspensefully. If City of Flowers was something of a disappointment compared to City of Masks and City of Stars (which remain some of my favorite books of all time, especially Masks!), then City of Secrets was a mega-disappointment. I could spend thousands of words criticizing this book: The writing didn't flow, characters weren't developed very well, Hoffman didn't spend any time exploring the city of Padavia (a.k.a. this world's Padua)...you get the picture. The no-exploration thing probably got my goat the most, because having never been to Italy, these books are kind of like a free, exciting plane ticket. But this one spent way too much time on Matt's insecurities (Ayesha, anyone? Yuck!) Another problem I had with it was my long-abiding love of Lucien Mulholland. I adore Lucien Mulholland. Or Luciano, or whatever the heck you call him. Ditto for Arianna. So even in City of Stars I was a little disappointed that she started introducing new characters with Georgia and Alice, and in City of Flowers, even more so with Sky and Falco. They took time away from the characters I really enjoyed hearing about, even though all four had grown on me by the end of their respective novels. With the intro of Matt and Ayesha, though, it just started getting ridiculous and watered-down. Pretty much every page Luciano and Arianna weren't on was ridiculously boring. Last complaint? Luciano and Arianna, WOULD YOU TWO JUST GET MARRIED, ALREADY? Sheesh. I was really crossing my fingers in this one for a big, fancy, old-school Bellezzan party with lots of Duchessa excess, but unfortunately, it just wasn't so.

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