



Yarrow

Charles de Lint

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From the acclaimed author of *Moonheart* and *Memory and Dream*

Cat Midhir had made a reputation as the author of popular fantasy novels. But the secret that her fans didn't know was that her Otherworld was no fantasy. Then, one night, a thief stole her dreams. Since then, she's been trapped in the everyday. And the Others are coming to find her...

Yarrow

Yarrow Details

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From Reader Review Yarrow for online ebook

John says

This was one of my first de Lint books. Going to read again.

1/4/16

Just finished. I want to settle my thoughts before composing my further review. I must say it evoked more now than previously.

Charles de Lint is true storyteller. He mastered the craft of urban myth and legend. With YARROW, he uses a present day North American city where the protagonist, female fantasy author resides. The antagonist is an ageless addict who feeds his addiction with human dreams, spirit and ultimately their soul. So, it is a good vs. evil tale.

However, it is far from being that simple. There's a possible romance brewing, lots of friendships and a splash of back-story and sub-plot. Mr. de Lint uses all this with euphoric language, grammar, figurative language and diction. His narrative is inviting. He allows the reader to enter a world to accept and have faith that there are other realms (maybe dreamable), to be on a path/journey and to reveal yourself to friends. Highly recommended!

3/30/16

Somehow, my review of my 2nd reading and marking it 'read' was not registered.

Jen3n says

This is the first book I ever read by Charles de Lint. I was hooked right off. I liked (and continue to like) his all of his Newford books; I love the gentle blending of wild myth and urban lore. Mid-town primitives and fairies living in the electrical pulses, that sort of thing. It's Urban Fantasy from back when that genre was, literally, fantasy in an urban setting, and not what it has been turned into.

This book spoke to me directly. It's about a socially awkward writer who is a little boho and has a rich fantasy life. This book is funny and dark. People die. People fall in love. But that's the sort of thing that is SUPPOSED to happen in fairy tales, so it's okay.

I do have several problems with Mr. de Lint's writing and style, but none of them really pop-up in this book. It was written fairly early-on, relatively. So I'll get into the crap that irritates me about the Newford books in a different review. I'll just close this one by saying: good book. I'd recommend this to any of my friends who like fantasy novels.

Amy C says

Yarrow was my first foray into the world of Charles de Lint, and it certainly won't be my last. What an

amazing mind he has. When I first began reading, numerous characters were introduced, all going about daily things. A page for this one, a page for that one. I wondered who they all were and what their relevance was to the main plot. As I read, I was drawn into each of these people and found myself amazed how they intertwined together. Some had small roles, and others larger, but what I loved was even though you didn't really NEED to know the little tid bits of information about this or that character, the fact that the author did give it in the simplest way made those characters stand out and become three dimensional.

This isn't normally the type of book I enjoy reading. I'm not a big fan of creepy, but I have to say that I did not want to put this book down until I finished the last page. The fantasy element in it was rather subtle, yet profound. I almost immediately found myself connecting with the main protagonist, Cat. She's withdrawn, shy and a writer. When she sleeps she dreams of an Otherworld, with strange creatures. A place that is just as real as the world she lives in in her waking life. But something terrible happens. She stops dreaming of her Otherworld. Something is hunting her. Something evil. Eventually Cat begins to doubt her sanity and if this Otherworld isn't really just her imagination.

It's this evil that is hunting Cat that brings all the characters together in one way or another. I loved the execution of this tale. The vileness of the villain made this one creepy story and gave me the heebie jeebies. But what really made this book for me was the relationship that formed slowly between Cat and Ben and the sense of a happily ever after for them.

I have a huge back list of Charles de Lint to get through, but I am looking forward to reading many, many more of his books.

Tracey says

Yet another book I haven't read in probably twenty years, *Yarrow* is the story of Cat Midhir, a fantasy novelist who, unbeknownst to everyone else, is dependent on her dreams for her writing. Every night she has found herself in another world, where she sits at the feet of the tall fae bard Kothlen as he spins tales, which she on waking weaves into her books. Every night of her life since she was very young she has had what for lack of better language she calls dreams - every night until three months ago, when she stopped dreaming at all, and because of that stopped writing. We the reader know what she cannot: there's an ancient creature called Lysistratus who feeds off dreams, off soul, and who finds her a rich source of sustenance.

