



Angel with the Sword

C.J. Cherryh

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School Library Journal: YA In Merovingen, a watery canal-laced city, much like Earth's Venice, society is segregated along class lines between the lower and upper cities. Against her better judgment, Altair Jones, 17, rescues an unconscious man from a canal near her poleboat. She is fascinated by Mondragon's good looks and elegant ways and begins to fall in love with him. Even though she knows there is no future for a water rat like herself with such a man, she decides to watch over him and rescue him from his enemies; enemies who turn out to be the most powerful people in the upper city. Cherryh is well known for her skill at creating complex and believable societies and worlds, as is shown by this book's 40-page appendix of maps and essays that cover everything from Merovingen's history to its monetary system. This meticulous background work shows up in the reality of her descriptions of the city, through which readers can almost feel the rotting dampness of the canals. The plot has some gaps, it is never completely clear why Mondragon was being pursued but the exciting boat chases and fights with various malefactors keep the story moving along at a fast pace. Altair is a girl-woman, half worldly-wise, half naive, but full of bravery and honesty, who should appeal to teenage SF fans. Betsy Shorb, PGCMLS, Md.

Angel with the Sword Details

Date : Published October 1986 by DAW (first published 1985)

ISBN : 9780886771430

Author : C.J. Cherryh

Format : Paperback 302 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Science Fiction, Fiction, Science Fiction Fantasy

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From Reader Review Angel with the Sword for online ebook

Lesley says

Angel with the Sword takes place in a rich, atmospheric world where the warring religious factions of the upper class collide with the dregs of society - the canalers - who have made their own world in the literal underbelly of Merovingen, a sort of alien, medieval version of Venice. When Jones, a canaler, saves an uptowner from drowning, she is drawn into a complex game of political intrigue that takes her out of her element and into dangerous waters. The plot is compelling, and Jones is a tough, funny, and self-aware heroine who I couldn't help but love. If you're looking for a standout fantasy novel with interesting characters and creative worldbuilding, then I highly recommend Angel with the Sword.

Erika says

It was fun to revisit this book, it was one of my favorites back in the 80's, I loved the whole series before moving on to harder Scifi.

It doesn't hold up quite as well as I was hoping it would but I can't tell if it's the writing itself or my tastes have changed.

I do wish, and I remember wishing this back then as well, that the story was told from both the main characters perspectives instead of just Altair Jones's and I find I wish it even more now.

It was fun though and I would like to read the rest of the books, but I don't think I want to enough to buy them and sadly, they aren't in my library's system.

Anna says

This must have been the first book I read by C.J Cherryh. I distinctly remember reading it and the gut-deep feeling it evoked, but didn't recall anything about the characters or plot. I also didn't realize that it was by one of my favorite authors, so I can only guess I read it before any of her other books and didn't put two and two together.

I stumbled across the book again this week and remembered the cover but nothing inside, so decided to reread it. Despite pretending to be science fiction, this book is just a really good fantasy tale of a spunky heroine in a medieval Venice-like environment. It's "science fiction" the same way the Pern books are, but is vastly superior in writing, characters, and plot.

Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says

Fascinating setting, engaging protagonist, intriguing plot...lukewarm ending.

Terry says

3.5 – 4 stars

So, I finally popped my Cherryh. It took me awhile, but believe me, it's not from a lack of trying! C. J. Cherryh is one of those writers who looms pretty large in SF/Fantasy genre circles without making too much noise about it. I've been aware of her presence for years, and I know that she is viewed as both an excellent writer and, at times, a difficult one. She has, I believe, a strong and devoted following and in general just seems like the kind of writer you really ought to have read if you travel in the genre circles I do. And I've tried, believe me, I've tried. I've bounced off at least one of her fantasy books, and another of her more famous SF ones. I've still kept my eye on her though and this time things seem to have clicked for us. Don't know if it was the timing, the specific novel I chose, or something else, but I thoroughly enjoyed *_Angel with the Sword_* and am looking forward to diving into more of Cherryh's extensive oeuvre with higher hopes that at least some will be to my liking.

