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Abstract

Examines Cherryh's imagination and narrative skill in creating characters in depth. Analyzes the two alien races in the *Faded Sun* trilogy (mri and regul) and the interaction between them and humans.

Additional Keywords

Cherryh, C.J. The Faded Sun trilogy

Dances with Dusei

A Personal Response to C.J. Cherryh's *The Faded Sun*

Paul Nolan Hyde

A paper read in honor of C.J. Cherryh, Author Guest of Honor at the Twenty-second Mythopoeic Conference held in San Diego, California

Prologue

Those who have followed my gentle musings over the years in the pages of *Mythlore* and elsewhere are aware of my attempts to push to the forefront my deep love and admiration for the works of J.R.R. Tolkien in general, and his creative linguistic contributions in particular. That has been, of course, a direct result of my formal academic training and my subsequent research in a discipline that captured my imagination many years ago. From time to time I have been called upon to express my views in subject matters somewhat afield from the narrow focus that my submissions to *Mythlore* primarily reflect. For the most part, these have been extended philosophical discussions, undoubtedly more tedious than they needed to have been, given the nature of my rather baroque writing style. Regardless of the effect on the readership of *Mythlore* (assuming anyone reads my stuff), these forays have been delightful for me and I have appreciated the opportunity to be a little adventurous; to leave The Hill, as it were, and wander across The Water or perhaps indulge a brief jaunt to Bree. Safe escapades, these.

At the Twenty-first Mythopoeic Conference held in Long Beach last year, I was asked by the Chairs, Jo and Bill Welden, to conjure up a paper on Diana Paxson, a long-time member of the Society and a long-time friend who happened to be the Author Guest of Honor. I have to say that as I began my preparations, I recall feeling as if I had been thrown in with a troop of strange-looking fellows, sloughing through unfamiliar territory and inclement weather, not knowing whether the direction I was going would bring me to the peaceful glades of Lothlorien or the lair of the dragon of Erebor. Fortunately for myself, Diana Paxson is no dragon in any event. The little hug that I received from her after I finished reading my paper on *The White Raven* has been a precious memory for me; I was warmed by it, but left unsinged.

Last spring, as I offered my perennial contribution on Tolkien for consideration to Stephan W. Potts, the 1991 Papers Coordinator, I off-handedly asked him if an additional paper on C.J. Cherryh might be welcome. He was enthusiastic. I guess that my previous journey across the Misty Mountains had made me a little giddy and, in the following momentary burst of mindless hysteria, I committed myself to another adventure into the Wild and the Unknown. Thus, I find myself before you again (albeit in

spirit) with another Personal Response, this time to Cherryh's *Faded Sun* trilogy, comprised of the volumes *Kesrith*, *Shon'fir*, and *Kutath*.

As an aside, I am compelled to say that my absence from last year's Conference should not be interpreted that I have concluded C.J. Cherryh to be a Dragon. Stephan has been There and Back Again and assures me that there is more of Galadriel in her than any other denizen of Middle-earth.

Logue

What can be said of C.J. Cherryh and how she has affected Paul Nolan Hyde? First of all, there is a unique quality to her work that is as equally important as anything accomplished by any other author with whom I am intimate. J.R.R. Tolkien revealed to me the power of linguistic creation and the extraordinary depth of narrative possible when detail and minutia are attended to. Ursula LeGuin demonstrated an absolutely magical capacity to end a story, long or short, with a little breath of eternity (or at least a pure sense of endurance) to the nature of the story she had written. Diana Paxson pulled me into her Celtic mythopoeys by weaving the threads of my own scholarship into her narrative tapestry; I could not resist the attachment. C.J. Cherryh, while having many, if not all, of these capacities, has accomplished a feat which is, in my estimation, unparalleled in Fantasy and Science Fiction circles, and, I believe, has not been so deftly achieved in all of English Literature: the conception, development, and artistic investment in such a large number and diversity of characters central to the narrative.

Conception

Without attempting to be definitive, I will suggest a few examples of Cherryh's facility with multiple characterizations by presenting a single aspect of the overall superstructure of *The Faded Sun* trilogy which serves as one primary nexus for developing the races and individuals of the story.

