



A Darkness Forged in Fire

Chris Evans

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We do not fear the flame, though it burns us,
We do not fear the fire, though it consumes us,
And we do not fear its light,
Though it reveals the darkness of our souls,
For therein lies our power.
-- Blood Oath of the Iron Elves

First in a stunning debut series, *A Darkness Forged in Fire* introduces an unforgiving world of musket and cannon...bow and arrow...magic, diplomacy, and oaths -- each wielding terrible power in an Empire teetering on the brink of war.

In this world, Konowa Swift Dragon, former commander of the Empire's elite Iron Elves, is looked upon as anything but ordinary. He's murdered a Viceroy, been court-martialed, seen his beloved regiment disbanded, and finally been banished in disgrace to the one place he despises the most -- the forest.

Now, all he wants is to be left alone with his misery...but for Konowa, nothing is ever that simple. The mysterious and alluring Visyna Tekoy, the highborn daughter of an elfkynan governor, seeks him out in the dangerous wild with a royal decree that he resume his commission as an officer in Her Majesty's Imperial Army, effective immediately.

For in the east, a falling Red Star heralds the return of a magic long vanished from the earth. Rebellion grows within the Empire as a frantic race to reach the Star unfolds. It is a chance for Konowa to redeem himself -- even if the entire affair appears doomed to be a suicide mission...

and that the soldiers recruited for the task are not at all what he expects. And worse, his key adversary in the perilous race for the Star is the dreaded Shadow Monarch -- a legendary elf-witch whose machinations for absolute domination spread deeper than Konowa could ever imagine....

A Darkness Forged in Fire Details

Date : Published July 8th 2008 by Pocket Books

ISBN : 9781416570516

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Format : Hardcover 416 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Magic, Epic Fantasy

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From Reader Review A Darkness Forged in Fire for online ebook

Abigail Singer says

It amazes me how many different ways people can write about elves. Everyone has their own opinion to what elves are like, but one thing that remains constant is the tie of elves to nature. And "A Darkness Forged in Fire" is no different.

The thing that really stood out to me was the fact that some elves use muskets, and the main character, Konowa actually hates the forest. It really helped make the Iron Elves or the "fallen ones" stand out among other elves I have read.

The book had a strong opening that grabbed me from the get-go. Evans is heavy on the militaristic breakdown and that isn't something I usually go for. A lot of time spent in camps and going on about the breakdown of the regiment. While being well written, it got old after a while, as did the idiot prince in charge. In the beginning Konowa complains he's going to have to baby-sit the prince until he becomes a man and I was hoping to see a little of that transformation. Granted, this is only the first book of either a series or a trilogy so I hope to see more from that transformation as the tale continues.

All in all not a bad read and I did enjoy it, however I prefer a little more character development. The only feeling I really got from that was Alwyn, a lad fresh out of the village seemingly unsuited for military life and Yimt, a surly dwarf who goes from saying the best way to stay alive is to stay away from battle, to leading a scout party in the most dangerous area.

Jim says

This is a very creditable first novel & a good start to a trilogy. Interesting magic in lands peopled by all sorts of interesting critters including many varieties of dragons. Not all are huge monsters such as the skunk-dragon. The characters were good & memorable such as the main character, Konowa Swift Dragon, an elf who doesn't like trees or... well, I don't want to tell too much. Some of the characters started off as a caricature & wind up being surprising. In the audio edition, it was nice to hear a dwarf with an Aussie rather than Scot accent.

There was some really good humor. It was sudden, often almost discordant, but it helped lift the serious mood & was quite life-like. It appeared suddenly at odd moments. Nothing uproarious, just funny moments that so often occur.

There were several things a little uneven or choppy about the story. I'm not sure if it was my listening skills, but in reading several other reviews, I'm fairly sure it wasn't me. I have a feeling an editor went a bit heavy with the red pen at times. There were some things I just had to roll with, such as a huge raptor that's kept under a tarp for days.

