



Trial of Flowers

Jay Lake

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The City Imperishable's secret master and heir to the long-vacant throne has vanished from a locked room, as politics have turned deadly in a bid to revive the city's long-vanished empire. The city's dwarfs, stunted from spending their childhoods in confining boxes, are restive. Bijaz the Dwarf, leader of the Sewn faction among the dwarfs, fights their persecution. Jason the Factor, friend and apprentice to the missing master, works to maintain stability in the absence of a guiding hand. Imago of Lockwood struggles to revive the office of Lord Mayor in a bid to turn the City Imperishable away from the path of destruction. These three must contend with one another as they race to resolve the threats to the city.

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Trial of Flowers Details

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From Reader Review Trial of Flowers for online ebook

Jordan Calderone says

The Trail Of Flowers is a very, how to nicely say overly complicated book. Which light weight disappointed me cause I've heard this author's other works are really good. The plot line drags and doesn't ever really pick up. The world that has been developed here is intriguing but had that been fleshed out more than the intrigue I would have been more satisfied and also interested. Again it's unfortunate cause there was a lot of room for a great story in here. Also there are zero reoccurring woman characters, which is honestly also boring.

Tim Hicks says

Can I say it was a good read but I didn't like it?

Dark, dark and in places too gritty for some readers.

A bit weird in places, and occasionally I think Lake reached too far with that.

I loved Perdido Street Station, and I am no stranger to dark, weird books. I like Jay's other works, and I wish him the best in his current health challenges.

There's some good world-building here, but as others have noted many details remain un-drawn.

A plus for the florid language, perhaps a tribute to Wolfe and others, and appropriate for the genre.

The cover suggests, and some of the text supports, that the camelopard riders wear 20th-century business suits and white shirts. Say what?

It seems excessively odd that this other-world city should have krewes that build floats for annual parades. Yet there is no mention of a large river. I can't think why Lake would lift a real-world thing so cleanly to place in his otherwise-far-out world.

Enero and his people are to be annoying in a way that is being reminiscent of Jar Jar Binks. It was to be annoyed by his constant "to be" - some of which were reasonably placed and some of which just stopped the reading flow dead. I am to be remembering seeing this style of speech many years ago, too, in a work by one of the long-gone great authors. It was to be annoying then. That one was implemented more smoothly too; for example, a character might ask someone "To be opening the door please."

Near the end I had a bit of "oh no, not the old trip through the sewers again" but it was OK because the dunny diver is a great character.

Finally, though, I was left disappointed because most of the plot revolves around characters moving dull-wittedly ahead and then suddenly knowing what they had to do, however weird it might be. Archer's role in the conclusion was particularly pulled out of thin air, and needed some setup.

This could have been a four-star book, but it isn't.

Mike Brendan says

The book is advertised as "decadent urban fantasy in the tradition of *Perdido Street Station*. Quite frankly, China Meiville did it better. And with less blatant decadence.

The story centers around three characters:

Jason the Factor, who is a dock manager by day, secret agent for one of the City's Councilors by night.
Bijaz the Dwarf, who is a clerk extraordinaire. He's a Dwarf by upbringing, his growth stunted by being locked in a box during his childhood. And his lips are sewn shut. And he was a friend of Jason's but not any more as the story begins.

Imago of Lockwood, a debtor who's looking to cheat the system and the courts by becoming the Lord Mayor of the City Imperishable.

The whole of the story takes place inside the City Imperishable -- yes that is its name -- which is suffering attacks of a magical (aka noumenal) nature while its secret defender (Jason's boss, the wizard Ignatius) is missing. Plus there's an air of fear/paranoia as rumors of invasion fill the streets.

Rather than traditional chapters, the book is divided into two acts, with POV shifting between the three protagonists. Each POV is announced with a scene break with the character's name afterwards, and it's a technique that annoys me, because you can get the same effect from a simple scene break followed by a few select words.

People (and Dwarves) are fleeing the city, and the Burgesses mutter and bicker amongst each other. There's some sort of schism among the Dwarves, represented in two factions: the Sewn and the Slashed, which refers to the traditional stitching of the lips. Other than that, we know little about why these two groups exist and what they stand for. But we get the picture that the Dwarves are generally held in disdain (although it's never revealed why normal people get shoved in boxes to become Dwarves), and the Burgess plan on taxing the hell out of these second class citizens in order to raise funds for an army. And Bijaz is going to be the collector.