Quick question: why on earth call a soul/dream vampire "Lysistratus"?? There was a real Lysistratus in the 4th century who was a highly skilled sculptor (a creator), and there was the fictional Lysistrata, the Athenian heroine of Aristophanes's comedy about the women on both sides of a war deciding to withhold sex until peace could be achieved. Not, either of them, anything remotely appropriate for this character, which is unusual, especially if my assumption is right, that he took the name for himself.

This was probably one of the first de Lint books I read, which helped lead to my reading more, which is by and large a good thing ... but if this was my first time reading it I'm not at all sure I'd pursue the author. It's not bad, at all; it's well-written, characters are well done, there's a good story, the setting (especially the Otherworld) is very good... I just didn't like it. I will, of course, being me, explain.

First off, the main character. Cat Midhir is, we are told early in the book, sick unto death of explaining to everyone in the universe and his sister how her name is pronounced. Cat, honey? I have to spell both my names to everyone in the universe, because both names have multiple variations. You should have taken a

self-explanatory pseudonym if it's going to get to you this much, and you didn't, and it's an odd name so it will keep happening, so suck it up.

And that's the thin end of the wedge, cracking open her character for the reader: there's not much there, there. She is a talented writer, but socially inept and alone (what ever happened to her parents? It's not a good thing that I can't remember if we're told). Now that her dreams have abandoned her, she can't write a single decent sentence, and I'm afraid I can't muster up a single spark of sympathy for her. I have delusions of authorship. I've had a couple of wild dreams that might someday, with a lot of work, become something readable. I have not ever had the ridiculous advantage of being able to sit at the feet of a bard, soak in his stories, and then write them down. We are assured that she took the stories deeper than Kothlen did, expanding, fleshing out the places he skimmed over and using her own gift of expression to turn them into best-selling novels... but we are also told several times that every word she tries to write without the umbilical cord of the Otherworld is "lifeless". I'll buy that she's not merely transcribing but actually writing - but how am I supposed to feel anything but mild contempt for a woman who has basically sponged off others for her livelihood? A woman who has never had to sit in front of a blank sheet of paper and search for what comes next in the story? Given a rich source like Kothlen, I'd be a best-seller too. If anything, her "writer's block" gives me a self-righteous and slightly perverse delight. Again, suck it up, honey, and sink or swim on your own damn merits. Wet dishrag, her.

The other characters, as I said, are well done: Peter, the bookstore owner who has tentatively befriended her over the years and who becomes a true friend now; Ben, the cab-driver who has had a minor obsession with her since he read her first book (though I kept thinking he was an old man for some reason); Mick, the mohawked punk-rocker with a heart, apparently, of gold; Rick, whose name is well chosen as the only word I can think of to describe him ends in "ick"... The Otherworld characters are not as strong, but sketched in well enough to serve, if not as clearly as I would like. Some of the many red shirts in the story were given more time and delineation than the major characters of the Otherworld, and I resented being asked to get to know and like them (which I didn't, always) in the pages before they were hideously murdered. That was actually a problem with the beginning of the book, as well: a large number of characters were introduced, one after the other, and it was fairly clear which ones weren't going to be around long. After that it was just a matter of Lysistratus picking them off at will.

My main issue with characterization shouldn't be a big one, but is: their language. As in profanity. It's constant, and every non-fae male character, antagonist or pro-, cusses like a sailor. And it's not just nice pungent anglo-saxon words, but it's those anglo-saxon words with "jesus" (no caps) in front, which ... Come on. I'm not a prude when it comes to strong language - anyone who thinks so has not driven with me on the highway - but this was just too much. On every page, every circumstance from minor annoyance to lives being threatened prompts the same response. It gets old.

