



Guardians of Paradise

Jaine Fenn

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Most people believe the Sidhe are long dead, exterminated centuries ago when the males of the race rose up and fought alongside the humans subjugated and enslaved by the female Sidhe. But Jarek Reen knows better: he's discovered, the painful way, that the Sidhe are alive and well, and still screwing over humanity.

Guardians of Paradise Details

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Author : Jaine Fenn

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From Reader Review Guardians of Paradise for online ebook

Liviu says

This continued a long string of ok'ish but disappointing 2010 Gollancz novels for which i had the highest expectations; I am not sure that it is due to me just getting saturated of the relatively light and mindless sf-adventure Guardians of Paradise represents or that the book is considerably weaker than the first two, so I will take a look at the next installment but not sure if i continue the series.

There were flashes when the book was exciting or interesting and I found myself turning pages eagerly to see what's next - the scenes with Marua were great and most of Nual's pagetime, but Taro was just annoying, boring and I wish he got lost on the vacation planet - he was interesting in Khesh but out of his depth he is just a huge drag on the series in the wider universe, while Jarek was in turns boring and annoying and another miscast type completely outside of his depth.

I also saw a large amount of typos or at best questionable author's choices of words, surprisingly so for a supposedly edited book - and these are things i tend not to notice with all the arcs and indies I read, but here somehow they stuck out; the plot verged on ridiculous on more than on one occasion too and I would drop the series not for Nual who keeps being an interesting character I want to see what happens too.

The story is told in the blurb, but to summarize: after two related books - Principles of Angels featuring Nual and Taro on the Orbital City of Khesh - great debut of the series - and Consorts of Heaven featuring Jarek on an obscure planet which was another superb book but due to the local characters first and foremost, the three meet in the wider universe and go looking for proof about the nefarious Sidhe that were supposedly overthrown a long time ago, but influence humanity in secret; Nual is actually one of them, so they are more-or-less humans with extra-powers and a nasty gender-split for reasons that are slowly revealed in the 3 books

More stuff is introduced here and some back story that is interesting, but Taro and Jarek drag the book down to much

Adrian Leaf says

Another really fun novel in Jaine Fenn's Hidden Empire series. This time it is an all out space opera continuing the story set up in the first two novels. Really good characterisation as always is backed up by some morally grey storytelling and difficult choices for the characters to ponder. The universe gets bigger, deeper and more interesting.

TeaDrinker says

As a trilogy, works well enough. Would read further in the series. Probably 3.5 stars each book.

Paul says

It is thought that the Sidhe are ancient history, wiped out a millennia ago. Jake's sister has just been murdered by the Sidhe, and they are now after a old friend of his and her partner. Foiling the attempt on their lives, he helps them escape.

The Sidhe think that they are dead and they join Jarek in his crusade in fighting back against the desire of the Sidhe to enslave the human race again. As they traverse space, they discover a dark secret hidden in the most unlikely of places.

With chapters from her previous books, Fenn has taken them well out of their comfort zones and pitched them into a race for survival. The plot is not as strong in this one, as this is primarily about character development of the Jarek and the two Angels Nual and Taro, and the way that they deal with the perilous situation she has placed them in. They are all flawed in one way or another, which adds to the richness of the story too.

Great stuff. Next one soon.

Jodie "Bookish" Cook says

Book review

Title: Guardians of paradise

Author: Jaine Fenn

Genre: science fiction/ psychological/ action

Rating: ***

Review: With Guardians of Paradise, Jaine Fenn is three novels into her Hidden Empires series. It is a solid start to a writing career—not the spectacle that publicists hope for nor, in my opinion, the failure which some considered her earlier novels to be. Principles of Angels presented an unusual world, where assassination is the formal mechanism of justice. It also introduced Taro, a pseudo-Dickensian street kid who is caught up in a Sidhe attempt to kill one of their own kind, a renegade known as Nual. The book avoids any clear description of the Sidhe, relying more on our familiarity with that fey name. The following Consorts of Heaven explains more about their former dominance over many human worlds, their defeat, their apparent extinction and their continuing, hidden existence, though its plot and characters are independent of the first novel.

Guardians of Paradise links up characters from the previous two novels and propels them to strike back at the Sidhe. How exactly they might do that is, at first, unknown to Nual and Taro. Nual has spent years in hiding and Taro is on the run from the only world he has known. Following the only clue they have quickly leads them to Jarek, who escaped Sidhe imprisonment in Consorts of Heaven with a valuable secret and a cache of

encrypted information.

Within a couple of dozen pages, Fenn covers the back story and sets up the mission—a briskness sure to be appreciated both by those new to her writing and readers who need a brief reminder of the “key takeaways” from her previous novels. The recap also allows a dash of recasting of previous events, pulling the focus onto events that didn’t seem so important at the time. My recollection of the closing pages of *Principles of Angels* had more to do with explosions and narrow escapes than the nature of the City Manager, but his being a male Sidhe provides an explanation for several elements in this book.