Meanwhile Jason is trying to find his master so the Burgesses can focus on the threat to the city. And Imago dodges the Law (because he owes a ton of money) while he tries to find supporters for his mad bid. You see, waaaay back in the day when the City Imperishable was the capital for some great Empire, the last Emperor razed the temples of the Old Gods before marching off to war and proclaiming that elections for a Lord Mayor were treason or some such. But Imago has legal precedence and plans on getting the courts to recognize it. Assuming they don't send him to Debtor's prison first.
Or kill him.

The first act revolves around Imago's bid for Lord Mayor, and how Bijaz and Jason involve themselves in this risky venture. The noumenal attacks plague Bijaz mostly, and damage him more than once. Then he gets assaulted in a scene which I felt was gratuitous and unnecessary -- it seemed more for the sake of telling us how "decadent" this city was than for any real plot-based reason. Imago gets hit by magic as well, right before falling in with the Tribade, an organization of women with no known agenda or goals -- save for getting Imago into the office.

Part of this whole bid is staging the titular "Trial of Flowers." So they set up this elaborate procession to serve as the Trial, including a mock joust where Imago proves himself worthy. However, the night before Bijaz goes out for a night service with a god monger (whatever that is, we find out after the first meeting he's also a Dwarf) and receives this horrible vision and reasons out that this Trial of Flowers is a bad thing. What makes it a bad thing is that it becomes a focal point of both power and belief -- which had been diffused among the Burgesses and the various and sundry temples for centuries. Now all this psychological power is focused in one event, and at the climax of the Trial, all hell breaks loose, and the Old Gods return along with the missing Ignatius who declares himself as the Emperor's Heir.

Thus endeth part the first.

Part the second revolves around the incoming army that's going to attack the City and getting rid of Ignatius, who is not the man he once was. The City is slowly falling into this oppressive state starting with the seat of government and spreading out into the city proper. Jason is a turncoat after seeing some these atrocities in the palace (and telling us about them), Bijaz turns Slashed so he can fellate people for drug money, and Imago learns that being Lord Mayor is a pretty craptastic position in the government bureaucracy.

Each goes their own way in trying to stop the invasion, as it will only further the hopes of the ubiquitous evil/Old Gods in restoring the empire. Although who exactly is interested in doing such is never made clear.

Jason goes out to meet the incoming army to help them get in so one of the Burgesses can get a shot at killing Ignatius. And he dies. And comes back. For no real reason, save some vague prophecy.

Bijaz goes through rehab, and in some bizarre casino scene reminiscent of the Twilight Zone, becomes the "luck of the city." He becomes invigorated and sallies forth to set things right, by arranging a huge parade of the temple gods.

Imago, meanwhile, goes beneath the city to find where the Old Gods were entombed to try to calm them down and get things back to normal.

And things fall apart. Not the protagonist's plans mind you, but the story itself. Things just suddenly blur back to normal, and the City is somehow saved. But how it all comes together and happens is so muddled I'm not sure what exactly happened. The best way to describe in the context of the novel as a whole is that the story just shits all over itself.

The greatest problem I have with this novel is that it seems that Lake is trying *too* hard to be like Meville and it doesn't work. I wouldn't call New Corbuzon "decadent" although it may give that air -- though I blame the smog. The difference is in the context. Meville's work is rich with it. *Flowers* doesn't have it. When you hear of a faction or concept in *Perdido* you learn things about it. We don't know anything the Tribade, the godmongers (until late in the book), Krewes, or Slashed or the Sewn. We don't know why the Dwarves are made as they are, but the Remade (from *Perdido* are a different story altogether.

And as I said before the decadence is too blatant in *Flowers*. I point to Bijaz with his rape scene and his fall to prostitution as the main culprit, but I also have to add that there's a scene where he pleases himself to what is, in all due respects, a snuff stage play. It makes Bijaz so unsympathetic it's a wonder how he and Jason (who we're told has his own little S&M dungeon for his personal amusement) ever became friends in the first place. And in my mind it's all unnecessary. There's better ways to show decadence than just sexual deviancy. At least with Isaac (again, referring to *Perdido*) while his relationship breaks taboos, there's a certain amount of acceptance, and the relationship between the two is fairly genuine. And where is the crowd? Where is the

density of industry that we see in New Corbuzon? Most of what we get from the City Imperishable is told, rather than shown. History is dumped in more than one spot.

And while Lake's writing is fairly solid, Meville is much more delightful to read. The latter shows a love for language and plays with it. I mean, the phrase "puissant weapon" has such a ring to it.

I think only die hard Jay Lake fans would hold an interest in this book. But if you like Meville, in all honesty, this can go back on the shelf.

Jacob says

The City Imperishable is in trouble. Various armies are marching towards its walls, old gods are spreading fear through the streets, and the people responsible for the city's safekeeping are either too busy bickering among themselves or worse, vanished. It is up to two ordinary men, and one dwarf, to restore order to the city, return the gods to their slumbers, and turn the tides of war.