There's a lot unexplained about various parts of the novel, but I think they'll be filled in later. I liked that. Most fantasy novels spend too much time explaining everything.

All in all, it was a good read & I'm looking forward to the next. 3.5 stars which I'm bumping up.

Donna says

A Darkness Forged in FireChris EvansI am a bit of a lover of fantasy novels and this was no exception. Fantasy novels are mostly about good versus evil and when they involve so many interesting characters it makes for a great read. But having said that it was a bit long-winded at 577 pages.

There are faraway lands, sick forests and evil witches. Then there are good witches as well, but as in most good versus evil, the good and evil overlap. An Empire, an army and a mixed bag of characters fighting for the good of the land.

There was a lot of description and explanation and a lot of characters so it did become somewhat confusing at times but as I read more, things fell into place and the story flowed a bit smoother. I loved the magic and sorcery and also the way the story combined different lives with different tools and arms.

I think this novel was written in a way that we can see how people from different walks of life can and do get along, help each other and fight for what is right even though they may not always agree with the way to go about it.

All in all in was a good book but a bit long.

Sarah says

For my 250th review (on Shelfari, where I copied this from), I was honestly hoping to write cunningly written, insightful rave about my latest book. Instead, I'm going to write a review about "A Darkness Forged in Fire".

Possible spoilers throughout this review.

To be fair, it wasn't a TERRIBLE book. Not really. The book opens with glowing promise. Our intrepid hero, banished for a dishonorable deed done for all the right reasons, has been recalled to possibly restore his tarnished honor. He meets one of the only women who exist in this part of the universe (at least, the only woman who merits the description of "attractive"), and even as he is given is life-or-death mission, little heart-shaped sparks fly.

Well, no, that's not really true. I think the author wanted to believe that these two were, ahem, falling in love, but I could think of no character-driven reason why they would like each other. When she first sees him, he's been living in the woods for a year, something he's terrible at, been sprayed by a skunk - Sorry, Skunk DRAGON - and is surly and rather terse. But sure. She thinks he's a hunk all the same.

His band of "Iron Elves" is being reformed. Of course, they're not being reformed by actual elves because that would be just too kind. Instead, they get the dregs of their local society foisted on them and then are sent out into the wilderness to recover the Magic MacGuffin while operating around the various incompetencies of their Commander-in-Chief, the dunderheaded Prince.

Along the way we discover that essentially no one in this entire brigade is mentally or physically equipped to handle the challenges they'll face, their Brilliant Leader *cough, cough* is even more knuckle-headed than initially thought, and oh yes, it's very possible that the entire regiment is under some sort of bizarre curse. Swell.

And so, here's the plot of the story - journey, battle, harder journey, bigger battle, even harder journey, biggest battle. Fin.

So. Yeah. The first part had promise. There was some kind of Big Bad Evil who was going to go after the Magic MacGuffin and Do Evil Things with it. That's standard fare. There are elves, dwarfs, humans, witches and non-magical, boring ol' humans. 'Kay. I can work with all this stuff. Also, instead of (only) using sword and sorcery, these elves can also work with muskets and cannon. Also neat.

But part of the hangup I have with this work is that the author seemed so keen to say "Yes I'm using fantasy tropes but LOOK HERE - now I'm turning them on their head!" that the plot and character development started to suffer. Many things just happen between characters because they "have to." Our Intrepid Hero needs a Lady Love, so the only attractive woman of childbearing years who has any dialogue in the book immediately gets shoved into that role. They have nothing in common, you say? That doesn't matter, silly reader. Because she's a non-elf who communes with nature and he IS an elf who feels no bond with it! Oh, the tables! How they have been turned!

Honestly, I felt that the relationship, though not the individual characters, between the dwarf corporal and the rookie human recruit was better developed. The two had a friendship born of shared experiences and similar desires. Granted, those desires could be boiled down to "let's not die" but still.

