



Precious Dragon

Liz Williams

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Detective Inspector Chen and Zhu Irzh are given a major assignment to escort an emissary from Heaven on a diplomatic mission to Hell. Zhu tries to dodge his demonic family's overtures, but ends up embroiled in Hell's political intrigues. At the same time, a young boy born to ghostly parents in Hell is sent to live with his grandmother in Singapore Three. The boy, Precious Dragon, is being chased by Hell's most dangerous creatures and ends up being the key to unlock the mystery that is quickly spiraling out of control. Chen and Zhu find themselves in the middle of a struggle much bigger than they can fully comprehend, and when the dust finally settles, neither heaven nor hell will be the same.

Precious Dragon Details

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Author : Liz Williams

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From Reader Review Precious Dragon for online ebook

Paul Weimer says

In this third volume in the Inspector Chen series, Liz Williams continues the stories of the strangest and most interesting police partner duo in fantasy or straight fiction--Inspector Chen and Seneschal Zhu Irzh. The one is a devotee of the goddess Kuan Yin working as a "Snake Agent" for the Singapore Three police force. His partner is a liaison from the Chinese Hells, and is, in fact, yes, a demon. Together they fight crime!

That may sound flippant, but by this third novel, Williams really starts making this pair work. Ostensibly, while the novel is about the titular character, who is a little boy who is far more than he appears, the novel positively sings and dances with delight when Chen and Zhu are back on screen. Be it Zhu's complicated relationship with his lover and his family, or Chen's attempts at trying to do the right thing in Earth AND in Hell, the buddy cop routine never fails to please.

I recently read a story by Williams in the Songs of the Dying Earth anthology and now, based on that, I can see that Vance is an inspiration for these characters, and some of the descriptive motifs and styles in these novels. The amazing "hell-bound train" is an image that has been indelibly burned into my memory.

Williams is also willing to avoid the reset button. Things have changed from the start of the first novel, and through the second, and the balance of things changes by the end of this one as well. Its an organic process of her world growing, developing and changing in a real way.

You shouldn't start here, of course. And the start of this novel is a little slow. But when the novel gets on all cylinders, Williams shows that she is an entertaining, engaging, and most talented fantasy novelist. I am looking forward, eagerly, for the next novel in her Inspector Chen series. After reading this, I am pretty sure you will, too.

carol. says

Starring (in order of appearance): a precocious orphan chorus boy with the Island Opera; a demon emissary from Hell; Inspector Chen, detective with Singapore Three's police force; an elderly woman; her daughter, currently a resident of Hell; an ancient water dragon; and a mysterious grandson and his equally mysterious pearl. They are supported by an emissary from Heaven with an apologetic talent for violence, a badger who is also a teakettle, and a pharmaceutical mogul who has tigress tendencies. How can you not be intrigued by such a cast of characters?

While the plot for Precious Dragon is a little tighter than the prior book, this isn't as much mystery as epic quest. The trouble is that instead of bringing her fellowship together, Williams tries to carry the storylines separately--that of the opera youth who inadvertently becomes a ghost, the daughter who lives in Hell and works at the Ministry of Epidemics, the detectives' investigation and diplomatic journey to Hell, the grandmother and her strange grandson trying to survive strange attacks, and that of the dragon and her journey through the world's waters--and it doesn't quite maintain enough integrity to succeed. Eventually the

majority of stories dovetail, but it occurs so late, it is without that accompanying "ah-ha" moment.

While I love the dragon viewpoint and the opportunity it gives to let Williams' writing shine, it was not truly necessary for the plot, and I suspect the daughter's focus could have been eliminated as well. I do acknowledge that the challenge could just be me and my everlasting irritation with the multiple-viewpoint narrative. It almost succeeds. Characters are more coherent than Weeks' Shadow series, for instance, so if you didn't mind that style, by all means, give Williams a whirl--she's infinitely more inventive. In fact, this might be the trouble with the work--because she is very good at the "show, don't tell," and because her setting is an alternate-reality Singapore/China, it does require more reader effort than the average UF.

I find the world-building nicely balanced with action and characterization. The basis in Chinese culture and myth is fascinating, unique in the fantasy world. (If you've read any Chinese myths, you might have already guessed at the identity of the boy with the pearl). The characters are interesting and well done--the grandmother especially was a delight with her common sense viewpoint and willingness to accept unusual definitions of family. I enjoy Williams' writing style, her metaphors and colorful imagery. I love her affection for Chinese culture, the humor sprinkled throughout and her clear disdain for bureaucracy (notable in the sections with Inspector Chen dealing with his superior who recently attended a management course and [misfiled] paperwork required for entry into Heaven). There's a pleasing thematic balance between everyday issues, and larger philosophical issues of what hell/evil/chaos and heaven/good/order really mean.