Maybe I'm just suffering genre fatigue, but for all its supposed grandeur and decadence, the City Imperishable feels...rather small and empty. Nothing about it really feels deserving of its grandiose name. Its history is thin, its politics unconvincing, the various players both large and small don't seem to have much purpose beyond advancing the plot. The story behind the City's dwarfs (people confined to boxes during their childhood, thus stunting their growth) is just barely explained, the *why* of it anyway, but we're not made to understand how the process works: who gets boxed, how they're raised, etc. The Tribade is shadowy and mysterious and rather single-minded in its efforts to help Imago of Lockwood become Mayor, and it's never made clear why the City even *has* an underworld criminal empire populated entirely by feminists. The Trial of Flowers of the title is pretty interesting, but most of the time it seems to be playing to empty streets. China Miéville makes his city come alive in Perdido Street Station (to which this novel is compared, among others); Jay Lake's City Imperishable feels as dead as the rest of its empire.

I suppose I shouldn't be too disappointed. After all, I didn't really expect much to begin with. Truth is, I only bought this book because there was a ~~giraffe~~ camelopard on the cover. You don't see many ~~giraffes~~ camelopards in fantasy, decadent or otherwise. Now all we need are some war kangaroos (Ape-rabbits? Hare-bears?) and we'll have it made.

Edit: 5/27/2010: Turns out "Camelopard" is an older English name for giraffe, as well as its scientific name (*Giraffa camelopardalis*), which means Jay Lake is more clever than I am, and also that mocking his use of the word in this book was in poor taste. But giraffe or camelopard, it's still the main reason I bought the book in the first place.

Encryptic says

I read this a few years back after reading a recommendation elsewhere and really enjoyed it. Finally got the sequel Madness of Flowers recently so I had to re-read ToF to refresh my memory. Just didn't have time to read much lately due to work otherwise I would have plowed through it much faster.

Really enjoyed it even more this time around - The plot at the heart of it all isn't incredibly groundbreaking but Lake's inventive spin on the usual genre trappings and the interesting trio of main characters (Jason, Imago and Bijaz) plus the above-average prose and solid pacing keeps it compelling all the way through.

As a huge fan of Wolfe's *Book of the New Sun* - I enjoyed the intentional homage to Wolfe (the names like "The City Imperishable" and obscure words like "fiacre" borrowed from *BotNS*) as well as the sense that Lake's *City Imperishable* is much like Wolfe's *Urth* - a once-mighty power now fallen far into decadence from the glory days of the past. Lake also clearly owes a debt to Jeff VanderMeer and M. John Harrison and acknowledges that with a few references thrown in here and there for the sharp-eyed reader - plus you can't go wrong with VanderMeer himself plugging the book on the jacket.

Richard Derus says

This week, Saturday the 27th, Jay Lake will hold the Jay Wake. It's the best idea I've ever heard, hosting your own funeral! Think of all the things you've said at the funeral of a friend, things you wish you'd had the chance, and the permission, to say while they were yet breathing. Well, here it is. Opportunity meeting motivation. I've gotten motivated to say my piece about the reading pleasure I've found in Lake's books.

I've reviewed *TRIAL OF FLOWERS* at Shelf Inflicted, the group blog. It's a fantasy novel.

I read a fantasy novel.

There, I said it.

I not only read it, I enjoyed it. BUT DON'T FOR GAWD'S SAKE TELL ANYONE. I will swear an oath that you're lying and that you must be the one who hacked my account and wrote a glowing heap of praise for a book with dwarves, an ancient city declining under an empty throne, a reluctant hero...well, you see my predicament. I can't admit out loud that I liked this kind of guff. "The city is," runs the motto Lake gives the *City Imperishable*. Yeeesh, really?

Really. And really worth your time.

Bogdan says

Jay Lake a castigat in 2004 a premiului John W. Campbell pentru cel mai bun Scriitor debutant in science-fiction. A mai aparut in publicatii ca *Realms of Fantasy*, *Interzone*, *Strange Horizons*, *Asimov's Science Fiction*, and the *Mammoth Book of Best New Horror*. Recent m-am lovit de el in doua antologii, odata in antologia "New Weird"-ul publicata la Millennium Press, si apoi in numarul 2 al volumului "The year's best science fiction", aparut la Nemira. Impresia buna pe care mi-a lasat-o a fost si motivul principal pentru care m-am hotarat sa abordez o carte de-a lui. Dar si informatiile de pe Amazon au jucat un rol important. Se spunea acolo ca este o carte numai buna de abordat pentru cei ce au ramas pentru totdeauna marcati de fantasy-ul urban a lui China Miéville si Jeff VanderMeer.

