

Wolfblade by Jennifer Fallon (Book Review)

Contributed by Satima Flavell Neist
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Voyager, ISBN 0732278902 Jennifer Fallon is currently one of the brightest stars in the constellation of Australian fantasy writers. She is in good company: shining alongside her we find several women writers of international repute, including Sara Douglas, Cecilia Dart-Thornton, Lian Hearn, Glenda Larke and Juliet Marillier. Each has a unique style, and all are worthy of recognition as fine writers by anyone's reckoning. One or two of them might prefer to be thought of as primarily literary or historical writers, but surely it's time for fantasy to stop being the genre that dare not show its face? Writers of their calibre can hold their heads up in any assemblage. Fallon is not only a good writer but also a prolific one, with seven books in print in the last five years. Her latest offering, *Wolfblade* is the first book of her third trilogy, *The Hythrun Chronicles*. This oeuvre will, when complete, constitute a prequel to her earlier *Demon Child* Trilogy, and if *Wolfblade* is anything to go by, the series will be eagerly devoured by anyone who appreciated the earlier work. It features some of the same characters, including Lorandranek, King of the Harshini, and his champion, Brakandaran the Halfbreed. They figure in the subplot, which centres on Wrayan Lightfinger, a thief turned sorcerer turned thief again, with some good laughs being provided by a brace of eccentric shape-changing demons. The doings of the otherworldly Harshini contrast nicely with the almost Machiavellian twists of the main story, whose central character is Marla *Wolfblade*, sister to the degenerate and perverted High Prince of Hythria. We see Marla forcibly married to a man not of her choosing, and over the course of the book we watch her grow from a silly teenager who can hardly open her mouth without putting her foot in it into a crafty stateswoman determined to become the real power behind the throne of Hythria. Along the way we are introduced to plenty of other intriguing characters, including a couple of frighteningly dysfunctional relatives-by-marriage of Marla's, and her devoted servant, Elezaar the dwarf, who teaches his mistress the subtle arts of deception and one-upsmanship essential to a ruler. All Fallon's characters are clearly and surely defined: we see how they affect events and how they are affected by them, so plot and characterisation bound along hand-in-hand. By the time I reached the book's surprise ending I was sorry to say good-bye, and eagerly await the release of book two, *Warrior*. I only have two small quibbles with Fallon's work, which is well-crafted, easy to read, pacy and gripping. First, she sometimes presents events from the point of view of a dying person. She is not alone in this once-unacceptable practice: the illustrious Guy Gavriel Kay is regularly guilty of it. For this reader, at least, it completely destroys suspension of disbelief. The other quibble is with her invented languages. Hythria must be on another planet, since we have never read about it in our history or geography books! How can it be, then, that its people have such an Indo-European looking vocabulary? "Court^{esa}", meaning a slave trained in the sexual arts, is altogether too much like "courtesan" for credibility as an Exotic Word. And names such as "Bylinda", "Frederak" and "Mahkas" border on the ludicrous. These criticisms apart, however, *Wolfblade* promises to be the first book of another captivating trilogy. Long may the muse dwell with Jennifer Fallon! Tor has picked up the trilogy for the American market, and will release the "Demon Child" Trilogy and "The Hythrun Chronicles" as one six book series in 2006. Furthermore, Bantam Spectra has taken up Fallon's "Second Sons" Trilogy, so her books are set to reach an even wider public. This review previously appeared in *Visions* magazine. Reproduced with permission of the author.