



Luminaria.

Jackie Morris.
Stittsville, ON: www.jackiemorris.ca,
2010.
245 pp., pbk., \$12.95.
ISBN 978-0-9867492-0-9.

Grades 5-8 / Ages 10-13.

Review by Darleen Golke.

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“Ours was once a beautiful, healthy, vital world. Everywhere you looked there was energy and life to fill the soul with happiness. The air hummed constantly with musical sounds and every creature enjoyed a sense of harmony of being.”
Larken paused again, composing himself.

Hopa came up behind him and placed her hands on his shoulders, kneading them lightly. “We apologize for our earlier distrust. There are many of SheZor’s followers who come from the other side of the mirrors. We cannot be too careful. There is not much left to lose. There are so few left to fight her.”

“How does SheZor steal powers? And why do the ingenga and other creatures under her control have red eyes?” Alex asked.

“It is said that SheZor stole a crystal from a powerful master and it somehow lets her control any who come into her presence. When she first arrived here with the crystal, nobody knew of what she was capable. We don’t even think she fully realized it herself. It seems those near her either lose their powers to her or become her slaves. The only ones who seem not to be affected are the children,”
Hopa explained.

“So Willow’s safe?” Heather asked hopefully.

“Yes, but she is not old enough to defend even herself to any great degree yet.”
Hopa’s hand went to her heart.

After a second, Logan spoke up. “If you have a power, you lose it to her but you don’t become her slave?”

“Yes. It seems whatever part of the brain or body that provides for the magical power in some creatures is the same as that which controls the free will of non-magical creatures,”
Larken clarified.

“So, those who’ve been imprisoned wouldn’t be affected by her once their powers were removed,”
Heather reasoned.

“Aha. Which is why she has them locked up. Although they don’t have any magic left, they’re still somewhat of a threat to her,”
Logan nodded, starting to better understand the situation.

Princess Alexandra Cynthia Montgomery, Alex, prefers sparring with Logan, the castle groundskeeper’s son, to executing her duties as a daughter of the nobility. Much to her dismay, as her sixteenth birthday approaches, her parents are busily arranging what they consider a suitable match for her. Similarly, 18-year-old Prince Richard William Walsh II prefers “sparring, riding, hand-to-hand combat and swordsmanship” with his friend Andrew, the smithy’s son, to social obligations “to entertain some stupid cows” as possible brides. When Alex and her lady’s maid, Heather, discover the presence of Willow, a fairy from another world who comes through mirrors into their world, their interest is immediately piqued, and they embark on an adventure to follow Willow’s map and pass through the mirrors into her world. Following the map brings them into conflict with a group of *ingenga*, beings from the human world whom SheZor, the evil force from Willow’s world, *Luminaria*, has enslaved. Richard and Andrew enter the fray, vanquish the enemy, and join forces with Alex and Heather, but not before one of the *ingenga* escapes back to SheZor’s court so she is somewhat prepared for the group of five’s incursion into her “kingdom.” “I know you’re faced with the same mundane life I am” or “you wouldn’t be donning men’s clothing and learning how to fight Alex,” Richard tells Alex. The group meets the next morning, defeats the dogs guarding the mirror portals, finds a golden key Willow has been seeking, and joined by Logan who follows the girls, enters *Luminaria*, Willow’s world of magical creatures.

From Willow’s parents, they learn that evil SheZor stole a crystal that made the “possessor” all-powerful and, although she has not yet fully mastered its powers, she has destroyed and enslaved many of *Luminaria*’s inhabitants, laid waste to the landscape, and maintains control using *ingenga*, humans under her influence; *canis ferus*, ferocious dogs; annelid, giant earthworms; viperidae, snake-like creatures; bats that delivered strong electrical shocks; shellarach, huge spider-like creatures; and fire-breathing, talking dragons. The five young adventurers embark on a quest to rescue and free the enslaved, rid *Luminaria* of SheZor, and return the land to its former peace and beauty. When an elf releases a flame-throwing dragon from bondage, it becomes an ally and helps free fellow dragons to battle SheZor. The group, assisted by dragons, joins forces with some surviving, free *Luminarians* and, with enhanced skills and special powers from the magical food provided by fairies and elves, succeeds in its quest, but not before facing many challenges and dangers. In the final battle, they face an onslaught of *ingenga*, dogs, giant earthworms, snakes, bats, and SheZor to emerge, with Willow’s help, victorious. “FAIRIES, ELVES, SHELLARACH, *ingenga*, witches and now talking dragons!” Richard exclaims with satisfaction. If we were at home “dances, boring dinners, entertaining potential mates” would be our fate.

Morris, a graphic designer and semi-professional violinist/violist, lives in Stittsville, ON. The self-published fantasy, *Luminaria*, is her first novel, and she incorporates the standard fantasy elements into the tale. The numerous characters are well-drawn and colourful, but action and adventure trump character development, and Morris infuses her tale with plenty of variety as the plot gallops along. The novel suffers somewhat from lack of clarity in point of view. Although initially Alex appears the focus, lines blur, and the story unfolds with Richard sharing star status. Morris inserts some romantic involvements that probably will appeal to female readers while the male readers will enjoy the lively action, bizarre creatures, and magic. Among the plot are four chapters revealing SheZor’s court and her struggles to control the powers she stole and the creatures she transformed to do her bidding. Fantasy fans who appreciate a strong female heroine and plenty of action may look forward to the sequel promised in the concluding chapter. The five of them “weren’t too sad leaving, knowing they could return any time they wanted. It would be wonderful to see *Luminaria* restored to its full glory.”

The colourful and clever cover art reflects Morris’s artistic expertise as do the black and white illustrations that conclude each chapter.

Recommended.

Darleen Golke writes from her home in Abbotsford, BC.