Romanul este impartit in doua, *Autumn of the City Imperishable* si *Old Gods Dance in Winter*, si desi eu am crezut ca sunt doua povestiri distincte din acelasi univers, de fapt ele sunt doua capitole ale cartii.

Intreaga actiune este concentrata in jurul orasului nemuritor si urmareste destinele a trei personaje, ce reusesc de multe ori sa se intalneasca si sa porneasca in quest-uri parca inspirate din universul dungeons& dragons.

Avem un fel de contabil, Jason the Factor, un avocat decazut cu datorii in urma jocurilor de noroc, Imago of Lockwood, si pe Bijaz the Dwarf, conducatorul uneia dintre factiunile pitice?ti ale orasului. Am spus uneia pentru ca orasul e macinat de conflictele dintre cei cu buzele sigilate, Sewn, condusi de Bijaz, si care au invatat sa vorbeasca printr-un limbaj special al semnelor si Slashed, cei ce au ales sa nu-si ingradeasca limbajul.

Si istoria acestor dwarfi, folositi mai ales la contabilitate deoarece erau considerati a fi foarte buni cu cifrele, este mai complicata, unii dintre ei fiind nascuti oameni normali pentru ca apoi sa fie inchisi in niste cutii speciale pentru a li se inhiba cresterea sau sunt supusi pur si simplu unor interventii chirurgicale repetate. Motivatia din spatele acestor actiuni nu este suficient de detaliata de autor asa ca nici eu nu pot intra in mai multe amanunte.

In lipsa regelui Terminus, plecat la razboi, orasul este condus de o fractiune de functionari, Burgess, intr-un mod in care nu fericeste pe multa lume. Romanul incepe cu disparitia patronului lui Jason the Factor, cel care i-a si tinut loc de tata in ultimii ani si cel putin teoretic, ar trebui sa se continue cu o intriga care sa creasca pe masura ce ne afundam in lectura.

Din pacate cartea pare ca stagneaza destul de mult, nu se intampla multe lucruri (supranaturale), doar niste atacuri la inceput, avem si zvonul unei armate ce se indreapta spre oras (ramas la nivel de zvon cel putin in prima parte), ceva fiinte dintr-o alta lume, in rest subiectul este dominat de necesitatea lui Jason de a afla ce s-a intamplat cu Ignatius din RedTower.

Necesitate care nu concluzioneaza prea bine pentru cititor, disparitia lui Ignatius nefiind explicata mai in amanunt si ramanand multe necunoscute, romanul accentuand mai mult nevoia cetatenilor de a se sacrifica pentru a-si salva orasul si pericolul revenirii la vechile obiceiuri si odata cu acestea, Vechii Zei sa fie treziti la viata.

Trebuie avut in vedere ca nu este o carte care as recomanda-o celor mai tineri, pentru ca, in primul rand, cuprinde o serie de ritualuri si sacrificii singeroase, dublate de ceva scene explicite de viol (si nu neaparat asupra sexului frumos), si se merge chiar un pic si mai departe, accentuandu-se din plin decadenta umana.

Din punctul meu de vedere, scriitorul nu reuseste sa creeze aceeaasi atmosfera fantastica, la care sa salivezi continuu, sa-ti vina sa nu mai lasi cartea din mina, pe care o gasesti in Perdido Street Station cel putin, sau in scrierile lui Jeff VanderMeer.

Personajele au farmecul lor si reusesc sa te atraga in plasa evenimentelor, insa acest lucru se intampla abia dupa ce ai patruns adanc in carte, si la un moment dat, lipsit de unele revelatii necesare, recunosc ca am ajuns sa cam stramb din nas. (de ex. cand dispare Ignatius, Jason ii gaseste o parte din ureche intr-un din camerele sale, iar pina la final, chiar daca acesta apare intr-adevar fara fragmentul respectiv nu suntem luminati despre "ce" si "cum" s-a intamplat).

Pare ca lipseste ceva, o anumita consistenta a evenimentelor, si probabil ca ar fi fost mai interesant daca s-ar fi acordat o mai mare atentie a detaliilor. Parca nici paza orasului nu e mai breaza, din denumirea scriitorului si din modul cum sunt ei descrisi par mai mult niste argati de curte boiereasca, decat o politie bine organizata si pusa la punct.

Romanul este structurat pe urmarirea separata a actiunilor fiecaruia dintre cele trei personaje principale, capitolele purtand numele acestora, multe din momentele de incheiere fiind bine dozate, facand loc unei doze suficiente de suspans pentru a te sili sa continui.