The Big Bad Evil is really Madame-Not-Appearing-In-This-Volume and seems to be pretty content to sit in the shadows, steepling her fingers and chuckling an evil chuckle. Instead, we have Moderately Evil Henchman Risen In Power who is seen as the Sorta Big Bad in the book. Sorta Big Bad also pretty much just sits in a room, making evil plans and generally Being a Bad Guy, but HE has a magical, evil table. And toward the end of the book, he creates a zombie horse. So there's that.

Sigh.

I wanted so much to really like this book. I really did. I loved the overall concept of mixing fantasy and gunpowder, but for how long the book is, the story overall felt hollow. There were no real characters that I felt I could either walk around as, or walk around beside. Even Our Intrepid Hero is more morose and "woe is me; I have let down my comrades" than "Let's do this thang, gents!" His lady love is a bit too self-righteous for me, and the Mysterious Other Woman doesn't have a big enough part to carry the story.

Another gripe I had was the over-fantasization of the world. I'm honest-to-God shocked that I didn't like that. I LIKE Magic MacGuffins. I LIKE magical creatures. I LIKE strange locations. But a muraphant is an elephant. You don't need to make up a new name for something we already have. A bengar is a black tiger with red stripes. Then there's the made-up words that he throws in constantly, like "Ryk Faur". I have an IDEA of what that is, but I don't KNOW. There is no glossary, and you have to guess the meaning of words by context. Normally, that's fine, but since I wasn't thrilled by the rest of the book, having to re-translate his Fantasy-speak every time the word came up got to be a burden.

I was glad when it was over...because I forced myself to finish it when I realized that I only had 40 pages left, and I'm not sure that I will want to read the sequel, even though it's sitting on my shelf right now.

Ah, well.

Joseph says

The elf Konowa Swift Dragon used to lead Her Majesty's regiment The Iron Elves, but has spent the past year living in the forest after being banished in disgrace and getting his regiment disbanded for killing someone who, admittedly, did need a certain amount of killing.

Now he's called back into service and his regiment is reactivated, filled not with veteran elves but with the dregs & cast-offs of the rest of the army, and sent on a mission through a hostile wilderness to retrieve an artifact before the Dark Queen's minions can lay their hands on it.

Entertaining military fantasy -- an early (pre-Wexler, pre-McClellan) example of flintlock fantasy, where muskets take their place next to swords and bows.

Sarah says

I wanted to read this book because the premise of an elf who hated the woods was interesting. I thought that perhaps Evans would break through the typical fantasy elf/dwarf/etc barriers and create something completely new and absolutely different and refreshing.

This book was superbly average. The romance was cliche, the dialog was stilted, the characters were not as unique as I had hoped. The plot was predictable. All of the standard dimensions of three-star fantasy were in place from the romance to the magic to the unmemorable events.

Don't get me wrong, the book was a light, entertaining read but it was nothing groundbreaking and nothing I'll remember in a day. I have little to no desire to continue on with the series because I feel like I already know what's going to happen. I feel like I've read about all of these characters before that I've read about these situations before... it's nothing new. While it is an entertaining read, I think fans of Dragonlance and those kinds of books may find it more enjoyable than I did.

Lucinda says

Chris Evans 'The Iron Elves' trilogy completely overwhelmed me entirely and i cannot commend the books highly enough. It was only by a very slim chance that i picked up 'A darkness forged in fire' off the bookshelf because it really did not stand out at all with such a pale cover, but little did i know at the time that it was the best descision that i had ever made in terms of choosing a book to read. At first when i read the blurb i looked in disbelief at the words Elves next to muskets and i thought how can you mix JRR Tolkien with Bernard Cornwell, but this comparision is in a sense very true and also not true because Chris Evans is just so unique and individual in his portrayal of a fantasy book. I fell in love with the main character of Konowa Swift Dragon immediately and throughout the book he was the focus point, such as Harry is in Harry Potter. I began to understand the creation that Evans had created and that the Elves in his trilogy were different to others in lititary fiction and so likewise were many of the other characters and creatures. The book was full of action and drama which was really spine-tingling and full on fast paced, plus it contained a deep romance too which i really longed for to be resolved but which only led to a cliff-hanger at the end. The good versus evil

