

EMERALD CITY

A monthly science fiction and fantasy review magazine edited by Cheryl Morgan and available at <http://www.emcit.com>

Contact details (USA): 36992 Meadowbrook Common Apt. 103, Fremont, CA 94536-7421; Tel: 650 722 1413; E-mail: cheryl@emcit.com

Contact details (UK): 27 Park Avenue, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 7EE; Tel: 07742 196 331; E-mail: cheryl@emcit.com

Review of *A Dark God Laughing* by Fiona McGavin

The following review appeared in issue #125 of Emerald City, dated January 2006. The issue in question can be found online at <http://www.emcit.com/emcit125.php>.

Fallen Elves

By Cheryl Morgan

Regular readers will know that Storm Constantine novels generally receive a favorable reception here. Constantine's own publishing house, Immanion Press, covers a wide range of styles (I have a Tom Arden novel lined up for future review), but the pitch for Fiona McGavin's *A Dark God Laughing* was that it is in a similar style to Constantine's own work. Having read a sample chapter I was intrigued, and I'm pleased to say that the book is just as interesting.

So what has this got to do with elves? Clearly there won't be anything sweet and flowery. But, centuries ago, perhaps they were. Once the world of McGavin's novel was covered with trees and two races of people. The pretty Alari and the immortal enteri lived side-by-side in peace. Then came the Westermen: tall, blonde and militaristic. They chopped down the forests. They built cities. They built factories that pumped out noxious smoke. The Alari became subjugated.

The enteri got drunk and tried to pretend it wasn't happening.

Which is how come we have a book that asks what a bunch of immortal elves will be like a millennium after being kicked out of their forests by uppity humans and forced to live in the slums of cities. McGavin makes the assumption that if you are immortal you live for today, not for tomorrow, because tomorrow is endless and will always come at some point if you wait long enough. So the enteri try to adapt, or lose themselves in parties. They become different.

By the edge of the lake, a castle built almost entirely of black metal teetered and twisted precariously, as if it had no foundations and might collapse at any moment. The huge plates of metal that formed the walls were creased like sheets of paper that had been rolled into balls and then straightened out again. There was a single tower that reached into the sky and swayed precariously in the wind. Gargoyles leered down at us as we stood looking up at the castle, and candles flickered within the narrow arched windows.

Livid green waterweed drifted lethargically in the moat that surrounded it, and a bridge of coloured glass arched gracefully over the moat to the entrance.

Yes, this is a book in which people have long hair, wear a lot of black and purple, and spend a fortune on kohl and nail varnish.

But it is more than that. To start with I haven't yet mentioned the hero. Alix is not enteri. He's an Alari half-breed, crossed with the Drael, another human race, and mortal enemies of the Westernmen. And he's a sorcerer of sorts, though he knows little about his powers or how to use them. Hunted out of his own lands, he's hiding out in the grim city of Zoelon, a place full of religious fanatics whose favorite idea of a good festival is to build some big pyres and burn a bunch of witches. Alix isn't very safe in Zoelon.

Religion is the other main theme of the book. As you can probably guess, there are indeed gods. At least one of them is rather nasty, and one of the more interesting characters is Traize, the Drael high priest (or Voice of the Triple God, as he is known), who found out the day he got the job just how badly the Draels were being suckered.

The most interesting religious material, however, comes from ordinary people in Zoelon. Alix works in a factory and shares a room with several Westernmen co-workers. There's Eric, who is a bully and uses religion as an excuse to victimize Alix. And simple-minded Smeek, irresistibly drawn to dark ideas. Coll, the most responsible of the group, tries to keep the peace but is torn between his essential good nature and his superstitious fear of anything different. Only Coll's girlfriend, Greta, is softhearted enough to have sympathy with anyone, no matter how strange, but

that leaves her at risk from real evil. As for Alix, while he desperately wants to believe that he isn't the sort of monster the priests would make him out to be if they found him, the persecution and poverty he suffers makes it hard for him not to lash out.

As I hope you can see, there's a lot to this book. It isn't just people posing in black. Nor, somewhat to my surprise, is there a lot of sex. The enteri are androgynous, but this seems to be more for effect than any serious exploration of gender. I think the book needed a little more work. In particular some of McGavin's dialog sounded more like people making speeches than natural conversation. But it is a very promising book and I'm keen to see where McGavin goes with the series.

A Dark God Laughing - Fiona McGavin - Immanion Press - trade paperback

About Emerald City

Emerald City has been published on a monthly schedule since September 1995. Over 600 books have been reviewed in the magazine during that time.

Although the magazine is published online, printable versions are available for download in both PDF and Microsoft Word formats. Access to all versions of the magazine is free of charge.

In 2004 *Emerald City* won a Hugo Award in the Best Fanzine category.

The magazine was also nominated for the Best Fanzine Hugo in 2003, placing third. In 2004 it was nominated for a British Science Fiction Association Award. Cheryl Morgan has been nominated for the 2004 Best Fanwriter Hugo. *Emerald City* placed 8th in the Best Magazine category of the 2004 Locus Poll. It was the highest-placed non-fiction magazine in the category.

In the 2005 Hugo Awards *Emerald City* was nominated for Best Fanzine and Best Web Site. Cheryl Morgan was nominated for Best Fan Writer. The magazine placed 8th once again in the Best Magazine category Locus Poll.

Emerald City review quotes have been used for cover blurbs by the following publishers: Tor, Bantam Spectra, Pyr and Night Shade.

We do not quote web site "hits" as the measurement of such statistics is notoriously subjective. However, we do keep statistics and the level of traffic on the web site has increased steadily with time. It is now roughly five times the level of activity in 2000 when we began monitoring.

Review copies of forthcoming books are always welcome. However, we can only cover 8 to 10 books per issue, so receipt of a review copy is no guarantee that a review will appear.

Emerald City is written and edited by Cheryl Morgan with assistance from Anne Murphy Kevin Standlee, Tony Geer and a host of guest reviewers.