Destul de subtil mi s-a parut si momentul in care Imago, ajuns un fel de cartofor cu datorii la multi, haituit de bailiffi (am gasit tradus ca vatafi), organul de ordine al conducerii despre care am vorbit mai sus, are parte de o "revelatie" si isi doreste cu orice pret sa devina primarul orasului, descoperindu-si subit iubirea fata de semeni si oras.

Unele personaje mi s-au parut insuficient exploatate cum ar fi grupul armat format din camelo-leopardii calariti de arlechini, specia zburatoare Alate ce survoleaza orasul sau fiintele supranaturale care au atacat locuitorii noaptea, alaturi de alte cateva evenimente ramase cu un semn de intrebare.

Per total este o lectura fantasy mai neobisnuita si mai singeroasa decat de obicei, cu momente in care reuseste sa te captiveze dar apoi parca totul se sparge, fie ca autorul nu mai pune accent pe explicatii fie nu dezvoltă destul de mult subiectul.

Totusi este o lume ce merita vizitata chiar daca comparativ cu Viriconium, Perdido Street Station, Veniss Underground, The Etched City, iese un pic mai sifonata, dovedind ca fantasy-ul a reusit sa evolueze de la povestile clasice si chiar sa-si depaseasca conditia de gen ingradit doar de anumite coordonate.

Marta says

Francuski filozof, dramaturg, eseista i powieściopisarz Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt da? si? pozna? polskiemu odbiorcy za spraw? licznych publikacji, w tym form d?u?szych i krótszych, na czele z uznanym na ca?ym ?wiecie „Oskarem i Pani? Ró?”. Cho? zdania o jego twórczo?ci s? w?ród czytelników podzielone, a sam autor, w sposób do?? krzywdz?cy, cz?sto porównywany jest do Paulo Coelho, warto podj?? ryzyko i samemu przekona? si?, na ile podziela si? wra?liwo?? tego twórcy i sposób postrzegania przez niego rzeczywisto?ci. Idealn? okazj? do zapoznania si? z piórem Schmitta jest si?gni?cie po wznowiony przez wydawnictwo Znak zbiór „Marzycielka z Ostendy”, prezentuj?cy pi?? opowiada? skoncentrowanych wokó? ludzkich marze? i l?ków. Oraz wokó? mi?o?ci.

Cho? opowiadania s? tematycznie zbli?one do siebie, ka?de z nich podejmuje zagadnienie marze? w inny sposób, ka?de potrafi czytelnika zaskoczy? i oczarowa?. Wszystkie próbuj? przekaza? jak?? my?l, której – nawet je?li wydaje si? do?? oczywista – trudno odmówi? wa?ko?ci. Opowiadane historie zmuszaj? do tego, by w nawale codziennych obowi?zków przystan?? i chwil? zastanowi? si? nad tym, co od zawsze tkwi?o gdzie? w g??bi duszy. Pisarz nie popada przy tym w tanie moralizatorstwo ani zbytnei egzaltacj?; przes?ania s? proste i przejrzyste, a przy tym chwytaj?ce za serce, za? wnioski trzeba wysnu? samemu – zale?nie od w?asnych prze?y? i do?wiadcze?.

Pod wzgl?dem narracyjnym i stylistycznym Schmitt zachowuje ró?norodno??. Niektóre utwory zosta?y napisane w pierwszej, inne w trzeciej osobie. Styl bywa a to bardziej oszcz?dny, a to bardziej poetycki. Autor poradzi? sobie tak?e z opowiadaniem, w które wplót? elementy napi?cia i grozy. ?rodki przekazu dostosowuje do tego, co pragnie czytelnikowi przekaza? – wie, jak i kiedy by? przejmuj?cym, wzruszaj?cym, budz?cym strach albo nadziej?.

„Próba kwiatów”, je?liby chcie? okre?li? j? w mo?liwie najzwi??lejszy sposób, to ksi??ka niezwykle dziwna.

czy w sobie specyficzny niepokój i duszną atmosferę new weird z domieszką urban fantasy, a po nalecieć do literatury modernistycznej czy naturalistycznej, momentami wręcz turpistycznej. Czy taka mieszkanka może w ogóle okazać się strawną? Jay Lake udowadnia, że jak najbardziej – o ile czytelnik dysponuje silną psychiką i mocnym ośrodkiem.

