



The Fallible Fiend

L. Sprague de Camp

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The demon Zdim was happy with his philosophy on the Twelfth Plane, until he was conjured to Prime Plane to serve the human wizard Maldivius. There, to a logical fiend, men seemed wholly irrational. He was ordered to eat the first being to enter a sanctum, then beaten for devouring the wizard's apprentice, who sneaked through the doorway.

Prime Planers stole, lied, and fought each other in needless wars. Naturally, a totally logical demon couldn't understand them. And inevitably, Zdim made mistakes.

But when war came to the city of Ir, only Zdim could escape to seek rescue from wild soldiers and uncertain sorcerers. The role of savior should have gone to a hero out of the legends.

But there was only one Zdim — and he was fallible.

The Fallible Fiend Details

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Author : L. Sprague de Camp

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From Reader Review The Fallible Fiend for online ebook

Onefineness says

Decent quality classic fantasy with some interesting additions to the field (and some that were borrowed and extended by D&D), especially when you put them in temporal context. However, it shows its age with respect to the use of offensive cultural tropes.

Nomadman says

L Sprague De Camp will never go down in history as a literary great, but he's never written a boring novel either, and hardly ever one that wasn't damn good fun. *The Fallible Fiend* is one of his best standalone works, a satirical swashbuckler with a plane-walking demon as the main character. De Camp's on top form here; the plot flies along, the laughs come thick and fast. The characters, a rumbustious procession of rogues and grotesques, never fail to entertain. De Camp also has room to squeeze in a couple of astute Swiftian observations about the nature our species itself, though the book never falls into the trap of becoming a serious piece of work. It's frivolity all the way through.

Rob says

Not a literary tour de force, but it was a hilarious romp.

Peter Tillman says

An entertaining short novel of humorous fantasy that was just what I was looking for: light reading after a bad day. This is, to some degree, yard goods, but very nicely done. Here's a quote from near the end:

"By herself, Roska sar-Blixens is a grave, reserved lady, of great dignity and presence, even if she be ever changing her mind. Admiral Diodis is gruff, positive and forceful. Both are, one would say, as mature as one would ever expect of a human being. Yet, when together, they seem as full of careless laughter and foolish remarks as children...."

"It is simple," said Schnorri. "They are in love."

Fluff, but **good** fluff. Recommended for frivolous relaxation.

Dwight says

Originally posted at <http://www.furiouslyeclectic.com/nova...>

The odd story of an indentured demon that reminded me a bit of Screwtape Letters (CS Lewis). I picked up this little gem in a used book store and immediately fell into it.

The first half of this small book is entertaining, darkly comedic, and quick. The voice of the author is fantastic oft using archaic wording.

It thickens a little in the middle and muddles around a bit.

We get some vague descriptions of the world in a slightly boring section while a pretty spot on Human commentary plays out.

The rest of the book plods along to its finale which is as you'd expect.

Pros: Fun idea, ?early humour, antiquated language, well written, short.

Cons: ?slows down in the middle

A fun little book that doesn't break any molds. It might make you laugh and De Camp's cant is enjoyable.

Imjussayin says

The Fallible Fiend seems like a good idea for a novel. Instead of wizards, witches and humans telling us how awful and dangerous demons are, this is life from a demon's point of view. However, demon Zdim is a literal chap and demon or not, people who take things literally can lead to hilarious consequences.

Unfortunately, the writing reflects a time when racism and sexism were acceptable. It denigrates black people and refers to rape in terms where it is not quite so bad. Demon Zdim observations on human nature were interesting but is a lost opportunity for diversity given the racism.

A well-written account of racism and sexism. There are books are not more worthy of attention.

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Book Rating

Sexual Content: U

Language: U

Violent: 15

Would I read the next one or reread ?: No

My rating system (* = star)

0* Could not finish this book (waste of time)

1* Finished the book but didn't like it.

2* Finished the book it was okay.

3* A good read worth your time.

4* An excellent read often with a novel concept or unusual plot.

5* A great read. A prominent example of the genre.

Jakk Makk says

Hard to imagine this ever being a current fiction offering (in 1973.) It's an okay romp, but the language is self-indulgent, which means, unnecessarily tedious in emulating an Olde English style. I gave up on page seventy and read the ending, my guess is it lacks tension and has very little rising action. Once you've figured out the plot pattern it doesn't improve much. If I screwed up by DNfing this let me know.

Trever says

An older, classic fantasy humor book, sort of pre-Pratchett. Zdim the demon is conjured to the swords & sorcery world as an indentured servant to a mage, and promptly begins a long series of goofing up while legitimately trying to follow the strict interpretations of fallible human commands. There's a large-scale city siege and a lot of hacking and slashing (and biting, on the part of Zdim), but the pointy thrust of the book is what nutjobs humans be. Zdim's bewilderment and confusion about human customs and habits and profit-mindedness gives the book its humor and the lead character his personality. Imagine Spock in the body of a lizardman, plopped down into Conan's world, and you have The Fallible Fiend.