was the main storyline focus and as for the 'evil' of the shadow monarch and her kin i apsolutely loved it and was bowled over completely by Evans' creative imagination; i mean deadly killing trees! There was also some background history included which as a reader i felt particularly privaliged to know about and it really added depth and another layer to the fantastic storyline, making it even more intense and interesting. Apart from Harry Potter and Tolkien by far Chris Evans exceeded all expecations with this book and made me not just like his work but really love it, so that i immediately after reading the 1st installment had to go out and buy the next two books (The light of burning shadows and also Ashes of a black frost). The trilogy is one of the very best that i have ever read and i cannot enthuse about it enough, but i do realise that it is also very unique and will as a consequence of this not appeal to everyone even if you are a fan of fantasy fiction or not. The books and certainly the first one had such an impact upon myself and only increased my enjoyment and devotion to this genre and type of literature. Chris Evans is an author who is a force to be reccond with and a real gem, as i cannot beleive that anyone would not like 'A darkness forged in fire' because it was just so great and i could not stop reading it once i had begun.

Forgotten Realms Queen says

I was finally able to obtain a complete copy (thanks Mr. Evans!) and it is still very much worth picking up.

As i said before, good concept of an evil elf witch on top of a mountain that needs destroying, well paced, and had very believable characters that you could both love and hate. Yimt was my favorite, as I'm sure he will be with everyone else who reads the story. C'mon, who wouldn't love a crotchety old dwarf soldier with a silver tongue? (Sweet knobby kneed nuns!!!)

They didn't reach the witch at the end of this book, (understandable since it is supposed to be a trilogy....) but over the course of the narration you see how the witches power corrupts, as well as the full impact of the saying "the road to hell is paved with good intentions".

What I liked most about this book however, is that the corrupted being fight against the witch. Usually they go over and serve the dark side, but here they know what has happened, know that they are doomed, and even though they're going down, they are going to take the witch with them.

Classic, I know, but you see this more in movies than in books, and it works really well here.

An excellent start to what promises to be a really awesome trilogy

Ranting Dragon says

Chris Evans' debut novel *A Darkness Forged in Fire*, the first installment in the Iron Elves Trilogy, shows off Evans's passion for military history and fantasy as he joins the two in a gritty, imaginative marriage where army life and Napoleonic era tactics coexist with fantasy staples. The trilogy continues with *The Light of Burning Shadows* and will be completed by *Ashes of a Black Frost*, due for release in summer 2011.

As the story begins in *A Darkness Forged in Fire*, Konowa Swift Dragon has led his regiment into shame and exile; he murdered a Viceroy and now the honor of the Iron Elves is as bloodied as his hands. A shamed regiment—stripped of everything, including their leader—the once glorious elves are but a stain on the

Calahrian Empire's colors. Konowa, court-marshaled and banished, has had plenty of time to dwell on his predicament as he wanders the dense forests he despises so fervently with only his loyal bengar, Jir, to keep him sane.

But with a darkness on the horizon blacker than Konowa's mood, the former commander is wrenched from his misery and thrust back into the fray. With a new draft of soldiers to fill his beloved Iron Elves—and not a single elf amongst them—Konowa must face not only the rising elf-witch, the Shadow Monarch, as she vies for domination, but also himself. Deep in the forest, Konowa is ordered to find the scattered original Iron Elves, under the constant scrutiny of an inexperienced, adventure-seeking Prince Tykkin. Charged not only with defeating the rising evil with which his destiny intertwines but also restoring order throughout the Empire, Konowa will soon realize that his black ear-tip—the Shadow Monarch's mark on her chosen soldiers—cannot be forgotten, and his fate cannot be escaped.