Also, I was reminded frequently that de Lint has a horror background under another name. There were strong horror elements throughout - Lysistratus is evil, and does evil for evil's sake, and it's no fun to read. And that's something of a problem. As with profanity, some is fine, even good in context. More is not better. If I want to read horror, I will read horror. I don't want to read horror. I don't appreciate a constant barrage of blood-soaked scenes packaged as a fantasy - particularly with my edition's cover - except for the skull in the foreground, it leads a prospective reader to believe the concentration is on the fae, not the evil. I'm uneasy with the idea that L stole people's souls, too, but that's my own issue. Or, to be more timely, hang-up. Which leads me to - -

A last issue, sometimes fairly easily overlooked but still a distraction, was that the book did not age well: it is very, very dated. Very. This was startling at times (there was a comment about the awareness of Reagan in

office, south of the border and apparently intent on starting a war, which was for me an unexpected and unusual Canadian political commentary), and almost funny at times (how many times would a cell phone have made all the difference? And - a turntable! Aw!), but frequently it was just ... odd. The name-checking was annoying - there was a great detail of corroborative detail, intended to give artistic verisimilitude ... who was on the turntable, what books Peter was ordering, what books everyone was reading (everyone) (seriously) - it felt grafted on to prove de Lint was "hip". Oddest, though, and unintentionally hilarious, was Lysistratus humming the Human League song "Don't You Want Me". The radio station I leave on at work plays this now and then, and I get the joke. It's just not funny. He could have been an amazing Big Bad. He wasn't. He was the well-dressed "Dude" (*sigh*) with the piercing blue eyes who you really want to avoid, and particularly to avoid having sex with. Who has terrible taste in music. That detracts from his fearsomeness (along with being called "the Dude"), and I think it would have even in the 80's.

minor spoilers

The ending felt a little rushed. I still don't think Cat did enough, and what she did was undermined and cleaned up to pave the way for a happily-ever-after, with some major questions left unanswered ((view spoiler)). I resented the death of one major character, rather than regretting it, and unfortunately the result of "the Dude"s eye contact - paralysis - was sometimes funnier than it was scary. And in the end ... two things. I can't help but be resentful that someone who is never shown as deserving has a devoted lover, a loyal friend, access to faery, and a continuing career I'd kill for. The other thing is: I've been listening to a movie review/writing podcast called "The Popcorn Dialogues", and in one was the comment that if at the end of a romantic comedy you're thinking "Geez, I really thought she'd end up with the other guy", it's not a successful romance story. That's the case here: I don't quite get why we needed both Ben and Peter.

Overall, three stars; probably won't read it again unless in twenty more years I forget not only the book but this review; disappointed; not in the mood for more de Lint soon. But I do admit I want to read Cat's books.

Noelle says

3.5. I liked the idea of this book but the execution fell a little flat. There were way to many characters for a 250 page book. Too much time was spent with minor characters that I didn't feel as much as unwanted to for our main characters. This book could have used about 5 less characters and at least 100 more pages. Overall, I liked the plot. It was a great blend of urban fantasy and horror.

Deborah Ideiosepius says

I read Yarrow long ago so it was almost like reading it new; as ever, Charles de Lint weaves a rich, complex fantasy with people who seem real, in circumstances that are not quite possible, but so easily believable.

It is 1981, or thereabouts, somewhere in Canada. So much has changed since 1981 that it is almost at the point of being historical fiction, our main character writes fantasy novels but her inspiration comes from her dreams and she can no longer dream. She writes them on a typewriter and as I read I realised that recent generations will have no point of reference for using a typewriter to write, no emotive response to all the pieces of paper that are torn out of the typewriter and lie strewn about as she tries to beat her writers block.

Her dreams are being drained out of her by a very old creature that lives, vampirically, off the dreams of

people. One night, sitting at a window she spies him, thinks he is a prowler and is jolted out of her very isolated life to involve others in her plight. Incidentally, when she spies the prowler she is scared and thinks of ringing the police, but the phone is downstairs and she is afraid to go down there in case he breaks in. Hands up anyone who remembers when landlines were the only phones available, in one location in the house...?

A lovely, satisfying story that I will be happy to revisit. It was totally worth the sleep I missed by staying up all night to read it.

Emelia says

Yarrow was an exceptional book. I probably would have given it 5 stars had I not read "Some place to be Flying" first. That being said I will move on with the review.

Cat Midhir is a writer. A writer who walks between worlds. Cat gets her stories from the Otherworld; Her conversations with Tiddy Mun, Toby Weye, and the storyteller Kothlen are the inspirations for Cat's books and have made Cat one of the best selling authors in Ottawa, Canada. That is until she stops dreaming and can no longer write. As Cat tries to deal with her writers block, a mysterious man with stark blue eyes appears and soon after his arrival corpse's begin to pile up. Soon the blue eyed Lysistratus' motives become clear, he wants Cat's dreams. For it is only through Cat's true dreaming that he can live, growing stronger and more powerful, and soon reach immortality.

