

A Bard's Eye View

Monica Ponder

BookSurge (January 2010)

Softcover \$10.00 (317pp)

978-1-4392-6092-0

A Bard's Eye View tells of the beginnings of a gathering storm. Ogres led by Rapine are setting out to avenge the ill treatment they have endured. Rapine is the offspring of an ogre chief and an Elf of the Galena nation. Having inherited all the worst attributes of the ogre race, Rapine fought his way to leadership, gathered followers, and has "declared a Holy war on all the civilized races."

The story's protagonist, Sheer'An, is an Elf and the daughter of a Bard. She learns her father's craft as well as some magic and other skills before nearly dying from the same black darts that take her parents' lives. As she sets out to earn her official degree as a Bard at the Conservatory, Sheer'An loses her way in the mountains and comes to a village where she meets some friends and frees one of Rapine's slaves, encountering the beginnings of Rapine's conquest. As the village is destroyed, Sheer'An and her new friends, Fleetwood, Redbow, and Wolf, escape and make their way to the larger city of Zenithmoon. There she enters the Conservatory and serves as a slave to pay her tuition. "I gritted my teeth and endured," she says. After earning her degree as a Master Bard, she meets again with her friends and together they take on a quest to restore the lost heritage of the slave they freed. As all is turning out well, but this is only the beginning of a larger tale. All of civilization is threatened by Rapine and his army.

The world of *A Bard's Eye View* bears striking similarity to Tolkein's Middle Earth, with its Elves, Ogres, Halflings, Humans, and other odd creatures. However, Ponder puts her own spin on the nature of this world, which she calls Cel'mystry, and endows it with more magic, teleportation, and a pantheon of five major Gods. Unfortunately, Cel'mystry is not original enough to earn readers' admiration or familiar enough for them to feel comfortable, although readers do come to know the personalities of the main characters and rejoice when justice is served. The natural rules of Cel'mystry appear at least internally consistent, if difficult to appreciate. The storyline, however, seems to wander until near the end. This book is only the set-up for the coming tale, in the way that *The Hobbit* set the stage for *The Lord of the Rings*.

Because it contains some violent and sexual material, this is not a children's book. If the writing itself were just a little better, readers might be able to forgive the lack of originality. But typographical errors, a slightly stilted style, a wandering storyline, and an overly crowded plot mar what otherwise might be a decent tale. Still, even with its shortcomings, avid fans of Elf tales may appreciate *A Bard's Eye View*.

(March 16, 2010)

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