



Review of Traci Harding's Gene of Isis

Tue, 05/30/2006 - 14:00 ? rpgrev

Voyager, 2005, 468pp

"Gene of Isis" is a heavy book physically. Weighing in at almost 470 pages in the trade paperback version published by Voyager, it is Traci Harding's tenth novel and the first in her third trilogy. Because we like the number three, there are three interwoven settings in this book, Victorian England (19th century), Cathar France (13th century) and 21st century Australia, or at least initially. Eventually they all find themselves in Egypt, because that's the sort of place where such storylines can end up. Because we like women we also have three as the central characters being Ashlee Granville, Lillet du Lac and Mia Montrose respectively to the setting.

Historical fiction is a genre I must confess a particular fondness for. For example, Mary Renault's retelling of the tales of ancient Hellenes and George McDonald's Flashman! series both provide a wealth of information that is cleverly included in the narrative and is backed up with a wealth of indexing and documentation to show historical authenticity. Such stories put flesh on the bare bones of historical facts, providing the actors and their actions with a structure of their psyche by which we can understand them better and witness their prejudices as well as understand their universal claims. Even historical fiction which includes a dash of the magical and mystical is more than acceptable (as any lover of legend and mythology should rightly state) as this helps elaborate the cognitive structures of the people of the appropriate time.

Sad to say, Traci Harding's book provides a bit of paranormal activity, but little else of the great qualities of historical fiction. The bibliography is sparse, consisting of works that could barely be considered scholarly. The glossary is likewise short in quantity of topics and deals with some difficult subjects in a fleeting manner. The language is often quite anachronistic. There is an enjoyable attempt in the opening pages to replicate some semblance of the writing style of Victorian England, but this is soon lost in the lightweight style of short paragraphs and trivial conversation. There are twenty or so pages relating to the Cathar setting which are enjoyable for similar reason, but also suffer the same fate. What historical references exist are clumsily dropped into the text and their importance mostly discarded. Likewise maladroit are the occasional sexual encounters and romantic thread.

Similar criticisms can be made of the narrative. At no stage is the story even remotely captivating, or, for that matter, is there much of a discernable story at all. Events are largely contrived and there certainly is no sense of narrative flow. To describe the treatment of esoteria and religions as "cavalier" would be an understatement. Characterisation likewise is almost non-existent. The personalities of the the three main characters are flat, sharing between them the one point of being women of a moderate degree of independence, and certainly with no development. The main male character, the fey Albray, has the task of protecting his female companions and alternates between being whimpering and slightly aggressive, but that's about the extent of it. Even the three settings, the most interesting and developed components of the novel, are utterly without feeling. There is no sense of the cold of England, the heat and dust of the Egypt or the earthy muck of a medieval fort in southern France.

Despite all these criticisms it is just possible that the book would have some worth, and not just as a door-stop. Young adults, who may need a more gentle introduction to the idea that paragraphs can have more than three sentences, will find the chatty style to their taste, along with the additional bonus of looking intelligent for having such a large book. Those who are utterly unaware of religious history may find use in the all-to-brief introduction to the Cathar heresy and the scale of the crimes against humanity committed by the Roman Catholic Church against these pacifistic heretics. Some

may find the three story thread useful for their Nephilim roleplaying game, to which there is a fleeting reference.

In the media release for for Gene of Isis ("Genesis", get it?), Traci Harding highlights the fact that she received a "D" in fourth form, when she left school, and that her dyslexia or lack of training in story construction have not held her back in her desire to become a succesful published author. This much is commendable, indeed highly commendable, for the most important ingredients in having a good story is to have imagination and dedication. However to write a good story it is requisite to know about such things as plot, characterisation, theme, style and how to develop these. Having imagination and dedication is not enough. It's time to put aside the experiences of the Catholic Ladies College, return to school, do that course and learn how to write.

An incorporated association in the State of Victoria, A0094301K RPG Review Inc., PO Box 15, Carlton South, 3053



Source URL: <http://rpgreview.net/content/review-traci-hardings-gene-isis>