



Well of Shiuan

C.J. Cherryh

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"The world of Shiuan was doomed. Rising waters and shattering earthquakes due to the coming of a vast and strange new satellite had sealed the fate of its peoples—flee or die with their world. Their sole escape routes were the Gates, the passages between worlds established by a forgotten cosmic race. And just as this knowledge dawned on the desperate tribes and cities there appeared the woman Morgaine—whose mission was to seal Shiuan's Gates."

Winner of the John W. Campbell Award for the best new writer of the year.

This is the story of Morgaine, and of her henchman, Nhi Vanye, and of their relentless enemy, Chya Roh, who followed them to the drowning planet.

Well of Shiuan Details

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From Reader Review Well of Shiuan for online ebook

Zachary Jacobi says

[the horrifying revelation that the Barrows Folk are the descendants of Morgaine's army. That made a bunch of things clear (hide spoiler)]

Juushika says

Morgaine and Vayne chase Roh into a drowning world and encounter Jhirun, a young woman fleeing from her people. I wish that this installment were bolder--it spends a lot of time developing the local setting, and while the doomed landscape is evocative and the residents are eventually tied directly into the overarching science fictional plot, it's little and late and the book overall doesn't do much to expand the narrative's scale. The interpersonal aspects continue to be my favorite part of this series, and while they threaten to grow repetitive (Morgaine's suspicions of Vayne are particularly forced) they remain uniquely Cherryh, intimate but terse, personal conflict interweaving with plot conflict. Jhirun's desperate circumstances are reminiscent of Vayne, but she's repeatedly forced out of the narrative by Morgaine's cruel utilitarianism and Vayne's complicity, making her a bittersweet foil. This feels like a middle book and it isn't my favorite Cherryh, but I like it more than not and will absolutely finish the series.

Derek says

The word 'misery' and its variations are used quite a bit. The world of the Shiuan Gate is drowning. Each year more land is claimed by the sea: field becomes poisoned marsh, hills become islands, and villages are abandoned when sea walls fail. Fatalism and retreat and diminishment as the people slowly migrate to the highest land available, and all know that the world is doomed. The gray misery of the people is on every page (perfectly suited to this week's weather: the cold wet drip of late March and a deluge of thaw) and tinges everything. It's a Dying Earth story of a sort, a wet, bonechilling November, whatever the season really is.

Morgaine and Vayne--Morgaine especially--march relentlessly on a quest that few if any will thank them for. In this case, they close the only escape from this sadly unpleasant planet. Where in the land of Ivrel's Gate this task had an air of heroism to it, a worthy deed to accomplish, here it is a heavy doom upon the inhabitants. Morgaine is merciless, holding the long view of events, and trailing destruction. It is not surprising that her name becomes a curse in the lands she has traveled. Especially in this case, where her passing triggers long-awaited social upheaval and a final accounting for many.

Ubiquitousbastard says

Some part of me doesn't want to like this series. Maybe because Cherryh loves to toy with my emotions. She makes very good ancillary characters that I end up liking even though I know that I'll never see them again...I hate her. She gets me every time. Even when I think that I'll finally avoid getting attached, then her three

dimensional, interesting characters put an end to that.

Oddly enough, I thought at the end of the previous book that I would start to warm to Morgaine here. Not the case. She seemed even more heartless and arbitrary in this book than she did in the first. Some of the character development just vanished. Which, I guess can be realistic, but I would have preferred a slower descent back into how she was, rather than a few days later everything is back to how it was.

Joseph says

Nhi Vanye's travels with Morgaine continue on the other side of the Gate. This time they've come to a world that is slowly dying -- drowning, apparently, in tides caused by a rogue moon. And this time they face adversaries more familiar with the Gates Morgaine is sworn to close, coupled with foes who are the result of Morgaine's own past actions.

These are not happy books. This particular world, as mentioned, is dying. Vanye is bound to Morgaine by oaths, but their relationship is prickly at best -- he feels compelled to honor his bond, but Morgaine is ruthlessly single-minded in her quest, willing to sacrifice anything or anybody if it will put her closer to her goal. And there's no knowing how many Gates await them, or whether they'll even realize that they've reached the final one.

They are, however, very, very good books -- compelling, character-driven drama in a vividly-realized world -- and I look forward to following Vanye and Morgaine through the Gate to see what's on the other side.