For the Empire

While it is the grander scheme of the Shadow Monarch that underpins the series thus far, without the innovative and insightful details into the Iron Elves as a living, breathing branch of the Imperial army, the notion of a powerful sorceress bent on world destruction would come across as too clichéd. Instead, the Calahrian Empire's struggle to maintain order as it strives to promote its own brand of progress—as important as defeating the Shadow Monarch—coupled with the raw mechanics of a regiment on the move, actively fighting the forces of the elf-witch while dealing with its own problems brought by injury, death and obligation, present the old cliché in brand new colors: the colors of the Imperial army. Everything is in the name of the Queen, whether Konowa and his men like it or not.

Dwarves need not apply

A regiment smells, and *A Darkness Forged in Fire* captures this scent in every page. The soldiers of the Iron Elves are diverse and it is through them that the regiment is given life: a religious zealot, a single grudge-bearing elf of the original Iron Elves, a sly trouble-maker, and a mismatched pair whose camaraderie invites the reader deeper into the unit.

Sworn into the Iron Elves are Yimt, a veteran dwarf whose stories will make your hair curl, and Alwyn, a reluctant, bespectacled young man whose eyesight is as bad as Yimt's manners and whose courage is often shaken but never shattered. Together, Alwyn and Yimt—the only dwarf in the unit, sworn in by cheek alone—pull the reader to the level of the soldiers, away from the lofty, tense world in which Konowa—at the side of the prince—exists in the unit. Evans offers a real taste of what life in the cursed Iron Elves is like through the friendship of Alwyn and Yimt.

Green magic

As a counterpart to the grit of the Iron Elves, the reader is given a view of those opposed to the Empire, though not as the Iron Elves' adversaries, but as companions and allies. Visyna Tekoy—high-born noble from Elfkyna, sent to drag Konowa from exile—wields a gentle magic and even gentler respect for nature that clashes with Konowa's strong detestation of the forests of his birth, despite the seeds of turbulent romance planted between the two. Another female seeks to balance out the thick macho cast—or would, if she weren't brasher than most of the men combined. Rallie, official reporter for the Queen, is a cigar-smoking old crone, who, while she is more than she first seems, remains a constant oracle, doling out guidance and advice to Konowa and to the unit. She delivers both wit and wisdom as she sketches her way through trouble, chain-smoking all the while. Although brash, Rallie's subtle gentility and mysterious powers make her a close confidant for Visyna's gripes about Konowa and the Empire.

Marching narrative

The style is straightforward without droning on, and while details about the setting are presented, they're not as important to Evans as the plot. The setting is explained as the story progresses, and little time is devoted to the background of the situation. Enough is divulged and explained meticulously to allow the reader to continue happily and immerse themselves in the world, although readers expecting a military-standard, encompassing description of the Empire's rise will find themselves disappointed.

Keep it moving

The weakest point of the book is movement, especially during battles; it appears at times that Evans has completely forgotten to move his characters as they fight. This is especially true of the final battle of the book, where it seems Konowa and another officer observe the fight from stationary places, like cardboard cut outs, when in fact, the narrative and dialogue suggest they actively participate. Furthermore, the descriptions of the elf-witch's magic and its effects, especially during battles, bring down the overall excellence of the book, as sometimes it is just too difficult to grasp precisely what is transpiring, and the reader needs to understand the narrative to understand the resulting situation.

Why should you read this book?

A Darkness Forged in Fire is a different take on commonplace fantasy elements, combining both sorcery and military conquest with classic sword-clashing and a struggle to save the world from death and darkness. It is a vivid and gripping debut by an imaginative writer whose strengths far outweigh his weaknesses, and whose original, vibrant characters bring the world to life in place. If you're a fan of elves, but fancy something grittier, something different, then give Konowa and his Iron Elves a try.