With the help of a quiet bookstore owner, Cat's biggest fan, and a mechanic, Cat soon comes face to face with Lysistratus and together they must find a way to keep him from not only killing innocents but a way to save Cat's very soul. How is Cat going to find a way to dream and save herself? Will she be able to save herself and the people she loves in the Otherworld? And who is the creature of startling, quiet beauty named Mynfel and what does Mynfel want from Cat? Delve into the dream world of Charles de Lint's Yarrow and discover magic that will save a world from a darkness that strives to destroy it.

What I liked about the book was the magical aspect. I am always a sucker for magic, and de Lint provides magic in abundance.

What I did not like was, in the beginning of the book there was a lot of jumping around. I realize de Lint had to lay a foundation for his characters, however I had to go back and reread parts to get a grasp of what was actually going on. After I got into the swing of things the book was amazing and sucked me right into Cat's world with likable characters. The part that made me cheer though, was Cat's cats. And that's all I am going to say about that. ;)

All in all I enjoyed the story tremendously and it has made me want to read more of Charles de Lint's books. They are like Lays potato chips...you can't read just one.

Trevor says

Another masterpiece!

jack says

pretty good read. i was not really into the amount of characters and how they were introduced, but things came together pretty well. i also think this was an earlier book, so that gripe may have been handled in later titles. i will probably find out. i do like the overall theme of mythology (of one sort or another) alive and well. it looks like this is a pattern through his other books. good.

Engineous says

This was quite a good novel. If you're looking for modern fantasy, you may as well skip this - *Yarrow* is more like semi-mystery/semi-thriller with elements of fantasy. There's very little the reader gets to learn about the Otherworld and, while that doesn't detract from the nice flow and engaging storyline, it's enough to disqualify the book from the urban fantasy genre.

I'm very picky these days, but *Yarrow* managed to pull me in and keep me absorbed almost the entire way through. There are a few problems that tripped me up here and there, and all of them but one were forgivable:

- de Lint's tendency to repeatedly add new characters without any explanation or *reason* for them to be in the novel gets annoying after a while. I was slightly perturbed when he hadn't gotten a foot into the plot by page 67 because of the continuous (unconnected) character additions, but then he did and it wasn't annoying anymore. But it's a habit with him, and his editor needs to crack down on that.

For example, he adds two police characters very near the end that appear all of twice; they're completely superfluous except maybe to satisfy de Lint's fantasies about Our Boys In Blue. They could have been cropped completely without *any* impact on the story.

He does the same with characters that are immediately killed off, which would be excellent as an occasional escalation device, but he uses it so often and draws out their existence so much it loses potency and meaning.

- He's... well, he's sort of melodramatic. I understand that's normal for fantasy, but I found myself looking at - for example - Peter's hyper-rationalization of why the Otherworld couldn't be real as if someone completely unfamiliar with the thought processes of people had written it. Cat and Ben were the same way. I can understand the "melodrama" as partially due to the fact that you don't try for serious subtlety - especially for a one-shot novel, because your readers may not get it (or you may be confusing "esoteric" with "subtle") - but if so, I think his attempt to bring the emotions of the characters into plainspeak stereotyped them and took away a lot of the enjoyment of reading about *people*.

There are certain other logical leaps - like Cat's immediate conclusion when she finds out she's Mynfel, which is to decide that it's all fake. Because of course, if you find out that you're one of the *inhabitants* of the Wood, it means that you *must therefore have created the entire thing in your mind*.

Yeah.

- And the unforgivable mistake is the plothole. Though plothole isn't really sufficient... you never learn anything about the world, not about Toby, not about Lysistratus, not about Tiddy Mun or Kothlen. There's an absence of information about the world that I found really deeply unsatisfying; the *Yarrow* world's outlines are drawn, but never colored in.