Powieść zaczyna się dość niewinnie – oto bowiem mamy trzech bohaterów, dwóch mężczyzn i jednego kobietę, a raczej ich jedno – troska o Nieprzemijające Miasto, w którym sytuacja nie wygląda najlepiej. O Imperatorze dawno temu słychać zaginięciem, a władzę sprawuje skorumpowane i zbiurokratyzowane Zgromadzenie Obywateli. Narasta panika związana z plotkami o zbliżającej się wrogiej armii, ponadto nasilają się nomenklaturalne ataki. Miasto nie cieszy się już przychylnością Starych Bóstw, a miast skupi się na obronie przed zewnętrznym zagrożeniem, musi więc w pierwszej kolejności skonfliktować wewnętrzny – spór między dwoma frakcjami klanów, Zasztytami i Rozciętymi. Na domiar złego, na scenę wkracza kandydat na burmistrza – mimo że od wieków nikt nie sprawował tego stanowiska – i powołuje się na dawny precedens, że przeprowadzenia próby kwiatów.

Trzech protagonistów robi, co tylko w ich stanie, by działać dla dobra miasta, nie oznacza to jednak, że kierują nimi szlachetne pobudki lub że wyróżniają ich nieskazitelne postawy. Jest wręcz przeciwnie. Postaci bohaterów są odrażające, nie budzą w czytelniku sympatii i – choć powinno się im kibicować – trudno przychodzi sympatyzowanie z dżungli, zdrajcą lub sadystą. Te obmierzone charaktery pasują jak ulał do Nieprzemijającego Miasta – miejsca brudnego, plugawego, skażonego najgorszymi wadami ludzkimi.

Przytaczający, duszny klimat metropolii tworzy nastrój całej powieści. Momentami trzeba się zmuszać do dalszej lektury, bowiem obrazy, które kreuje Lake, nie należą do przyjemnych dla wyobraźni. Ludzkie sadizm, okrucieństwo, najbardziej wstydlive pragnienia – wszystko to przedstawione zostało na kartach utworu. Autor nie ucieka przed dosadnymi, naturalistycznymi opisami budzącymi obrzydzenie. Można takiego zabiegu nie polubić, trzeba jednak docenić fakt, jak wspaniale udaje się Lake'owi grać na emocjach czytelnika, oddziaływać nie na jego intelekt, a na zmysły i pierwotne odruchy.

Na tym tle kuleje nieco fabuła. Wydarzenia zbyt często biegną przypadkowym torem, a kolejne poczynania bohaterów nie trzymają w napięciu. Często dochodzi do niepotrzebnych zwolnień tempa akcji. Jeśli zaodrżemy powieść z jej zatęchłego klimatu, a postaci z negatywnych emocji, jakie wzbudza w czytelniku – otrzymamy prostą i mało ciekawą opowieść, w której zbyt często wydarzenia rozwija deus ex machina. Co gorsza, wiele elementów konstrukcji tego interesującego świata pozostaje niewyjaśnionych, a szkoda. Oliwy do ognia dolewają też błędy, które można odnaleźć na kartach „Próby kwiatów”. Już na pierwszej stronie raz w oczy brakuje przecinek, a i w dalszej części książki nie brakuje wpadek; trafi się nawet wyjątkowo paskudny błąd ortograficzny.

Warto jednak dać szansę powieści Jaya Lake'a, pozwolić porwać się wykreowanemu przez niego Nieprzemijającemu Miastu. Metropolii, która nie jest tak w pełni usytuowana w żadnej konkretnej przestrzeni, w żadnym miejscu czy czasie – a mroczne tony i zepsute charaktery jej mieszkańców wpisują się nie tylko w ramy fantastyki. Jeśli ktoś poszukuje dekadentckiego klimatu, a nie raz go epatowanie brzydotą i okrucieństwem, powinien po „Próbę kwiatów” czym prędzej sięgnąć.

Zarówno te recenzje, jak i wiele innych tekstów znajdziecie na moim blogu: <http://oceansoul.waw.pl/>
Serdecznie zapraszam!

D. B. says

Bizarrely if florally written, this Tale Of The City Imperishable" follows the paths of three denizens of the aforementioned metropolis in their combined efforts to preserve the integrity of their home, politically, strategically, and spiritually.

Lake's City exists in fantasy, with stunted men, barbarians at the gate, and inexplicable magic floating free, but the meat of the story focuses on the power struggle between the established board of regents and a reactivated office of the mayor. Along the way there are sidebars into human sacrifice, dwarf buggery, and a weird kind of sibling voodoo.

Urban fantasy? Maybe, but I hate that term.