Cherryh has been a very prolific author. As mentioned above she has penned both SF and fantasy tomes (as well as the blended Science Fantasy that partakes of both) and much of her significant SF output has been in multiple series that span time, space, and in some ways even genre and yet all of which are part of a much larger future history of mankind amongst the stars (The Alliance-Union universe of which this volume is a peripheral part). I love this kind of thing, or at least I love the *idea* of it. Sprawling future histories with room to really explore differing political, ideological, and personal aspects of the human condition, along with all of that cool what-if technology and even crossing into other genres (like science fantasy) gives me a happy feeling. I say that I like the idea of it, though, because up to this point I have to admit that I have yet to find a future history series that has really clicked for me.

While I would classify this book as science fiction it looks much more like a fantasy at first blush. The world of Merovin in which we find ourselves appears to be something analagous to the late Renaissance, but it is made clear from the start that this is a fallen colony world that no longer has access to the high technology of the space-farers who were the colonist's ancestors. Also, these colonial descendants have not forgotten from whence they came (though at this point most of the details are lost) so it isn't a case of a primitive world that views technology as magic, though it is one where it is strictly limited due to lack of knowledge, limited resources, and most importantly a set of cultural restrictions that have become part and parcel of what it means to be a Merovingen and which harken back to the catastrophes that brought about their separation from the rest of the Human ecumene.

In this book Cherryh has in some ways taken what we would consider the traditional approach to her cast of characters and turned it on its head. The character of Mondragon (the aristocratic, sword-wielding figure of authority embroiled in high politics and nation-shaking events), who in almost any other sci-fi/fantasy work would have been the hero, is instead the secondary character while we follow the one who would normally be the side-kick: Altair Jones, a lowly skip pilot barely eking out a living moving illegal freight across the canals and rivers of a Venice-like city on this lost colony world of Merovin. To add to the inversion Mondragon is the one who needs to be saved by her, which certainly makes for an intriguing story as we follow Altair in her attempts to navigate both the lowly 'canal-side' world on the periphery of the criminal underworld with which she is familiar as well as the 'hightown' world of aristocrats and power brokers in which she is a true fish out of water.

The detail with which Cherryh builds the world of Merovin is impressive. She makes use of both an introduction to set the scene as well as an appendix at the back of the book to give greater detail to the interested reader on the culture that she builds in the novel proper. Her world-building within the context of the story proper, however, is done without resort to the dreaded infodump and she trusts the reader to gather the pieces left through passing comments and references made by characters and the tight third person narration and put them together themselves such that details of the broader picture can be distilled from the context in which they occur. I was probably most impressed with the vivid picture she painted of the life of Altair herself. It is a life that has been mostly hand-to-mouth where many things we would likely consider to be necessities are for Altair the greatest of luxuries to be obtained only in the rarest of circumstances (such as sugar for one's tea). We are never bashed over the head with this, but simply come to appreciate the kind of life that a canaler on Merovin can come to expect. This of course comes into even greater focus as Altair is drawn into the hightown world that Mondragon calls home.

What ensues is a cat-and-mouse game of conspiracies and mysteries set against the backdrop of a hard-scrabble world that has lost everything but hope, and even that is of a rather callous sort. The real star is Altair Jones, an extremely well-drawn heroine who thinks and acts in ways that make sense and allow her to seem like a real person, not a literary archetype or a plot element. The world we get to live in for a short time is intriguing and colourful and certainly held my interest. The plot was intricate without being convoluted and was certainly strong enough to bear the weight that the world and characters demanded. The long and the short of it is that this book leaves me with a desire to read much more of Cherryh's work and a sense of anticipation at what I might find there. That, my friends, is definitely a good thing.

Helen Bell says

Loved this story.

Imagine London, New York and Venice all rolled into one to picture the setting. Imagine the extremes of luxury and poverty, the daily grind and the political machinations that could and do take place there. Now just pick this book up and go with the flow. You'll love, hate and root for the protagonists with every page turn. This book is also notable for having the closest to a cinematic, on-the-edge-of-your-seat experience that I have ever had as a reader, testament to the quality of C.J. Cherryh's amazing writing skills.