Again, an example. Lysistratus fled the human world for a while, presumably, because it was stated that he'd only *returned* after the strong dreamers had left... but we're never told where he went, or what he was doing, or how he survived. He had to feed every single day, which I found really weird - predators don't do that. A cougar does not need to kill every day as long as they get *big* kills; it's why they gorge themselves. Why did he need to feed every day when that seems completely unreasonable? I can think of two reasons: 1) he was becoming addicted to the strength of Cat's dreams or 2) he was just... getting old.

Unfortunately, there are no explanations offered. We don't know how Lysistratus survived, if he fled to the wild and fed off of animals' dreams and emotions - which is unlikely, as de Lint does not strike me as someone particularly egalitarian; he'd probably fall in line with the standard tripe that the emotions and dreams of humans are better and stronger because humans are special, because shut up that's why.

That last bit is more of a remark on most other fantasy/modern fantasy authors I've seen, though. I gotta say, outside of these things, *Yarrow* was a breath of fresh air; I have not encountered a novel with such a lack of racism, sexism or speciesism for quite some time.

So thank you, Charles de Lint.

... just... please learn how to handle a knife so there won't be any more wincing. Pretty please.

Susan says

Just finished A Game of Thrones, which was such a weighty and quite depressing (but mesmerizing) book that I now need one that will lighten my soul and relieve my mind, so I'm gonna re-read this now.

N.W. Moors says

Cat Midhir is a best-selling fantasy author, but now she's blocked. Her stories come from her dreaming life in the Other World, and now she's no longer dreaming. Someone is stealing her dreams.

Charles de Lint is one of my favorite fantasy authors. This is one of his very early works (I'm pretty sure I've read it before a long time ago). I found it a bit uneven, especially in the beginning where there are a lot of characters to keep track of. About a third into the book the story found its pace and cohesion, and it was all good from there.

Yarrow is a bit more gritty than most of Mr. de Lint's books. References to the eighties time period didn't make it seem dated though there were times when I wished Ben or Peter had a cell phone in the more harrowing parts.

The writing is best (in my opinion) when Cat is in the Otherworld. The descriptions and characters draw the reader in so you never want Cat to wake up. Still, it's a satisfying urban fantasy tale and a solid story from this master author.

Melanti says

Yet another de Lint book that I'd read pre-Goodreads and mistakenly entered as "to-read" instead of "read." Cat and her dream world is so close to Newford's Sophie and her dream city of Mabon that I'd actually thought what I'd remembered of this book was part of Sophie's story and thus thought I hadn't read this particular one.

The imagery surrounding Mynfel and the horns reminds me very strongly of the imagery in McKillip's *Stepping From the Shadows*. Since that was published just a few years before this book and since I know de Lint is at least familiar with her work, it makes me wonder if that book might have played a small part in inspiring this one?

There were a few too many characters for my taste. I think he could have pared it down just a bit without loosing much of the story. For instance, the detectives' portion didn't seem to add all that much that couldn't have been added in a different way.

I also did find myself getting a bit annoyed with de Lint's constant name dropping (this is an early work, and he names a LOT more people/books/songs than he does in his later works - I guess he learned a bit of restraint over the years) and with his idolization of non-Westernized cultures. Both are relatively common features of de Lint's writing though, and I think that my irritation with them is more a sign that I've read too much de Lint lately and need a good long break. (6 in the past year and 2 in the past week - way too much!)

But it is a fun book, and after a recent read where I was empathizing with a rather mentally disturbed villain, I wanted to read a book with black-and-white morality and a nice, happy ending - and that's something you can always count on de Lint to deliver.

Lance Greenlee says

De Lint came quite recommended by those promoting urban fantasy as an alternative to the Tolkiennesque, but in truth, this came as quite a disappointment. This story and its characters lack any serious development. In the first eight pages of text, de Lint introduces Caitlin Midhir, Albert Cousins, Peter Baird, Ben Summerfield, Mick Jennings, Becki Bones, Debbie Mitchell, Andy Barnes, Farley O'Dennehy, Stella Sidney, and Rick Kirby. In eight pages, it simply can't be done with any depth. The reader ends up having to write down a list of names with an attribute tacked onto it just to keep them straight. Level of detail problems continue to plague the book, with mentions of rock groups, streets, and authors reading more like name-dropping or list-making than substance. It ends up feeling empty, like the bare bones of a story. I think those recommending this are more in love with the idea of moving beyond the limitations (and imitations) of Tolkien than they are in telling a good tale. In many ways, this is not quite up to the literary standards of Terry Goodkind, who, with all his trite stereotypes, also fails to be a fantasy master, but he's at least a storyteller with excellent pacing.