Dantegideon says

Pretty enjoyable, although the demon taking everything seriously with humorous consequences got a little tired by the end.

Jordan says

A fun read, filled with gleefully obscure terminology and a skewering of fantasy tropes and human foibles. It's become increasingly clear to me that the greatness of The Compleat Enchanter series was due to De Camp, not Fletcher Pratt

Colin says

This book is a lot of fun, the tale of a demon named Zdim who is from what mortals call the 12th plane who allows himself to be summoned to the prime plane. There, he is contractually obligated to follow the orders of those who summoned him (or to whom his contract is sold), and so he does follow them . . . to the letter, even if this causes more problems! Fun stuff, and I can see clearly why it was on Gary Gyax's "Appendix N" list . . .

Mark says

L. Sprague De Camp is famous for his numerous light fantasy novels. They are sort of the potato chips of fantasy lit, tasty but not particularly filling. This is one of his lesser works. It is told from the viewpoint of a "fiend" summoned to an Conan-esque world. The gimmick is that fiends aren't evil demons, but beings from a metal-poor alternate reality who are leased into temporary service in exchange for iron. This particular fiend is a philosopher in his own reality. The mild humor of the book revolves around his misunderstanding of the human culture and his literal-minded misinterpretations of simple commands.

I didn't actively dislike the book, but it isn't really worth the time to read it.

Charles says

Stuff I Read – The Fallible Fiend by L Sprague de Camp Review

So kind of cheating here, because I was supposed to be reading Ursula K LeGuin's *Left Hand of Darkness* next as part of my continuing efforts to read more female writers, but I got this book for Halloween and it's very short and looked funny and so I'm sorry. In any event, this is (according to the internets) the third book in Camp's series in Novaria, but really I don't think it's much of a proper "series," as this is a stand alone book involving a demon summoned to the Prime Plane (read Novaria, your standard fantasy setting) and forced into the service of various wizards, conmen, and politicians, who invariable fail to utilize his talents to the fullest potential.

Zdim, the demon narrator, is a bit of a charming person...er, demon...whatever, because of his simplicity. He appeals to the reader's own voice of reason. He is the comic foil of the setting, basically, operating under fairly strict rules, the biggest of them being that he takes commands literally, which ends up causing quite a bit of trouble throughout the book. As a comic character, though, he excels, being unknowledgeable about the setting and therefore able to bring up the ridiculous qualities of Novaria and the fantasy genre as a whole while also being involved in a fantasy story that revels in being that same genre. It smacks a bit of other fantasy humorists, probably more like Pratchett than Anthony, because the humor here is very much in the way the characters go against fantasy clichés instead of playing it more seriously as Xanth does (and I know that sounds odd, but if you've read all of them, it should make sense).

The humor, then, largely lands, though there is the slight sense that some of the story is dated in an older sort of fantasy, one that hasn't necessarily survived to the current times. Still, as someone who has read and taken in a lot of fantasy from that time, I can see the allure, and I can get the humor. The characters alone are worth the read, because the book is filled with colorful people, all of them being kind of nasty in their own particular way. It plays on the idea that people are really only out for themselves, for their own interests, that humans in general seem too complicated, too full of plots and intrigue, a point that couldn't be as well made with a human main character.

Other than that, my only real complaint is that the book doesn't really do women any favors, largely leaving them out and only briefly making fun of the tropes in fantasy to have the women be virginal and pure. I would have liked a bit more, and I understand that this was written a long time ago, but some of the jokes are obviously playing towards a male audience and it made me a bit sad to see. Still and overall, though, the book hits the right notes. Though some the jokes miss, enough hit that I can put this up there with works by

Pratchett and Anthony. And while it might not be groundbreaking, it was at least a fun book to read.

So in the end, this was a book that made me smile often enough, though it didn't actually make me laugh. It takes a bit to make me laugh, though, and part of the problem was the somber tone of the narrator, which I understand completely. It is a well crafted book, and a short book, and really I don't have all that much more to say for or against it. I enjoyed it, and for that at least it earns a 7.5/10.

Jerry says

This is a fun, and short, book, that takes the demon's point of view. Wizards oft complain about the literalness of demons and come up with all sorts of outlandish theories ascribing maliciousness to the demons who so literally take their commands that the commands become worthless. Here we see that from the demon's side.

There is also a definite D&D-ish vibe in the writing, which is not surprising: this doughty author is on the infamous Appendix N. From the kind of humor to the language to the spells, readers of first edition AD&D or early Dragon articles will find this a familiar, even nostalgic, territory.

Joel says

L. Sprague de Camp writes in an engagingly humorous style that rarely disappoints. This title is my favorite of his. The 'fiend' is one of funniest characters I've ever come across in the field of fantasy. I reread this from time to time, as a pick-me-up.