Pam Baddeley says

This is volume 2 of the science fantasy series narrating the efforts of Morgaine to close the space-and-time spanning Gates which have previously wrought havoc through time implosion, and the struggles of her faithful servant Vanye to stay true to his self and his oath, although he has to accept he is gradually becoming more distant from both. In this book, he faces the soul shaking discovery that, just as Morgaine had been missing for a hundred years on his own world while she was trapped in stasis within a gate, so has he been gone from his world for nine centuries. The world they have come to, in pursuit of the dangerous enemy who possesses his cousin Roh's body, experienced an invasion a thousand years ago and has suffered the effects ever since. The planet has also been experiencing a worsening inundation since the moon apparently broke up in collision with some captured moons, and now the coastal Barrower settlements - people who live by robbing the graves of their kingly ancestors and trading the gold with those living further inland who can grow food - are under imminent threat.

Morgaine and Vanye interact with the societies which have evolved since the incursion a millennia previously - the Barrowers, the Marshlanders and the people of Shiuan who are divided into rulers (who have the bloodline of the alien qual, who originally spread the use of Gates and who were responsible for the catastrophe those Gates brought about) and ordinary humans whom they view as cattle. (view spoiler)some of them are willing to follow her away from the drowning coast in a quest to leave their doomed planet via the master Gate. In reality, she uses them to try to smash a way through to the Gate and close it before Roh

can reach it and jam it open to allow the inhabitants - including himself - to escape to another planet and time.

In this story, Vanye is more torn than ever between his oath to Morgaine and the need to rely on his cousin Roh - or the creature wearing his body - for survival when he falls prey to the ruling qual descendants. The other man insists he is still Roh in essence, and Vanye finds it impossible to kill him as Morgaine ordered. He earns her suspicion, although she comes to his rescue - but then, it seems she has other motives. Always he finds it difficult to deal with her brooding nature, and she is more contrary than ever at times in this novel, though he now understands that at least some of this is due to the burden of carrying Changeling, the artefact which is a sword in form but a portable Gate in nature.

As a change from the first volume, the opening and closing sections of the book are seen through a different viewpoint than Vanye's: a young Barrower woman, Jhirun. She has been somewhat of a Cassandra figure since childhood and is viewed by her people as fey. She dreads the thought of having to marry the brutal Fwar and become a drudge overburdened with children like her sister. While wandering far from the Barrow she discovers an unplundered tomb full of riches, but is then prey to misconceptions about the identity of the wounded warrior who follows her home and terrifies her people, precipitating her own drastic departure. She is an interesting character viewpoint and it is a pity that her viewpoint is not continued in the main story, where we usually see Jhirun as a cowed character at the mercy of Morgaine, only sometimes showing the courage which we know she possesses.

The story concerns the breakdown of society and a descent into lawlessness, with the strong coming out on top and the weak and innocent suffering or even being slaughtered. The situation was evolving that way before Morgaine arrived, but her actions - in particular the manner in which she rescues Vanye - precipitate the downfall of the first inland fortress and a bloodbath which she does nothing to prevent. She is callous and only mindful of her mission - and somewhat of Vanye's life and safety, but probably because she needs someone to watch her back. She isn't responsible for all the mayhem - Roh has already infected one of the sons of that fortress with his vision of the Gates as an escape which he can open, and it is that murderous man who presides over a lot of the destruction - but possibly Roh would not have meddled so if he had not had Morgaine in pursuit, since his hope of extending his very long life depends on Gates.

The story is quite grim in places, and Vanye certainly goes through the wringer physically and mentally. The ending of the main story is a bit rushed - I wondered what Morgaine had accomplished with her 'final' order to Vanye and how necessary that was - so for that and the lack of integration of Jhirun's viewpoint into the main story, I would rate this at 4 stars.

Mike (the Paladin) says

I bought this book recently, and as happened with another of this author's books, found that I'd owned it before, in the 80s.

The story of young woman who loots a tomb and is then followed home by an enigmatic armored warrior. Once the warrior leaves she (deciding that her life is one she doesn't want..think about it) she follows the warrior...but meets someone else. She meets two people sworn to "destroy" Roh (the warrior). You see, they explain Roh is actually not Roh, but possessed and they are on quest. And on and on and on. They have perused him through a gate left by an older civilization, there are two on this world....and off we go.

The story moves on in what I find to be a pretty standard manner and it never drew me in. I couldn't get into any of the character's minds and I just didn't get to where I cared what happened to them.