<http://www.rantingdragon.com/a-darkne...>

Sophie A. says

There are so many things wrong with this book that frankly I'm surprised I was able to finish it. I'll tell you from now, there was a lot of eye rolling on my part.

1. Some fantasy authors do a great job introducing the readers to a different world filled with magic and mythical beings. Evans does a poor job. His fantastical world is barely believable. This is probably due to the way he introduces readers to the story and of course his poor analogies (eye roll and "oh please"). You eventually buy into but it still leaves you feeling a bit skeptical.
2. Thumbs down for the romance aspect. The chemistry between the hero and his lady is there at first but then fizzles and mid way through becomes forced and rushed. The dialogue between the two becomes stilted and by the end of the story I was ROLLING my eyes every time the two love birds interacted.
3. The dialogue between the all the characters is stilted. It's like an action movie; good dialogue is way too much to ask for.
4. One thing that really annoyed me about this book is how people who were not there when something happened nor were they told of such happenings, but some way some how, they knew. Maybe the author did not see the need to tell us how characters became informed. And i guess our hero was pretty transparent since everyone seems to know what he was thinking. Sort of at odds with his military background. Also, There are certain moments that makes you go "huh?" (and roll your eyes) You find yourself flipping back to early pages to see if you missed something.

5. I must say that I did not bond with the main characters. During the final battle I really did not care whether or not they triumphed.

Now some good: there are a lot of stories out there about elves but I found the authors take familiar but at the same time different. It does have some originality. I want to learn more about the elves, so I might pick up the next book. And Evans is a new author so his style might improve.

Dirk Grobbelaar says

I liked this book. Perhaps against my expectations. No, really, it is rather good. The protagonist has a really catchy name too. Konowa Swift Dragon is an elf and former leader of the Iron Elves. He is also in exile and out of favour with just about everybody. The Elves don't like him because he doesn't adhere to the same beliefs about nature (The Iron Elves are so called because they use metal weapons such as Sabers and Muskets as opposed to the other Elves who shun metal, opting instead for wooden weapons like bows). In short, Konowa doesn't talk to the trees. The Queen (of the Empire) and her followers aren't too fond of him either, since he assassinated their Viceroy (never mind the fact that said Viceroy was an instrument of the Shadow Monarch). See, now I'm getting ahead of myself. By the way, this is not a spoiler, just in case you were tut-tutting. Evil is upon the land, courtesy of already mentioned Shadow Monarch, who is actually a rather powerful elf witch (Galadriel gone bad?) and Konowa is recalled from exile to reform his regiment and address some of the problems. Well, actually, to find the red star of the prophecy, which should not, repeat not, fall into the grubby paws of the evil elf witch. From there, things go awry and all kinds of weird adversities are unleashed upon our anti-hero and his motley band of brothers.

This novel is the first in a trilogy, and as such, it ends on a rather open note. No surprises there. The things that really stood out for me were the setting and the almost Napoleonic aspects intermingled with the more traditional fantasy elements. Elves with muskets and cannons, how cool is that? This is military fantasy, and at times it gets a bit gritty. On occasion, it did feel a bit like reading a Warhammer novel. This is really not a bad thing. The characters are fun, and there are some really interesting 'pets' prowling around.

Perhaps I'm just easy to please.

Shanon says

The creatures were unique and interesting but I didn't feel most the characters were all that engaging. There was a lot of action but little character development throughout it. There was really only two characters that stood out to me, Alwyn & Yimt, neither of which are really the main characters of the book. Alwyn is a young man who really isn't suited for the life of a soldier and had many doubts throughout the story. Yimt is a seasoned warrior and a dwarf. His humor provides a much needed giggle here and there.

