

***The Poison Throne* by Celine Kiernan**

The Poison Throne is a wonderfully rich new medieval fantasy by debut Irish writer Celine Kiernan. Wynter Moorehawke returns home, with her father, after years away in the Northlands. But things have changed and the Kingdom is now a dangerous place ruled with an iron hand by Jonathon. Jonathon has disinherited his legitimate heir and replaced him with his other son Razi and is intent on ensuring everyone accepts this. Political intrigue abounds and some horrifying punishments have been reintroduced. Wynter finds herself choosing between staying with her ailing father, or joining her old friend Razi in his attempt to restore the Kingdom on its rightful path.

Kiernan has created a fantasy novel peopled with lifelike characters that are both tough and compassionate but also vulnerable and ultimately flawed. It is hard to believe that Kiernan is indeed a debut novelist as the writing is so vivid, engrossing and polished. With so many plot twists, turns and unanswered questions, *The Poison Throne* will weave its magic web around the reader and leave them begging for more. Fortunately there won't be a long wait as the next two books are to be released in 2010.

Pia Butcher, Knox Library, Vic

Wynter and her father, who is ill, have just returned to their home kingdom after several years away in a northern country. It is clear from the start that things are not quite as they were when they left.

Seen through Wynter's eyes, we are quickly drawn into life in an alternative medieval Europe, where cats and ghosts can communicate with humans. Descriptions of court protocol, daily life and complex political alignments are well done. We learn that Wynter's home is now becoming as intolerant, violent and prejudiced as surrounding places, and when she finds that her childhood "brother" Alberon has disappeared and that his half-brother Razi is now unwillingly the Crown Prince, Wynter's distress and confusion mounts. Only one of the ghosts and a cat remain to give Wynter some assistance – the cat is unlike most other cats in fantasy fiction as this one behaves as any self-respecting cat should, and is one which many cat owners would recognise.

The Poison Throne sets the scene for the rest of the series, as the political situation and the actions of the king lead to Razi, his mysterious friend Christopher (to whom Wynter is attracted) and Wynter all needing to escape the kingdom. Wynter's aim is to find Alberon, discover what the mysterious machine is, and uncover the reason why the king is behaving as a tyrant.

This promises to be an interesting fantasy series, with its emphasis on friendship, betrayal, and the nature of kingship. Wynter is an attractive lead character, resilient, capable and also vulnerable. Highly recommended to older readers and might appeal to anyone who does not normally enjoy the fantasy worlds of wizards, demons and the forces of the Dark.

Gaye Fitzpatrick, Vic

"Wow, wow, wow!!" was my reaction on reaching the end of this wonderful book. Anyone who loves to read will often find books that they enjoy but only occasionally do they find a book that really blows them away. For me, that book is *The Poison Throne*.

Celine Kiernan has created an alternative medieval European world in which she has placed characters of such colour and depth, that I become so engrossed in their lives as to nearly miss my train stop. We have a heroine – Wynter Moorehawke - who is being trained by her father as a master carpenter. Because of her father's friendship with the King she has grown up as a friend to Princes. There is Razi, first born son of the king but the product of a youthful union with a foreigner. Never intended for the throne, he has recently returned from medical studies with his spirited friend Christopher in tow. King Jonathan, ruler and friend of Wynter's father Lorcan. During the past five years he has become so changed that the Moorehawkes' barely recognize him, let alone trust him. And Prince Alberon - absent heir to the throne – we don't meet him but his presence is everywhere.

Our story begins with the Moorehawke's return to the kingdom after a five year absence. The frosty reception that she and her father receive, establish for us that all is not as it should be, and as the story unfolds the sense of tension, confusion, danger and intrigue increases palpably.

The author introduces ideas of loyalty and betrayal, racial and social prejudice, interpretation and misinterpretation of motives and circumstances, and their resultant effect on behaviour. These themes twist and turn themselves throughout the plot, adding depth and texture.

The Poison Throne as part one of a trilogy has echoes of other first parts of great fantasy stories such as *Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring*, *Harry Potter* and *Eragon*. The story is set, the characters and threat

established and the reaction decided upon. The skill of the author is in making you impatient for more. I, for one, can't wait to read part two.

Debbie Williams, Mountain District Christian School, Vic