The vital information Jarek has taken from his sojourn on the planet Serenein is that the Sidhe use the brains of rare Sidhe/human hybrid youths to create the transit-kernel at the core of every starship. This recalls the Conjoiner use of minds to run spaceships in Alastair Reynold’s *Revelation Space* series. As in Reynolds, the existence of a sentient mind in the workings of starships is unknown to owners and operators. However, Reynolds has only shared this information with his readers in one story (“Weather” in *Galactic North*), whilst Fenn makes it a major part of her plot. Additionally, the Conjoiners chosen go willingly, whilst the Sidhe transit-kernels are genetic sports, lied to and never understanding their fates.

Fenn’s worldbuilding is best close to the core of her plot. The concept of the transit-kernels drives the novel well and is well-realized. For example, there is validity in the idea that the hybrids are rare and that a single facility might take a year to process each. There is even a whole paragraph on the approximate number of “shiftships” in human-space and that “[e]ach transit-kernel lasted between one and two thousand years before it became unstable” (p. 99). Further from the plot, however, the worldbuilding frays. There doesn’t appear to be any reason for the Sidhe to continue the creation of transit-kernels, which they don’t need and would only benefit humanity. Nor, with the hybrids so rare, is there any sense of what the Sidhe do with the transit-kernels, how new shiftships are built. These concerns, however, aren’t immediately important to the story of *Guardians of Paradise*, and there is enough in the novel to salt it with a sense that there is more to Fenn’s setting than meets the eye—a broad background of hundreds of possible planets.

This broad background, along with the open-ended nature of the series; the possibility of aliens; the opening up of a further layer of malevolence beyond the Sidhe, all add up to a fabulous setting for a sprawling series of old-fashioned adventure novels. There is a similarity here to the oeuvre of Neal Asher, who also designed a vast playground of future history for his, now multiple, series of novels. Fenn differs in the nature of her protagonists, though, and in the games she wishes to play. She is more interested in people than machines. This makes her initial task of developing characters more important, but Asher has been caught by the need to forever escalate the technology, the level of threat. Fenn can build out, one person at a time, fighting a secret war where each life lost or won matters.

Fenn also seems rather more interested in planetary romance than in space opera. Even so, each planet feels like a single setting. Stormy planet Kathryn, where this book opens, feels like it is all one North Wales coast while Kama Nui, where Taro and Nual eventually set down, is a South Seas planet with Pacific Islander culture and rules. There’s a bit of hand waving to allow this set-up:

Kama Nui is mainly a water-world. . .What land creatures are here now are all imports, many of them from Old Earth. . .The people the Sidhe took from Old Earth to settle Kama Nui were native to marine archipelagos there. . .they were used to the idea of retaining their lives through change. Most now live a traditional island lifestyle—at least that’s what the guidebooks claim. (p. 89)

And then we’re off. Palms, tropical flowers, colorful clothing, beach bars and tapu, rules against use of lethal

force in combat and fair treatment of opponents.

These last allow espionage, daring raids, and lots of peril for our protagonists without any immediate danger of death. This balancing of force stops the sophomore efforts of Nual and Taro resulting in their immediate extermination. Taro is a naïve teen, torn from the life he knew but intelligent enough to recognize how little he knows.

One of the first things Taro had learnt when he left Vellern was that he had no chance of faking it out in the real world. If he didn't know something—and there was shitloads he didn't know—he'd save himself a lot of grief if he just asked. (p. 33)

This makes him a great viewpoint character, an excellent sidekick, as he can ask the audience's questions any time we need it of him. By contrast, Nual knows the ways of the world(s), but doesn't really know herself. She has spent much of her life repressing her Sidhe character through fear of what she might become and doesn't know her strengths or her limits, despite being an experienced killer. She is afraid of her own glamor, making a direct equation between sex and death—one which is reinforced by her own first experience of sex. As Nual's self-reliance grows, she also comes to understand how much power she has. She struggles not to become a Bitch Queen, seemingly able to overcome those elements of her nature through the power of love. How much of Taro's love is real and how much an effect of Sidhe glamor is central to their increasingly complex relationship, and incompletely resolved in the course of this book. Beside this emotional rollercoaster, Jarek seems to be offstage for much of the book, perhaps because he experiences comparatively little character growth.

It is probably best to think of Fenn's novels so far as journeyman works. Whilst I have enjoyed them more than other reviewers on this site, I am also pleased by the signs of progress in her writing. Her skill with characters is growing and they have accrued depth over the course of her novels.

The integration of technicolor endings into the story has also significantly improved, from feeling tacked-on in her first novel to the gradual ramping up of threats in her latest. *Guardians of Paradise* is good light entertainment, which continues to build a platform on which Jaine Fenn can grow her empire and her audience.

Matti Tornio says

Pretty mediocre read. Jaine Fenn writes interesting female characters and Nual is definitely the highlight of the book. Unfortunately way too much time is spent with Taro and Jarek, neither of whom is particularly compelling or likable.

I quite enjoyed the worldbuilding in the first two books in the series. Unfortunately the vacation planet on display here is not nearly as interesting.

Fred Langridge says

I'm still really enjoying the *Hidden Empire* series. Each book has been quite different; they're all good books and I like the way the bigger picture's being built up.