I found the idea of "Iron Elves" very interesting and unique. A group of elves that don't feel at home in nature and prefer a musket to a bow. A trait that is completely at odds with the more traditional elves also in the story. I wish the regimend of Iron Elves had actually been made of the Iron Elves mentioned in the story. Unfortunately, the only elf in the Iron Elves was the main character, Konowa.

The beginning of the book was promising and made me glad I took a chance on an unknown book while browsing my library catalog. Sadly, it just sizzled out somewhere along the way. By the end it had a hard time holding my interest. I doubt I will read the next book in the series.

Kati says

First read in 2009. Re-read in August 2011: Much better the second time around. Bumping the rating up from 3 stars to 4. I'm really intrigued by the book now and can't wait to read part 2!

First in the "Iron Elves" series. And quite good, actually. Once you get used to muskets and cannons in a fantasy book. I liked Konowa and his inability to connect with nature despite being an elf. I loved the dwarf Yimt and the bespectacled Alwyn. I liked Rallie the reporter and her drunk pelican Wobbly. What I didn't like was Visyna and her hypocrisy - yes, she wanted to save her land and the elfkyn but she turned her nose at the nomadic tribes because they were filthy and low, she was all for saving nature but with a clear conscience she plotted Konowa's demise and let herself be duped like a complete idiot. I just didn't see the attraction between her and Konowa, that must have been one of the most unbelievable romance I've ever read about.

But basically, when you step back you realize that the Empire is Europe, the elves are Indians and the elfkyn Native Americans and it's all about the Native Americans fighting against the white man.

Shannon (Giraffe Days) says

In the far west of the Hyntaland, the land of Elves, lies a dark mountain covered in flesh-eating trees whose roots have burrowed deep into the rock. At the pinnacle rests a single sickly Wolf Oak, a corrupted tree that bonded with an Elf who has become as twisted as the tree: the Shadow Monarch.

To the far east, in the land called Elfkyna by the Calahrian Empire that rules it, the leader of the Iron Elves lives in the forest, exiled for killing the Viceroy who was an emissary of the Shadow Monarch. The Iron Elves was the first and only elvish regiment in the Calahrian army, compiled of elves tainted at birth by the Shadow Monarch: the tip of one pointed ear is black. They also lack an affinity for the trees and natural life, preferring the metal of musket and sword and an indoor bed. But when Konowa killed the Viceroy, the Iron Elves were disbanded and became no more.

Until now. The legendary Star has come to the land and there is a race on to find it first. The prince and heir to the Calahrian throne, a collector with no experience leading men, has come to Elfkyna to put together a new regiment of Iron Elves - this time one consisting of humans (and one dwarf). Conscripted to lead the regiment in all but name, Konowa knows the real reason to reach the Star first is to keep it out of the Shadow Monarch's hands. As once-extinct and monstrous creatures rise up from the earth to do Her bidding, the Iron Elves must battle never before seen foes and keep their heads, while the touch of the Shadow Monarch spreads amongst them.

What began as a traditional but interesting Fantasy, shifted into a very slow - creeping, almost - and careful march culminating in a confusing and unnecessarily prolonged battle. War and armies and fighting I expect from this kind of fantasy - the "sword and sorcery" kind - but it needs to be balanced by a wider breadth of

characters and sub-plots so that it doesn't dawdle to a standstill.

I generally steer clear of elves - they can get incredibly boring, especially the Tolkien kind, which are just too perfect to hold my interest for very long - but this was sent to me by the publisher and I'm always willing to read outside my general comfort zone (I like to think my comfort zone is quite broad but I expect it's pretty routine).

The Elves in *A Darkness Forged in Fire* were something like indigenous Native Canadians or Americans - or a naïve idea of them: a peaceful, harmonic people bonded to the trees and the land, putting the natural world above the human (or elf) one. Reminiscent of what could be seen as a more primitive culture - or a vastly more sophisticated and wise one. I'd like to go with the latter, since I personally think people are secondary to the world in which we live. Anyway. They were more rustic than godlike, and the tainted elves like Konowa were an interesting concept, though the "pure" elves were a bit too goody-goody superior: annoying and, sadly, boring.