Her SF stories all fit into the same universe and timeline and some are clearly connected. This is one that, when it first appeared, seemed to stand on its own. The number of follow-up and collaborative tales that followed reflect the alluring world she created here, and the ambivalent, frustrating and fascinating characters.

If you've never read Carolyn Cherry's writing before, I urge you to do so. A Hugo and Nebula winner, she deserves to be better recognised than she is. She writes in a variety of Fantasy and SF genres but is great in all of them. I'll aim to review as many as possible, but if you read this and love it, go meet Morgaine and Nih Vanye in *The Gate of Ivrel*.

Fantasy Literature says

C.J. Cherryh has penned both science fiction and fantasy tomes (as well as the blended Science Fantasy that partakes of both) and much of her significant sci-fi output has been in multiple series that span time, space, and in some ways even genre. And yet all of her works are part of a much larger future history of mankind amongst the stars: *Angel with the Sword* is the first book of the eight-book *MEROVINGEN NIGHTS* series, as well as a peripheral part of Cherryh's *ALLIANCE-UNION* universe. I love the idea of sprawling future histories with room to really explore differing political, ideological, and personal aspects of the human condition, along with all of that cool what-if technology, and even crossing into other genres (like science fantasy). I say that I li... Read More: <http://www.fantasyliterature.com/revi...>

Marie Michaels says

What a fun, fleshed-out, thoughtful story! This is my first time reading Cherryh's fantasy -- I'm a huge fan of her *Foreigner* series -- and this book shows all the strengths I'm used to seeing in her writing: intricate world-building, engaging characters and thoughtful plotting. The story also moves at a good clip, and Cherryh packs quite a ride into a fairly short novel (part of the book is taken up by general info about Merovingen). The world-building too is quite skillful -- she paints a very vivid picture of world inhabited by the MC without bogging down the pace of the story. The backstory and the setting really cry out for more novels in this world.

Of course, this would hardly be a Cherryh novel without drawn-out internal conflicts and convoluted politics -- not all which I caught, I must confess. The ending is also rather "... and then?!" even for me.

Andrea says

The city is water-logged Merovingen, on the world of Merovin, a human-settled planet now isolated and planet-bound after an alien war.

The person is Altair Jones, daughter of Retribution Jones, walking a fine line between isolation and degradation. Altair Jones, who survives because she's a light sleeper, who runs deliveries on her small skip and has been alone since her mother's death when she was twelve. Getting by, trusting little, barely keeping herself whole.

Altair Jones, who used to rescue kittens out of the stinking water. All the kittens would die, but she would still fish them out. One time she fished out someone's baby. He died too.

This time Altair Jones fishes out a man. And he doesn't die.

Mondragon, fine and full of secrets, hunted by faction after faction in a political tangle seemingly impossible to unravel.

The story is full of boat-hooks and fire-bombs, desperate races by water, and the slow build of trust between two people of completely different backgrounds, with so much against them that it's clear from the start just how impossible they are.

The book is the best damn thing I've read all year.

Masha Toit says

This book started out really well, with a fantastic world and excellent characters. Altair Jones is an original creation - fierce and uncompromising, a girl not to be trifled with. The world is very convincing, with many details about what it is like to be a pole boater, the dialect they use, all portrayed very directly. I could hear and smell what was going on.

Like some of C J Cherryh's other books, this one got bogged down with the details of the shifting relationships between the characters. Should they trust one another? How do they feel about one another? And the climax that reveals the reasons behind their actions fell rather flat.

Not a bad book, but not as good as - say Hellburner or Downbelow Station.

Grey says

I just finished this and I have to say I really enjoyed it. Like enough to close the book and scour the internet for the other 7 books in the series, and dole out real cash. It's a crime that great stuff written before the advent of the internet is so hard to find, and impossible to find in digital format.

Altair Jones is the rare female protagonist that really catches my interest. She isn't written as beautiful, or extraordinarily powerful. She's just a tough, canny girl doing the best she can with what she has. I found myself rooting for her almost instantly. She human, losing her heart in a way she knows isn't smart to a man she knows is too pretty to be good for her. She gets tired, and pushes on. She gets smacked around and then gets back up.