I want to wholeheartedly recommend Williams' Detective Chen series to every fantasy lover, but alas, the convoluted narrative prevents me. I suspect this book will appeal mostly for those who like highly imaginative fantasy, perhaps along the lines of Catherynne M. Valente's work. Starting the series at the beginning will help with the Singapore setting and the Heaven-Hell conflict, although there is a short introduction to main characters through the eyes of the chorus boy.

Three and a half tentative stars...Or... On reflection, Williams deserves more for being so inventive and thoughtful. Four determined stars.

"Night passed and the new day shone under the surface of the water, light curving and fragmented. She was coming closer to the cold waters, the ice seas of the north, and she breathed in the fresh water, snowmelt running cold along her dappled sides."

"Chen had thought he'd been given a tough job as liaison officer with Hell, but it was nothing compared to being a member of the traffic department. He felt almost smug as Ma took the police car the wrong way along a one-way street, up a flight of steps, and shot along the harbor road against the flow of in-bound traffic."

"When he died, as a devoted servant of the Goddess Kuan Yin, Most Merciful and Compassionate, he might reasonably expect to enter Heaven himself. Okay, he'd married a demon. His right-hand man was from Hell. On a previous, unfortunate occasion, he'd used the goddess' sacred image as a battering ram. Good thing she *was* Merciful and Compassionate, really."

Cross posted at: <http://clsiewert.wordpress.com/2013/0...>

JW says

I think we're reading in a good time to be a fan of F&SF. When I go to the bookstore or library, I'm literally blinded by the choices, but unfortunately most of it is crap. If I get another time travel or Narnia ripoff story, or a small band against impossible odds Star Wars/LotR imitation, I think I'm going to vomit until I die.

Then Liz Williams comes along. (AND Daniel Abraham AND Karl Schroeder, I <3 you all). This is the third Detector Inspector Chen novel. DI Chen is a cop in Singapore Three (a franchise (YES, A FRANCHISE! OMFG) of the original), which is somewhere on the coast of China. He's a "snake agent" (also the name of the first DI Chen book) for the S3PD, which means he deals with occult crimes. And early in the first book he runs into a Vice from from Chinese Hell. Of course they end up partners.

Yes. A demon cop. Who smokes opium cigarettes. And Mrs. Chen is also a demon (but a nice one).

Originality? Fsch yes (except for the partner bit, but picking on a cop story for unwilling partners is like harping on a space opera for being in, well, space).

I started Precious Dragon right after I finished Pirate Sun and I have to admit I thought it was slow initially, but only because Pirate Sun wrapped up with such a bang. But did Liz make up for that. Holy poop. As the climax built I remember peeking at the last page to see I only had 40 pages left. How the heck was she going to wrap it up.

Like an effing champ. That's how. Someday they may be able to reattach my jaw.

Jacey says

I love Liz William's Inspector Chen books. Chen is a Snake Agent, in the branch of Singapore Three's police force that deals with transgressions in all three realms, Heaven, Earth and Hell. This is the third in the series in which Chen and his demon policing partner Zhu Irzh are called away from investigating the disappearance of a girl from the opera to accompany Miss Qi, a Celestial warrior, on a cultural exchange trip from Heaven to Hell.

There are several story arcs: Chen and Zhu Irzh, of course, as they negotiate not only Hell but Zhu Irzh's overbearing demonic family; Pin from the opera, soon to follow the hapless missing girl to the depths of hell; Embar Dea, the elderly dragon; Mrs Pa and her grandson Precious Dragon who was born in Hell, has come to earth and is now being chased by the deadly demonic kuei; Mhara, son of the Celestial Emperor (introduced in the previous book, The Demon and the City); Jhai Tserai, Zhu Irzh's amoral, wealthy industrialist girlfriend, part demon herself, and Inari, Chen's gentle demon wife. Everything interlinks and comes together satisfactorily at the end, of course.

This is absorbing and beautifully written and I'm already itching to get on to the next one, The Shadow Pavilion.