Skimmed through, skipped to the end finally. Some will like it I'm sure, but as I've said before, I've read better by the author. She apparently isn't one whom I like everything by. I find that my take on her works is that they run hot and cold. if you like this one great. the synopsis sounded good and drew me in, but I just couldn't get into the story...but maybe I'll remember it this time and not buy it again.

Jax says

I love these books but I can't figure out why they take me double the time to read. Anyway, 2nd book in a trilogy, not as good as the first and I'm kinda unsure what exactly happened at the end. I'll wait a bit before moving on to the final book, but i'm super stoked to see what happens to Morgaine! Vanye I don't care about at all, the lummox.

Adam Barnes says

The chase begins upon another world, the hero's are separated again and the tale follows Vanye as he tries to keep his honor and come to terms with the magnitude of the choice he made.

William Leight says

In this book, we follow Morgaine and Vanye to a new world, one which is slowly dying as sea-level rise renders it uninhabitable. This provides an opportunity for an ethical conflict: Morgaine (and therefore Vanye, who remains sworn to her) wants to destroy the Gate (called a Well for some reason) that leads off of this world, which is also the only way that its inhabitants can leave their slowly-drowning home. It's an intriguing idea which Cherryh doesn't quite know how to finish: she wants Morgaine to be completely dedicated to her task while also not being a monster, and isn't sure how to square the circle. As a result, the ending doesn't really make sense: it's not even really clear whether or not the Gate is destroyed. Also, apparently the entity that is currently occupying the body of Vanye's cousin Roh has had a change of heart and become a completely nice guy, which makes Vanye's ethical quandary that much more difficult but doesn't necessarily make a ton of sense. But it's enough fun to read that I'm still hoping to run across the third book one of these days.

Karen-Leigh says

Thoroughly enjoyed this series.

Douglas Milewski says

The Well of Shiuan (1978) by C.J. Cherryh continues the tale of Morgaine and Vanye. Morgaine is an otherworldly sort, dedicated to the destruction of gates, and Vanye is the sword and sorcery minion who's out point of view character for most of the story.

This was her second publication, and here she addressed many issues that haunted her first work. In this book, she creates a much better feel for location and place, she better articulates goals, implications, and moral conflicts, and she generally keeps the through line of the narrative far clearer. In the sort of tale where moral ambiguity usually doesn't exist, this tale hinges on those ambiguities. However, even with all the improvements, there are still places where the tale feels muddled and ill directed.

Also gone is the stiff dialog of her former work. The dialog in this novel, while still not fully naturalist, has greatly loosened up, The characters no longer feel like they're always reading from cue cards.

Interestingly, Cherryh begins the story from a third character's view, that of Jhirun, a young woman that lives in the marshlands. I found her the most present and engaging of all the characters, and I wished that we had spent far more time with her point of view. She gives us the world and the complexities in a way that no other character does, with a vulnerability that no other character has. Because she's so unspecial, her actions have consequences where a hero's never would. To me, that made her a more interesting character than any other in the book.

Parts of the book still felt forced, while other parts seemed aimless. Cherryh still has a ways to go before she hits her stylistic best, but with this tale, I begin to see those traits that would make her later books so interesting.

Suz Thackston says

I didn't love this one quite as much as the others in the Morgaine saga.
Which means way more than most books.
I freakin' LOVE the Morgaine saga.

Helen says

#2 Morgaine, slow, stilted, hard to stick with it

Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says

This was a very dark and depressing read. Throughout Volume 1, we are told about Morgaine's grim reputation as someone who brings death and suffering everywhere she goes. In this volume we see for ourselves how her single-minded focus on finding and destroying the space/time portals on each world she visits lead her to make alliances and decisions that result in enormous violence and misery for anyone who is in her way, and most of those who aid her as well.

And yet, Cherryh manages to retain my interest in and even a certain sympathy for Morgaine by showing her through the eyes of her loyal companion, Vanye, a man who is driven by little more than a deeply-held sense of honour.

This novel is set on a world that is dying as rising waters engulf every last strip of habitable land. This adds to the darkness of the novel and also complicates the plot as the inhabitants learn of the existence of the portal and what it might mean for them from Morgaine's adversary, a human who might be possessed by an alien intelligence. A young girl who lives on this world, Jhirun, is an important viewpoint character in this novel; her character arc bookend the novel and presents us with a different kind of story to offset the epic ambiguities of Morgaine and Vanye, although no less rife with tragic import.

A gripping novel though quite disturbing at times. I look forward to reading its sequel.