The driving force of *The Faded Sun* derives primarily from the exploration of the relationships between three distinct races, regul, mri, and human; each of which, for the most part, have no idea what the others are about. The narrative focuses on the resultant hostilities and distresses caused by an almost total lack of understanding between the parties. Throughout the story, each race attempts to anticipate what the others will do under a given set of circumstances and almost invariably misjudge the situation because of a lack of mutual comprehension. This is best illustrated by how each race deals with deception.

The Regul: Who chopped down the Cherryh Tree?

The dominant species, to all outward appearances, have been the regul, a long-lived race, who in their adult stage are nearly immobile without mechanical aid. Their civilization is based on their extraordinary facility to remember, without error, everything that they have experienced in their lives. Inherent weaknesses accompanied this facility, as Cherryh's narrator points out:

Regul had vast and accurate memories. They could not forget what had always occurred, but conversely they could hardly conceive at all of what had not yet happened, and they did not make plans against it happening. Hitherto the regul had depended on mri entirely in the matter of their personal safety, and mri foresight—for mri could imagine—had shielded them and compensated for that regul blindness to the unexpected (*Kesrith*, p. 4).

As Sten Duncan (a special agent attached to the first human governor of Kesrith) becomes increasing conversant with the nature of the regul, he speculates about the relationship between knowledge and deception:

Instant and total recall. Eidetic memory. The word lie was, he remembered Stavros telling him, fraught with associate concepts of perversion and murder.

A species that could neither forget nor unlearn.

If this were so, it was possible that they could depend on the exact truth from the regul at all times.

It was also possible that a species that could not lie might have learned ways of deception without it. (*Kesrith*, p. 29)

Duncan's summation was correct; the regul did have ways of manipulating their adversaries without telling a direct untruth. The essence of the principle was for a regul not to tell all that he (or she or it) knew. Incomplete knowledge is deceptive, obviously, because conclusions inferred may appear to fit all of the known facts, but still be in error. Bai Hulagh Alagn-ni, the regul elder who replaced Solgah Holn-ni as principal of Kesrith, confesses to himself that he had made a mistake in not asking Solgah about the weather on Kesrith:

He dealt with the destruction of the storm as best he could, covering the one error he had committed, in failing to ask of Solgah concerning the behaviors of the seasons and the climate of Kesrith (*Kesrith*, p. 107).

Later when George Stavros, the new human governor of Kesrith, and Hulagh are discussing the continuing disasters involving the mri:

Hulagh was silent for a long time, throughout most of the cup of soi. His nostrils worked rapidly. At last he blew a sigh and turned his sled from the window. "Holn," he said.

Reserence?

"Holn concealed records. I did not ask, and they did not say: and I know now." Nostrils worked in great flaring breaths of air. "Stavros-bai, you and I have failed to ask questions. Now, now, you and I, Stavros-bai, we have been handed only fragments of what we should have known about Kesrith. We are together in difficulty;

and we share an enemy, Stavros-bai."

Holn.

"Holn," said Hulagh. "They are clever, human reverence; and I shall not be able to face the anger of my doch destitute (*Kesrith*, p. 234).

Sten Duncan's observation concerning the regul, that lying was equated with perversion and murder, is proven out when Hulagh finds himself forced to lie to Intel, the she'pan of the mri, while inviting the whole clan to leave Kesrith with the regul before the last vagabond mri ship lands.

"We will consult upon the matter," said the she'pan, her hand on the shoulder of the young warrior who sat beside her, and at her other side, silent, settled the gold-robed young female.

"There is no time for lengthy consultations," Hulagh objected.

"Ah," said the she'pan, "then you have heard about the ship."

Blood drained from Hulagh's face, slowly resumed its proper circulation. He did not look at the youngling, hoping for once its wits would prevent its repeating this insult and humiliation elsewhere, among its youngling fellows. He had scant hope that this would be the case.