Merovin is a world realistic enough to be plausible, unusual enough to be interesting, and hopeful enough to keep you turning the page. The story, which to me was just a tool to provide exposition for Jones and her personality, was tight, tricky, and assembled in a logical way. Perhaps the only real weakness in this book was how thinly Mondragon was defined. A little *too* mysterious.

This wasn't, as they say, Shakespeare, but it was a fun weekend read, and it absolutely whet the appetite for more of the same. I recommend it to anyone who wants a gritty adventure story with good guys who deserve your support.

Peter says

C.J. Cherryh is an award winning science fiction/fantasy novelist whose oeuvre exceeds sixty books, including Hugo winners *Downbelow Station* (1981) and *Cyteen* (1988).

Angel with the Sword is the initial book in the Merovingen Nights series to which other authors contributed. The setting is a fascinating city modeled somewhat on Vencie as it consists of Islands connected by canals and bridges. It is also a city dominated by class. The higher you live from the water, the wealthier and more

powerful you are.

The story is about Altari Jones, a 17-year old young canal rat whose life changes dramatically the day she rescues a man who is thrown into the river next to her skiff—a boat she lives on and earns a living by transporting goods from place to place in the city. Jones personality drives the story. She is relentless and fearless while at the same time doubting her every move.

After rescuing Mondragon, she becomes attached to him romantically and injects herself into his life, seeking to protect him from those who wanted him dead. The story is so focused on Jones that we never learn exactly why Mondragon was tossed into the river or what knowledge he possesses that he hopes will keep him alive, but that doesn't matter. The core of the story is about Jones putting her life on the line again and again in order to protect Mondragon.

I'd not read anything by Cherryh in several years. The world building and writing in *Angel with the Sword* demonstrate why she is so highly regarded in the field of science fiction.

Ashley says

In C.J. Cherryh's "Angel with the Sword," we are transported to a complex world filled with games of power, upper world politics and a underworld filled with a thoroughly engaging cast of characters. Long after the Sharrh, a highly advanced species delivered their ultimatum and sent the space-faring humans packing, the world known as Merovin has been living apart from mankind for centuries. Though once technologically savvy, there has been a major regression to a way of life similar to the Renaissance period, and now the descendants of those too stubborn to leave scratch out a meager existence in the canal-ridden cities. One of these, the old spaceport Merovingen, was where the lowest of the low tended to flock, corrupt officials living high on the hog in their gleaming spires, while thieves, beggars and smugglers inhabit the refuse-filled alleyways and beneath the crumbling bridges spanning the toxic Det River. It was a fool who went into those waters, let alone drank 'em, the grim and filth tending the rot in your gut. All the canalers knew that, being their livelihood and all. So it was with Altair Jones, daughter of Redemption Jones. Thought she had it made, she did, running freight between Moghi's tavern and smuggler Hafiz. Among the boater community, there weren't none better at taking those canals. Then one night, waiting for a pickup, she just happened to observe masked assailants dumping a guy into those waters. Smart thing would be to let 'im drown, hit Det-bottom and salvage later. Ignoring tradition, Jones pulls this drowning landlubber from the water and sets into motion a series of events that will stretch even her skills to the limit.

If sword fighting, shadow slinking, political intrigue and brash-talking teenagers appeals to you, *Angel with the Sword* is something I would highly recommend. The "first" of the "Merovingen Nights" series, Cherryh has done a fantastic job in its creation. One thing that makes this book just plain fun to read is the personality of our main character, Altair Jones; Raised as a pole-boater under her mothers' guiding hand, Altair is a street-smart (or should we say canal-smart), tough, though slightly insecure teenage girl running freight along the clogged channels of Merovingen. With an argumentative tongue that spouts off a dialect completely appropriate that gets you thinking of the Artful Dodger, it's quite hard to keep from chuckling at her matter-of-fact logic. In contrast, her co-star, one Thomas Mondragon, is found to be, though well connected in high society, almost useless when dropped into her world and cut off from his resources. With blonde hair, fair skin, and a nobleman's bearing, Mondragon sticks out like a sore thumb among the rough-shod miscreants that inhabit the alleys and back-channels. Together, they make for a rather amusing team as