Chris Cangiano says

The City Imperishable is the seat of a decadent former empire. The Empire is gone but the City remains ruled by an assemblage of Burgesses, an inner Counselors and a elephantine bureaucracy. Recently however, it has been plagued from without by threats of invasion from an allegedly approaching army and from within by terrifying magical attacks and the potential reemergence of long vanished Gods. Three men of the City work together to try to put things right; Jason the Factor, a businessman and servant to the City's most important and powerful Counselor, trying to discover the mystery of his friend and master's disappearance while attempting to rally the City to defend itself; Imago of Lockwood, a dissolute lawyer from a formerly noble family, struggling to revive the long vacant position of Lord Mayor of the City for himself by using a long forgotten ritual known as the Trial of Flowers, so that he can keep one step ahead of his creditors and the City's bailiffs; and Bijaz, the embittered and self-loathing leader of the City's dwarf community, sewn faction (I'll let you discover what that is if you read the book), attempting to protect both the City that he loves and which abuses he and his fellow Dwarfs. Add into the mix dark Gods, fierce tribesman, mercenaries riding what are essentially giraffes and of course the living breathing entity that is the City itself and you've got an enjoyable weird fantasy in the same vein as China Mieville. I'd add a half star because it was well written and the goings on in and around the City were tantalizingly strange. Recommended

mister says

Fucking awesome. really strange and dreamy. oh so sad and tragic, but redemptive and beautiful. not for the light hearted.

Chris Van Dyke says

They are all on the book jacket, but I'll throw out a few names for you here -- Mieville, Van DeMeer, Bishop. If your reaction is "Ooooooh -- cool!" then you will love this book. Lake has his own style and his own uniquely disturbing world, but if you like the dark, "new-weird" authors, Lake fits firmly and very competently in their midsts.

If the above paragraph means nothing to you, a short review -- Trial of Flowers is a very dark, very disturbing fantasy set in the ancient, crumbling, bureaucracy -ridden City Imperishable. Amid the plotting of sadistic dwarves and power-hungry burgesses, armies of mummers and ancient, cthonic gods are all part of planned and accidental rites that will leave the city stepped in blood, flowers, and hopefully a better future. At times squirm-inducingly violent, the end moves like a thriller with the occult power that most Lovecraft stories promise but fail to deliver. A great read for fans of dark, dark fantastic-lit.

Scott says

This was another attempt by my brother-in-law and I to do a "read-and-discuss" thing. That last two have ended with one of us giving up on the book halfway through. I am not sure if he finished reading this one, but it was mostly due to his schedule. This book caught a while back when it showed up on my recommendations on Amazon. And for a description, I go to the one that I saw from *Publishers Weekly* via Amazon.Com:

The ancient and decadent City Imperishable teeters on the verge of obliteration in this inventive fantasy from the prolific Lake, if not from the armies marching toward its gates, then from the dark, bloodthirsty gods reawakening within its walls. Three haunted and imperfect men must stand against the destruction of everything they know: Jason the Factor, a businessman and sometime civil servant who's in love with pain; Imago of Lockwood, a feckless lawyer who puts himself forward as a candidate for the centuries-dead position of Lord Mayor; and Bijaz the Dwarf, an embittered and self-hating half-man whose lips have been sewn shut. As random supernatural assaults are perpetrated on innocent citizens, these three must uncover the City Imperishable's blackest secrets, not knowing whether or not their actions will save what they hold dear.

As I mentioned, this caught my eye. Somewhere along the line this was a recommendation from Amazon. It sounded bizarre, which equals good in my book (no pun intended). On the back cover it claims to be along the lines of books like "Perdido Street Station" by China Mieville, "The Etched City" by K. J. Bishop, and "City of Saints and Madmen" by Jeff Vandermeer. I have read two of the three mentioned and would say that, yes, they are similar (as well as another book by the third author that can be said to be similar as well). They have what is referred to as "steampunk" qualities, plus the grittiness factor of the story, surroundings, and characters.

This book though had qualities about it that I didn't expect. I figured it would be more shrouded. Not sure if that is the right word, but it's what comes to mind. Maybe more cerebral. I expected something that came with thick prose and would take time to figure out how the characters stood up, and what was happening around them. Much like I found in "Last Dragon". But the book started right out of the gate with being rather straight forward. The lives of the characters, what made them tick, and how they interacted and why, was right there, plain as day. I didn't mind this at all. It just wasn't expected.

Lake does a great job in creating this world. His descriptions are very well placed, very lyrical, and I thought not overdone. You can get a lot of our what he is describing; the smell, the lay of the land, the details of the characters appearance, the city's appearance, and all around them. But again, it's enough to give you want you need without lingering too long.

Some of the events that happen aren't for the faint of heart. There is some holding back, though that may not be the best description either. Maybe saying there was a limit that Lake set. Or just instinctively knew that he only needed enough to make his point. It can be brutal though.