"Yes," said Hulagh, "we have naturally heard. Nevertheless we are anxious to speed our departure. We are not familiar with this incoming ship, but doubtless—" he stammered over the not-truth, compelled to lie, for the first time in his life, for the sake of regul, for the welfare of the younglings in his protection, and most of all for his own ambitions and for the survival of his knowledge; but he felt foul and soiled in the doing. "Doubtless after you are aboard, we may intercept this ship of yours and divert it toward the safety of our inner zones."

"Would you permit that?" The dry old voice, heavy with accent, was careful, devoid of inflections that could have betrayed emotion and concealed meanings. "Shall mri go to the regul homeworld at long last? You have never permitted us knowledge of its location, bai."

"Nevertheless—" He could not build upon the lie. He was not able to consummate this, the supreme immorality—to falsify, to lend untruth to memory, which could not be unlearned. He had learned this practice of aliens. He had watched them do it, amazed and horrified; he had learned that humans lied as a regular practice. He felt his own skin crawl at the enormity of it, his throat contracted when he tried to shape more to his fiction, and knew that if he refused to build upon it, it would not be believed at all; and then he would be caught, lose credibility, with fatal consequences for the mri, with unfortunate result for the regul under his command, and for his own future (*Kesrith*, p. 121).

After that interview, which ended in refusal on the part of the mri, Hulagh contemplates his options which seem to resolve to a single genocidal one:

He began to think, his double hearts laboring with fear, what choice he had in dealing with the mercenaries; and as he had never lied before he dealt with mri, so he had never contemplated violence with his own hands, without mri hired as intermediaries (*Kesrith*, p. 131).

At the end of the second volume, *Shon'jir*, a conference is held between Koch (the commander of the human task force in orbit around Kutath), Sharn (the elder of the regul ship), and Sten Duncan (who has, for all intents and purposes, become *mri kel'en*). In the midst of a session of rather plain talk on the part of Duncan, Sharn erupts, "Kill this youngling. Be rid of it and its counsels, bai Koch. It is poisonous" (p. 237).

It is interesting to me how far along Sharn's moral contamination has progressed after the fashion of Hulagh's. As Duncan prepares to return to Kutath's surface:

Duncan veiled himself and rose, folded his arms and made the slight inclination of the head that was respect.

And among the guard that had remained at the door, he started out.

A squat shadow was there. He hurled himself back. A regul hand closed on his arm with crushing strength. The regul shrieked at him, and he twisted in that grip; a blade burned his ribs, passing across them.

Security moved. Human bodies interceded, and the regul lost balance, went down, dragging Duncan with him. Galey's boot slammed down repeatedly on the regul's wrist, trying to shake the knife loose.

Duncan wrenched over, ripped a pistol from its owner's holster and turned. Men reached for him, hurled themselves for him.

Sharn.

The regul's dark eyes showed white round the edges, terror. Duncan fired, went loose as the guards seized him, let them have the pistol easily.

He had removed the People's enemy. The others, the younglings, were nothing. He drew a deep breath as the guards set him on his feet, and regarded the collapsed bulk in the sled with a sober regret (*Shon'jir*, pp. 239-240)

Suth, the regul aide to Hulagh and successor to Sharn, brings to a culmination the effects of the untruths engaged in by his predecessors. He has no hesitancy to directly destroy both *mri* and humans if it will advance his position. In a discussion regarding *mri* duplicity, Koch and Suth have the following exchange:

Suth's nostrils flared and shut, flared again. "Do not be angry, human bai. But can *mri* lie? This is a human possibility. Is it also *mri*? Does your experience or your imagination... judge?"

"We don't know."

"Ah. Do you imagine?"

"We don't have sufficient data."

"Data for imagining."

"It does take some, bai Suth. We operate at present on the premise that they can." He considered for a moment, made the thrust. "In our experience, bai Suth... even regul can be dishonest."

"Dishonest, not honest, not... truthful."

"What is truth, bai Suth?"

Nostrils closed. "According to fact."

Koch nodded slowly. "I perceive something of your

thinking, then. — Is there, Dr. Averson, a regul word for *honest*?"

"In business, the word *alch...* meaning evenly balanced advantage or observation, or something like. Value for value, we say."

"Mutual profit," Suth said. "We can spend much time at these comparative exercises, reverence (*Kutath*, pp. 168-69).

