

## **Cybele's Secret Review (Published in Death Ray Magazine)**

Juliet Marillier has found a wealth of success within the historical-fantasy and young-adult markets. *Wildwood Dancing* - Marillier's first young adult novel - won the Aurelias Award for Best Fantasy Novel. So, hopes were high for this, the sequel. The first thing to note is that *Cybele's Secret* is completely stand-alone. Whilst the story's family and the mysterious Other Kingdom were key points to the prequel, Marillier fills in the blanks for newcomers with very skilful and unobtrusive subtlety.

Paula's father is a trader, on route to Istanbul on a mission to acquire *Cybele's Secret*, a religious and controversial artifact said to bestow good fortune on its owner. Paula has been brought along, on her first journey, to Istanbul as a stand-in assistant. This instantly sets the tone for a coming-of-age adventure. Unsurprisingly, it soon becomes clear that acquiring *Cybele's Secret* will require more than keen negotiating skills. Queue an underground cult, an angered Islamic community with the Mufti on a mission to destroy said cult and a love-triangle and this historical-fantasy is go. Perhaps this sounds somewhat familiar. Indeed, the most fundamentally disappointing element in *Cybele's Secret* is its lack of true originality. There are pirate ships, stereotypical characters - a pirate, scholar, brute and a trader - and mystical figures randomly appearing, but all this has been seen before. The fantasy element is also lacking. Once the trio find the land they sought it becomes a rather simple maze with tests and trials that lack inspired thought.

The lack of originality makes the story heavily reliant on the writer's craft to entertain. This Marillier has. The characters show true personality with realistic dialogue. The location of Istanbul is evocative and truthfully portrayed and the reader gets a very real account of what life was like for a woman in the country at the time. Marillier also maintains her adeptness with the first person point-of-view, successfully placing the reader right into the heart of her story. *Cybele's secret* will entertain, but it will also leave the reader longing for a greater realization of the fantasy element.

**Did You Know:** Cybele, a Phrygian goddess, was worshipped in Anatolia in Neolithic time as a deification of the Earth Mother.

Rating: \*\*\*½

Paul Harrison.