I found myself having a problem getting through the book however. The grittiness and/or brutal scenes didn't bother me. The dark nature of the book in general wasn't the problem. Overall it seemed inconsistent. As I mentioned, at the start I got a lot out of what I read. Getting to know where things stood. But as the story went on I felt that some explanations were missing. There were many references to what was called the noumenal, but it was never explained. Even after looking it up, I was no closer to understanding what it was about and its effect on the story. The mystery bothered me. Also, most of what was happening was leading up to a big battle. Yet the sides were never clearly defined. In some respects, I am OK with that. Black and white is not always a good thing when reading a story. Shades of gray enhance the story, make it more interesting. But it went beyond just knowing who was on what side. I had a hard time discerning why anyone was on what side they were on. Well, other than Bijaz originally. It made for some muddy plot issues in my opinion, and brought about a feeling that I needed to finish the book just to finish it.

Lake has gotten much praise for his writing. Though I had problems with this book, I still can see why many would enjoy it and other works written by him. He has talent as a writer. And many like the mystery of dissecting just what is making a character tick. Personally I like things laid out in the open more. Just a matter of taste.

Viridian5 says

Jay Lake's *Trial of Flowers* starts slow, and the various viewpoints can be a bit confusing at first, but once it picks up and you get used to it things get very involving. In an ancient city besieged by mysterious and deadly magical attacks and threats of invasion, a few people try to save the city's people. This isn't your usual fantasy environment, though. Out of tradition some children are boxed to stunt their growth and altered to make them dwarfs, who seem to be made for administrative purposes but there's actually an older reason for the practice. There are two factions of them, the Sewn and the Slashed. The Sewn are the conservative, traditional faction, who keep their lips sewn mostly shut out of... crazyass tradition, I guess. Eyeless dead orphan children with long slaverling tongues wander the streets literally sniffing out rebels. Mercenaries dressed as clowns ride strange mounts through the street. In one blurb Walter Jon Williams says, "Jay Lake is more inventive than a hive of meth-addicted weasels," and I have to agree. The City Imperishable feels like it has a vast history. The plot unfolds, gradually revealing the truth of what's going on. The section spent in the sewers in particular is very vivid and interesting to me.

I recommend the book, but there's some rape and sexual torture alluded to that some readers might find triggerry.

Elf M. says

Trial of Flowers is one of those new books in the "steampunk and decadence" genre that seems to have become popular since the emergence of China Mieville's *Perdido Street Station*. *Trial* follows the adventures of three men: Jason the Factor, Imago of Lockwood, and Bijaz the Dwarf, as the three of them face the rising old and corrupt gods and their magick that threatens to either overwhelm their beloved City Imperishable, or

attract the attention of neighboring nations determined to raze the City to the ground before the gods can gather their full strength. The City is a place of "eletricks" and "hedge mages," of "poor magicks" and "boxed dwarves," of steam and iron. It might be New Orleans, or Casablanca, or Shanghai, with the last magics and the first difference engines vying for attention.

Jason is a mercantile agent who works for the city's most powerful mage and who has a secret torture chamber under his warehouse, Imago a shifty lawyer who's lost one case too many and owes money to legbreakers, and Bijaz is a "made dwarf," his body artificially stunted in its growth, trained as an accountant, with a taste for snuff theatre. These three don't necessarily get along as they each fumble their way toward saving themselves, and maybe the city as well.

As I mentioned, the inevitable comparison to China Mieville is there, but if there's one thing Jay Lake does better than China, it's this: Jay does not flinch. Not for a second. Heck, Steven R. Donaldson, once hailed as the modern master of characters wallowing in their own degradation, was never quite as skilled at not flinching the way Jay does not flinch. Thomas Covenant's self-loathing was never quite as pointed or tangible as Bijaz's.

That said, the issues involved do make it hard to care about Jason, Bijaz and, to a lesser extent, Imago. These aren't nice people, and the scatological hells through which Jay metaphorically and literally drags them, often face-down, is tough reading. The expected redemptions aren't as rewarding as we might hope. This ain't no book for the beach. But they're all done so *well* and so artfully that once you're into the book, once you've accepted the humane ugliness that Jay has decided to show you, you'll be hooked.

Trial of Flowers isn't a perfect book. There's a sense of isolation to the City Imperishable; its presence on a world full of people never quite feels right. Even Moorcock's Melniboné felt more attached to its wider world than the City Imperishable, and I sensed that discordance more than once. But the wider world isn't what the book is about, so once you've stepped into the City Imperishable, there really is only one way out. You'll just have to travel through the city's sewers, pursued by eyeless, frog-tongued children and accompanied by two mad dwarves, each insane in his own way, to get there.