Yblees says

[Count the fingers on the dragons hands. Only Imperial dragons have five claws. Nice attention to detail (hide spoiler)]

Andrew says

This book follows on like the previous instalment - all building and growing the scale and involvement of the various characters. There are several of the plot twists - one of once is so obvious that it smacks of a certain Eddie Murphy film. However the sense of satisfaction when literally hell goes to war and is subsequently stopped in its tracks is suitably satisfying. The book is now settling in and i guess a little more predictable however I cannot help but enjoy it and again it was finished in record time

Eija says

Komisario Chenin ja senesalkki Zhu Irzhin seikkailut jatkuvat tutuilla uomillaan. Tapahtumia käydään maassa ja helvetissä, unohtamatta taivaallisen väen mukana oloa. Chenin demonivaimolla Inarilla on myös osuutensa tarinassa. Tarina on itsenäinen, vaikka on eduksi lukea edelliset osat ensin. Sivuosissa on edellisen osan henkilöitä.

Sarjassa on omaperäinen maailma, vaikka kolmannessa osassa se on jo tuttu. Sinänsä uutta kolmas osa ei maailmaan tuo. Helvetti ja taivas ovat tavallaan maanpäällisen elämän rinnakkaismaailmoja – maailmojen arkkitehtuuri ja tiet ovat samoilla sijoillaan niin helvetissä kuin maan päällä. Maailmojen välillä ei kuljeta noin vain, mutta tietyt väylät yhdistävät maailmat toisiinsa. Puhelin yhteys, tosin heikkotasoinen, on myös olemassa maailmojen välillä.

Kultaisen lohikäärmeen juoni kootaan useasta erillisestä tapahtumavyyhdestä. Juoni on vetävä eikä liian simppele. Meno on todella vauhdikasta. Tapahtumien ryöppy ja tarinan vauhdikkuus alkoi loppupuoella tuntua liialta, tuli ähkyinen olo. Sen vuoksi kiinnostus tarinaa kohtaan ei kantanut ihan loppuun saakka.

Mimi says

There's nothing quite like returning to a beloved series. I don't really know what it is about these books that just feel right to me. Singapore Three and Detective Chen's houseboat feel like a second home to me by now because so much of the writing is dedicated to the vibrant locales. I feel like I can navigate the streets and back alleys just by following the books' descriptions of each neighborhood.

This book starts out slow and builds up momentum as it goes. Chen and Zhu Irzh return to Hell, but this time for a sanctioned trip to escort Ms Qi, an ambassador of Heaven, to the Minister of War. Of course the trip turns out to be disastrous, more disastrous than expected, and the group find themselves in the middle of an impending war with Heaven and Zhu Irzh, in particular, finds his family in the middle of a coup. Things only

get more awkward and hilarious from there.

The combination of Liz Williams's humor and her takes on Chinese mythology, satire, and fantasy never fail to entertain me. I like that (view spoiler)

Side note: I always thought Singapore Three was a franchise city, like there are at least 3 cities modeled after Singapore all over Asia (or the world?). But what if Singapore has been destroyed completely twice before and this is the third time it's been rebuilt?

More reviews at <https://covers2covers.wordpress.com/2...>

Julie Davis says

#24 - 2010.

Williams almost has too many characters doing too much in too many situations here. However, she pulls it off. I love Mrs. Pa's character and enjoyed the discovery of what lies at the bottom level of Hell, although I found the sudden craziness of the Emperor of Heaven rather too much. I still enjoyed it overall though.

Rereading this I rediscovered that she suddenly develops a linguistic twitch partway into the book. Or perhaps that is simply where it forced its way into my consciousness. At any rate, once you have noticed that she uses "given" every three sentences or so, it becomes so very annoying that it is difficult forcing one's way past it. Where was the editor? Dozing? Or perhaps in love with that phrase. *Given* that I am not, one might take it as a *given* that I was unable to force my way through the next book in the series, The Shadow Pavilion. Especially *given* the fact that not only is Williams using *given* sometimes three times in a paragraph, she crammed even more characters in more situations into this one. Nope. I'm not going along for that ride.

Shawn Thrasher says

Not as good as the other two in the series I read, but a still good, solid, entertaining romp through Hell. The setting (s) seemed bigger than the characters, and towards the end they felt like marionettes dancing half heartedly in front of a really, really good drop background. Williams is excellent at painting vivid word pictures describing the scene (particularly that of Hell), but her characters - at least in Precious Dragon - became a little bit flat and manipulated by the end. It occasionally felt like a fantasy version of It's A Mad Mad Mad Mad World, with a huge ensemble cast that played comedically off one another, and several good cameos. But, as those kids in Sound of Music so whiningly say "But it doesn't mean anything..." A stronger plot and much, much, much more character development would, I think, make for a better story in the end. Detective Inspector Chen, who I feel is supposed to be the main character, gets so little development and so little to do - for the second book in a row! I'm only going to keep going with these because Williams does a great job of making you want to keep on reading and find out what's going on; it's a good mystery.