LibraryCin says

3.5 stars

Cat is an author and gets her inspiration through dreams. Unfortunately, she has not been dreaming for a few months and is now blocked. What she doesn't know is that there is... something out there feeding on her dreams! And he's feeding on others, as well, but Cat's dreams are the ones he really wants.

This was good. I liked the real world sections of the book more than the dream sections, but that's not a surprise to me. Cat didn't really have friends in the real world, so I enjoyed the sections where she was making friends (though that was more secondary to the story). There were a lot of characters introduced at the very start of the book, so I was afraid I would get them confused, but surprisingly, it was rare to not figure out who we were following in the story fairly quickly – de Lint must have given enough clues to be able to follow easily.

Mary C says

I always enjoy his books and did this one. But this one was a little more scary than most.

Amber McCarter says

This was entertaining enough, but lacking any real depth - even though that is precisely what the story purported to be about. It tells you that deeper things are being revealed and realized, without any actual development of these claims in plot or character. So it was a little disappointing, because it had the bones to be much better, and just... wasn't.

Donovan says

Yarrow is one of the better reads from de Lint (in my humble opinion). I can't get over his knowledge of the old Pagan ways and how they are woven in to a modern day setting. The characters are well developed and this particular story has a nice dark edge to it that keeps you a bit more riveted. Combine that with a pace that is a bit better than some of his other novels makes this a great introduction to the fantasy works and a way of sidestepping the a-typical Dungeon & Dragaon fantasy (of say J.R.R. Tolkein).

Plot *Spoilers*****

Cat is an author whose plots and characters come from her vivid dreams. Cat has visited this dreamscape, the Otherworld, since she was young. There she met Kothlen, a bard who gave her a secret name, Yarrow. Recently, however, Cat has stopped dreaming and finds she can no longer write. As she struggles to break her writer's block, strange things begin to happen. The shadowy Lysistratus stalks Cat, hoping to steal the soul of a true dreamer. And Cat discovers that the Otherworld is not a product of her dreams, but a real place to which she is deeply connected.

Along with her friends from the "real" world and a gnome named Tiddy Mun from the Otherworld, Cat has to face Lysistratus in order to save them all. In true fantasy style, the fight requires Cat to face the truths within.

Allyson says

I really wanted to give this 3.5 stars so I rounded up. This is the first book I've read by De Lint that strayed a bit into thriller territory, and of course, since it's fantasy, the stalking-killer-bad-guy was a kind of dream vampire. Interesting. As a writer myself, I couldn't help but enjoy and appreciate the predicament of our protagonist, Cat, a writer with serious writer's block. Except in her case, the block is because this vampire has been feeding off her dreams, the source of her stories. I also really appreciated how the author tied together the stories of several seemingly disparate characters who ultimately came together in the end to bring about the vampire's downfall (well, kind of--as in any good story, not all the heroes make it!). And as usual, I love De Lint's unique blend of magic and reality, though I thought the message about Cat's writing got a bit muddled by the end of the book. There was a tension between her reliance on getting stories from her dream world vs. her own imagination, and I don't want to give anything away but I felt that the reveal could have more strongly shown Cat that she's not just a secretary recording what goes on in that other world but a true storyteller in her own right. In any case, a nice easy read that I enjoyed.

Andrew says

Not nearly as good as his later novels, but the story was entertaining. I only had three complaints:

1. Too many characters, some playing such minor roles the story would have been better off without them. The detectives are a prime example.
2. The main character was *so* helpless and whining. "*Whaaaa... I'm lonely... I have writer's block... I'm crazy... I'm not crazy but my life is meaningless... I'm still lonely... I still have writer's block... I miss my dream pals...*"
3. Perhaps this was specific to the ebook version, but there were *way* too many scene breaks with no indicators. One paragraph you're reading about Cat, the next Ben in his cab, a few paragraphs later we're with Peter in the bookstore. Something to indicate a scene break would be very welcome; caps or bold on the first few words of a new scene, the good old centered triple asterisks, something.