Konowa had a modern mouth. He sounded a bit out of place, being more human than the humans. Certainly it assures our sympathy, being the most *familiar* character of them all, alongside the love interest, Visyna. But it was also a bit weird. He *wasn't* human, and it would be a far more thrilling read to have the main character be truly non-human. This would be a challenge to write - there's a good reason why main characters are almost always human; or if Other, tend to be written as human. Part of the issue is the reader: does the reader, *can* the reader, want to read about a non-human? Can a human care for a being not of the same species, really? Plenty of stories have depicted a negative answer to this question, when the non-human is a secondary character. What's missing in the genre - from science fiction too I'm sure - are stories that have a completely shifted narrative perspective; or if they do try, they do it poorly.

What we have in *A Darkness Forged in Fire* is a colonial world run by a British-esque empire that believes whole-heartedly in the superiority of its own civilisation, providing fertile ground for a critique of imperialism. There is a bit of that there, but it's quite obvious and not all that important. At the end of the day, so to speak, I'm not sure what *was* important. Almost the entire book depicts an army on the move and engaged in battle. Perspective shifts between Konowa, a private called Alwyn who gives us the troop's perspective, and Visyna, with an occasional other voice thrown in, like the new Viceroy.

There were some elements I very much enjoyed: for all my complaints, I liked Konowa, even though he seemed out of place. I liked his bengar, Jir, and Rallie's messenger birds - especially Wobbly, the perpetually drunk pelican, and Dandy the raptor. The dwarf, Yimt, was clichéd but entertaining. There was great potential in the monsters and the flesh- and soul-eating trees, as well as the Big Problem with the oath that binds the Iron Elves in more ways than one.

But it was slow, very slow, and the final battle was especially frustrating. Descriptions began to get confusing, and I have no idea why the dwarf's Company went off on its own - supposedly to scout - and took so much longer to get to the outpost. I formed no lasting attachments to any of the characters; it was a tad too simplistic in plot and concept to trigger my curiosity; and aside from the old "rid the world of the evil one" plot I have no idea where this story is going. The Shadow Monarch is an unknown and probably unknowable entity, and so by default can cause no real fear or concern. Other "evil ones" are shades and the like, and just don't feel very threatening.

On the whole, I feel very ambivalent towards this book. I'm disappointed that the second half didn't live up to the promise of the first half, that the characters were too superficial, and that every attempt to create a deeper and darker atmosphere only wrecked what had already been achieved by over-doing it.

Lyle Kimo Valdez says

I found this story quite hard to get into but once I got past the first about 100 pages or so I was sucked in and couldn't leave it down.

There are some different concepts at work here, not radically different, but just different enough. Elves in particular take on traditional and non-traditional roles, but done very well. The evil Shadow Monarch, who is really a master of the powers of cold, opposes all life. The Long Watch elves who guard the trees oppose her, as well as the Empire, and the Iron Elves, a regiment of elves who cannot belong to the Long Watch. Joining them are a castoff bunch of humans and a dwarf. There's a few mysteries here that aren't cleared up enough, and at times it is a bit simplistic, but still quite good. Its not Robert Jordan or G. R. R. Martin quality, but certainly the next level.

The battle scenes, using guns and cannons, bayonets and fists, draw you into an era of history not generally utilized in fantasy, adding a sense of freshness to the traditional elements employed. And the misfits making up the Iron Elves quickly start grow on you.

Chris Evans has the ability to paint a fully realized description in a single sentence. You don't read *A Darkness Forged in Fire*, you watch it in your mind. My only complaint in reading this book was that I was forced to take too many 'commercial breaks', disrupting the flow of the writing and lessening the impact of the conclusion. So do yourself a favor and read this on a quiet weekend when you'll have time to really let the story take you away.