they deal with trouble in one form or another. The world in this book isn't something to scoff at either; After nearly all technology was wiped out by a highly advanced extraterrestrial race, Merovin has regressed to a Renaissance-like state, and the fact that the detail of the cities causes one to imagine Italian waterways with buildings rising up on either side gives one a sense of familiarity. If you listen closely, you can almost hear the minstrels on the bridges or the gondolas moving across the surface of the water. One thing that I found odd with this book, however, was the attraction between Altair and Mondragon. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm a sucker for the whole "lowborn helps out highborn and they hit it off" classic storybook ending, but this time it felt like the author rushed the whole thing. After saving Mondragon from drowning, Altair gets one look at him and decides he could be her lover...and announces this to him. What? This is a girl that, until puberty hit, hid her sex by wearing loose clothing and, when someone did try something, would exact revenge by sinking their boat or killing them! So to have her fall so madly in love with a complete stranger that is obviously in some kind of trouble, enough so that they end up sleeping together within the first 100 pages, isn't that believable in my opinion. Other than that, this book was thoroughly enjoyable and well worth the time.

PTG42 says

I read this in Swedish but the Swedish version is not in the database. Inspiring and different worldbuilding in this book that made me wanting for more. The writing style in this book was very different from other books I have read, mostly for better but partly for worse. The best thing about this book was how much fun was pressed into so little space. There are too few sci-fi/fantasy books that are not really long or part of a long series. I liked the protagonist, a female that was nicely balanced between being human and being independent. My one complaint, that made the book a strong 3 instead of 4 for me, was that certain things were left unexplored (that definitely should have been explored). Things that was hinted at being of great importance but then never really answered.

Julieta Steyr says

Hoy en día, este es un libro de esos que no se consiguen así que eso me da varios dolores de cabeza porque, primero, esto es una serie más tirando a la fantasía que al sci-fi (salvo por el pasado de Merovigen), y segundo, es parte de la serie del universo Alianza-Unión siendo un mundo que fue parte de la Unión. Esta es la historia de Altair Jones, una chica pobre en su barca (skip) que un día rescata a un hombre llamado Mondragon, que arrojaron de uno de los innumerables puentes de su ciudad al agua para asesinarlo. Mondragon pertenece a la clase alta y, estar allí en los suburbios más bajos le dificultará la tarea de regresar a su hogar cuando los asesinos andan al acecho.

Altair, como cualquier personaje de Cherryh, pasa a conocer la completa desconfianza hacia los tratos que le pueden ofrecer y a mirar sobre el hombro incluso a sus amigos, el problema es: el clímax de la historia no suena a clímax. Es un enredo de subir, trepar, saltar, explotar, y las voces de remo a la que uno no está habituado aunque exista una guía de ello, me apabullan. Otra vez, otra chica, se enamora de un rubiecito (¡basta!) y el rubiecito apenas la registra y de nuevo, muy típico de ella, la chica tiene más carácter que su compañero.

La ciudad en la que vive Altair es una suerte de Venecia en otro planeta, recubierta de puentes y más puentes debido a numerosas inundaciones años antes. Existen otras ciudades con mayor suerte y sus propios estilos, hay una ciudad con nombre oriental, está Signeury que es donde reside la autoridad y hay un colegio, New Hettek que es una ciudad poderosa que aspira a ser capital... no todo es pudredumbre de agua.

El final es algo abierto que perfilaba a ser algo muchísimo mejor, pero como dije, no es una maravilla. Alguien arriba mencionó algo de las intrigas de Merovigen y le diría que si eso lo impresiona es porque no leyó "Cyteen". "Rimrunners" es un poquito mejor que esto, "Chanur" lo supera en cuanto a intrigas, "Cyteen" es su cúspide. Lo malo es que por ser una serie de los '80 cuesta horrores conseguirla. Es interesante ver hacia el final como Cherryh creó desde los vestuarios que utilizarían a las distintas monedas, la historia del planeta, cómo los humanos lo abandonaron, las distintas religiones, las zonas geográficas, etc. Sumamente detallada y un ejemplo para cualquier escritor.