Jaine Fenn is a great writer of character and of story, and her universe feels neither contrived nor too derivative.

John says

Another epic book from Jaine Fenn. Can't wait for the fourth instalment!

Ove says

I love Jaine Fenn. Her characters and intriguing world building is superb. She is one of my favorite authors and *Guardians of Paradise* is one of my most anticipated books this year. Let me start by telling you a bit background.

The Hidden Empire series is about the Sidhe, a race with overwhelming mental powers and beauty that has been screwing with the human race in secret for a long time. Centuries ago their Protectorate ruled the human race. But their tyranny was so great that the males of their own race joined the subjugated humans in an uprising believed to have killed all of them and freeing the human race. But now a few humans learn that they are still around.

One good thing with Jaine is that her books are self contained and can stand by themselves. That is especially true for the previous two books that can be read independently.

Principles of Angels is about a conspiracy that could destroy a floating city to kill Nual, a renegade Sidhe. This is where Taro and Nual meet and become what they are now.

The second book *Consorts of Heaven* is about a secret colony where the Sidhe breed a special kind of talent only to lure them with fake religion and put them in stasis to send them off planet to use their tortured brains as jump-cores. This is where Jarek Reen regains his memories among the local barbarians and helps them overthrow the Sidhe and escapes with the secret.

Guardians of Paradise brings together the characters and plots from the previous books. Nual and Taro are now both certified Angel assassins hiding in the house Nual inherited from Elarn Reen. Jarek arrives at his dead sister's house in time to foil an assassination attempt on them and they decide to join Jarek in his crusade against the Sidhe.

The hunt takes them through hard personal dilemmas, arduous jumps, elusive allies and equally elusive enemies. Nual and Taro goes ahead to the vacation planet that was the destination of the *Consorts of Heaven* to try to find the operation there while Jarek goes to a trading hub to find a hacker competent enough to hack the Sidhe datacore he stole from their ship.

The story is well paced, captivating and thrilling. I especially enjoyed the artificially induced love between Taro and Nual. The Sidhe power of healing induces love and she saved his life at the end of *Principles of Angels*. He is a 17 year old kid, a bit more mature than most in some respect since he grew up in the Undertow but very much his age in others and she is an alien with different ways of thinking brought up as she was in a hive-mind-like community. It has many surprising twists and turns. And every good story

should have a love interest in it. The captures and escapes kept it thrilling too. And the overall journey of discovery has some big surprises at the end.

The world building is one of Jaine Fenn's strengths. This world is well thought out with its history and different political solutions. The seemingly rural vacation planet with hidden high tech corporations at war with each other while maintaining a tabu against killing is well executed and made believable.

The characters are easy to love and root for. Jaine makes them sympathetic, lifelike and believable like 'ordinary people' with special circumstances. They are human and they make mistakes maybe thats what makes the threats to them so gripping. The powers they have are not superpowers that take them out of any bind, rather the opposite it is their ingenuity that saves the day unless their friends have to come and help them. The multiple main characters hold together well and the plot doesn't diverge much.

Another great thing is that I finally get to know about how Nual became a Sidhe rebel and how she as a child was rescued by Jarek. That explained a whole lot but it also opened a can of worms that I am sure the reader will enjoy in books to come.

I got this random thought. Interesting the way you thinks about female alien villains. It doesn't feel like a gender issue here but what would I think if a male writer had the same female villains? I would probably never think about it at all if they were male...

I love journeys of discovery like the one here. *Guardians of Paradise* is an action adventure that puts two Angel assassin and a Free trader against sinister alien conspiracies. Jaine proves again she is a master at doling out revelations and pacing the story that keeps me captivated from beginning to end. This is enjoyable science fiction with a spice of fantasy. This book is less standalone than the previous two and I would recommend that you read them first. I don't know how long you can keep calling someone a promising new author, Jain Fenn is one of the most promising authors of this century and I am sure you would enjoy her books too.

The ending keeps me thinking and speculating on where this is going but we will have to wait until July 2011 for *Bringer of Light*.

C says

Thought I'd reread a favourite Space Opera on my holidays this year.

Things I'd remembered. That this where the protagonists from the two books join forces. Corporate espionage as a fact of life on a Polynesian landscape.

Things I'd forgotten. The scale of the world building in this series. We're still getting revelations that explain the set-up, cast things in a new light, and set up more problems. Quite how annoying the teenage boy's point of view is (It's supposed to be. I just wanted to grab him by the shoulders and shake him!)

Guy Robinson says

Reads like a James Bond film crossed with a Call of Cthulhu investigation.

Very satisfying in terms of technology, politics and commerce with plenty of action and Jaine Fenn's distinctive female voice that bothers itself with otherwise overlooked women thus painting a fuller picture.

Martin Stewart says

This book is another in a series of S.F. books by Jaine Fenn, although I don't think you need to have read the previous books to enjoy this one.

I loved meeting up with characters from the previous books again, but also some new characters who have been dragged into the quest to find evidence of the continued existence of a powerful alien race thought to be extinct.

The plot is fast paced and unexpected but also sexy, dark and left me keen to read the next in the sequence.
