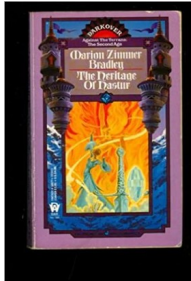




Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



Heritage of Hastur By Marion Zimmer Bradley *Discussed August 2002*

Discussion

Due to some circumstances outside our control, we did not have a pre-set group of questions for *Heritage of Hastur* prior to the discussion. However, one attendee (thank you Antonio) drafted these question and answer notes summarizing our discussion.

1. What did you think of *Heritage of Hastur* as a book and how does it compare with the rest of the Darkover Series which many readers find to be uneven?

The book is rated among if not the best of Marion Zimmer Bradley's Darkover series novels. Zimmer Bradley's earlier works in the series were more standard sword and sorcery adventure stories and were written by a writer not yet at the peak of her powers. Many of the subsequent books written by Zimmer Bradley, particularly those toward the end of her life were less strongly plot driven than the early ones, so when they fail to get the alchemy of intriguing character driven interaction right, those books did not work as well. Gay readers may find *Heritage of Hastur* different from much of the rest of the Darkover series because unlike much of the series, which has strong feminist themes, none of the main protagonists are female.

2. What were the strengths and weaknesses of *Heritage of Hastur*, and in what way would this be a notable or worthwhile book, or lacking in such distinction?

Being written to fill in a gap in the Darkover Series, *Heritage of Hastur* had the advantage of having a well established world and time-frame in which the author could focus on richer aspects of plot and character development. It was one of the few SF/Fantasy books written in the 1970s that dealt in any meaningful way with gay themes, combining these with SF/Fantasy tropes. A strength of this novel is the range of intriguing multi-dimensional characters, while the scientific plausibility weaknesses apparent in other parts of the series are largely not evident in *Heritage of Hastur*.

3. With the use of psionic forces as well as space travel does the book work best as a Fantasy or Science Fiction novel and how well did the author deal with her world building in that context?

The book features a colonized and abandoned world in a galactic human civilization. It features a comparison between a medieval style society and the Anglophone Western world of the era when it was

written. Darkover is a medieval society with the advantage of psi-technology, which is well handled in terms of the dilemmas, solutions and problems it poses. An intriguing theme of the book is the clash of cultures between this society and the more 'modern' terran one.

4. The novel contains a number of interesting characters; many of whom end the story somewhat changed from what they were when they began it. In particular what did you think of the character Dyan Ardais, and why?

Zimmer Bradley portrays Dyan in such a way as to invoke a degree of sympathy among readers, and leaves some hope for future redemption. He is authentic in that he behaves in character for someone of his status in his society, and is far more than just a one-dimensional villain serving the plot. One of Bradley's strengths is that when writing at her best she leaves the reader to draw his or her own conclusions in assessing individual characters who both have flaws and redeeming qualities. She does this without making it too easy for the reader, thus encouraging the reader to Think (similar to what she achieved with *Mists of Avalon*). Dyan as well as other characters in the book achieve this.

5. To what extent could the book be described as one featuring gay positive characters?

The book can certainly be described as a gay positive story, with gay positive themes, and while all the gay characters provide a degree of sympathy from best to worst a number of them exhibit flaws in light of this aspect of their being. (One is a rapist, one is closeted to the extent that one wonders if he would come out under normal circumstances, and a third has been raised and is thus influenced by an environment that views homosexuality as less than ideal). Based on the fact that to be gay positive the characters do not have to be necessarily all be heroic, or even good, but are interesting, well developed and often intriguing the book succeeds in portraying gay characters well in an overall gay positive SF/Fantasy genre novel.

6. In part *Heritage of Hastur* is a coming out story. How well does this work in terms of the plot and overall structure of the book?

It is a very imaginative coming out story in that the emergence of the psi-powers is interlinked with sexual awakening. In order to release the one the other has to be accepted by the individual. It also presents an interesting dilemma faced by a telepath trying to remain closeted from other telepaths. In this sense the coming out and SF plot elements combine and aggregate together onto to each other.