Snail in Danger (Sid) Nicolaides says

This is more like it.* (Also, I'd probably give this a 3.5 if I could.) Jhai is still annoying (And why did she do something that was distinctly counter to her best interests? Unless I read too fast and missed it, we never get an explanation or even a very good justification.), but Mrs Pa and Precious Dragon are the bees' knees.

There is beginning to be a distinct Singapore Three is the Center of the Universe vibe here, though. (Unlike in, say, Kim Harrison's Hollows series, where things happen to or because of Rachel, who happens to live in Cincinnati.)

I realized toward the end of this one what this series also reminds me of: Piers Anthony's Incarnations of Immortality books. (See my review of Snake Agent for a list of other things this made me think of.) Edited to add: if books were people, this one would probably live a few streets away from The Case of the Toxic Spell Dump.

*I was not terribly fond of The Demon and the City, this book's immediate prequel. (My review contains some spoilers.)

Peter Tillman says

Precious Dragon opens slowly and somewhat confusingly, as Liz Williams has to set three or four parallel story-trains into motion. Unlike the first two D.I. Chen books, you definitely shouldn't start here. Even readers who've read the first two book may be doing a bit of head-scratching (and toe-tapping) until she gets all her balls into the air.

But then -- wow! All the cool stuff I've loved in the first two books, and more! Viz, Chen musing on his mortality, aboard the Hell-Bound Train:

"When he died, as a devoted servant of the Goddess Kuan Yin, Most Merciful and Compassionate, he might reasonably expect to enter Heaven. Okay, he'd married a demon. His right-hand man was from Hell. On a previous, unfortunate occasion, he'd used the goddess' sacred image as a battering ram. Good thing she was Merciful and Compassionate..."

The Hell-Bound Train! Can there be a more resonant image in SF&F, either in words or as pictures? Williams' iteration is spectacular:

"It was bullet-shaped, black and silver..., coruscated with magnificent ornamentation. Its engine was encased in the head of a centipede: of a kueri, and the name on its side read STORM LORD."

"Wow," Chen remarked. "It's certainly baroque."

Which isn't a bad description of Williams's book. Plus, it made me smile a lot. Liz Williams is a Jack Vance fan, and it shows. I haven't quite decided who Zhu Irzh, "large as life and twice as unnatural," reminds me of... Not quite as finely-crafted as the first two, in my judgement, but if you've come this far, you won't want to stop now.

AJ says

I read the first two books of this series as paperbacks and then it sort of hung out in the back of my mind as something I liked, but I never really remembered to look for more when I was shopping for ebooks. Finally I stumbled across the series again while looking at a sale at Amazon and decided to pick up where I left off.

It's been long enough since I read the second book (The Demon and the City, I think) that I couldn't remember a whole lot about what had happened, but I remembered the characters: Detective Inspector Chen, police liaison between Earth, Heaven and Hell, and his demon partner Zhu Irzh, late of Hell's Vice Squad.

This series is an entertaining near-future urban fantasy with an Asian setting and lots of side-journeys into Hell and even a little bit into heaven as well. It's pretty enjoyable -- in this volume in particular I enjoyed all the thought the author put into the details of Hell's Ministry of Lust, for instance.

However, this particular book suffered from a bit of rough writing. Not only were there some embarrassing typos -- misspelling the names of important characters at least twice, for instance -- but it felt like certain subplots and minor characters were kind of abandoned in the rush to wrap up the story.

There are two books left in this series and I'll go ahead and pick them up and read them over the next few months, as I do really enjoy the characters and the setting, and they're a good light read to intersperse between heavier books. Plus the next one apparently features the badger tea kettle as a central character, and I have a soft spot for him.

barbecube says

Rarely are we treated to such an enjoyable cataclysm.

Liz Williams has been assembling a rich world in the past two Detective Inspector Chen novels, a world where a charmingly bureaucratic, surprisingly efficient (unless they decide not to be, for the sake of cruelty) Hell butts up against the agents of a frigidly virtuous, colorless and perfect Heaven on the sweaty streets of Singapore Three.

In this one she takes a sledgehammer to it.

Well, I guess she already did that twice. (Spoilers.)

But this time, it really felt like she meant it, and it's a special feeling to see a fantasy author who's willing to take the world she built so lovingly and really fuck with the status quo.

Leslie Sexton says

Fun read!

I really like this series. Fun to read and hard to put down. This moved fast and the ongoing story has another layer. And there were dragons! I was instantly sucked in! I did notice that there were quite a few editing errors, mostly wrong words or proper names not capitalized. That's why a 4 Star. Looking forward to the next book.