The nature of this particular aspect of the narrative (honesty versus dishonesty) is such that Cherryh is required to show us the minds of the various regul characters in operation, growing gradually into this considered perversion, until they are quite mad with it. One might argue that Hulagh, Sharn, and Suth are really one character with three manifestations, each progressively more perverse than the last. If judged by this one degenerating character trait, this conclusion would be unavoidable; but, in fact, each of the regul are presented as distinct individuals. They are in most respects, fully mature, three-dimensional participants in the story in addition to their being representatives of a race that corrupts itself irretrievably by lying. Cherryh appears to have a natural gift for distinguishing persona, and it is a delight to the reader to realize that if you have met one regul, you have not met them all.

The Humans: All Cretans are Men

I suspect that there is no real need to demonstrate to anyone's satisfaction that humans have the capacity to misrepresent the truth. In the *Faded Sun* trilogy they appear to be the mentors for all other species. All of the duplicity is logical and "moral", of course, because it was designed to facilitate peace, justice, and equity among the effected parties. The relationship between George Stavros and Sten Duncan, for example, was ostensibly that of governor and personal aide, but in truth only served for the sake of appearances for the benefit of the regul. The regul counterpart was actually an adult-child relationship; biological maturity versus pre-adolescence. Duncan's presence, in reality, functioned to provide Stavros with prestige in regulan terms.

Sten Duncan, aide to the honorable George Stavros, governor-to-be in the new territories and presently liaison between regul and humanity, regularly availed himself of that six-hour liberty; the Hon. Mr. Stavros did not — did not, in fact, venture from his own room. Duncan walked the corridors and gathered the appropriate materials and releases from the library for the honorable gentlemen to read, and carried to the pneumatic dispatch whatever communications flowed from Stavros to Stavros' regul counterpart bai Hulagh Alagn-ni.

Regul protocol. No regul elder of dignity performed his own errands. Only a condemned incompetent lacked youngling servitors. Therefore no human of Stavros' rank would do so; and therefore Stavros had chosen an aide of apparent youth and fairly advanced rank, criteria that regul would use in selecting their own personal attendants.

He was, in effect, a servant. He provided Stavros a certain prestige. He ran errands. Back in the action that

had taken Haven, he had held military rank. The regul knew this, which further enhanced Stavros' prestige (*Kesrith*, p. 22).

The humans were the conquerors of regul territory. They had won control of Kesrith through a negotiated end to a border war. There was no real necessity to exhibit cultural compatibility with the regul, except that humans had a natural penchant for that kind of charade, particularly where it would prove to their advantage. Duncan, in fact, is a Surface Tactical officer, a kind of futuristic Green Beret, who has been trained to survive alone under extraordinarily adverse conditions, and still function as a soldier. The whole scenario presented by the two humans is a deceit in order to keep the regul off balance, or at least in the dark for a time.

As in the case of the regul foray into deception, the human lie, once told, begins to be the truth. Stavros' stroke debilitates him sufficiently that he adopts almost the very essence of the regul culture, including the use of the adult sled and communicator. For all practical purposes, both in negotiations and life style, Stavros begins to take on the characteristics of his regul counterpart, the bai Hulagh. But as Sten Duncan is drawn further into the regul arena, he rejects the role of a youngling and eventually strikes out on his own. To the regul, both Stavros and Duncan are perfect examples of the capacity of humans to ignore facts, and, thus, be untruthful and undependable.

Suth had been privy to many of the early dealings between Stavros and Hulagh and, as a result, was extraordinarily wary of humans when he came to adulthood. As Suth commits the regul to a course of mri annihilation, he exhibits this distrust.

There was no elation, no exultation. It was not time for such.

"Keep in close contact with this office," Suth said. "When you sleep, do so in the presence of one of us four being awake. All channels are to be strictly monitored by some one of us."

"This dismantling of mri sites," said Nagn, "is said to be progressing. Human information is not always accurate."

"Lie, Nagn. The word is *lie*. Humans deceive in false statements as well as actions; but we will work with this particular action... indeed, we work with it (*Kutath*, p. 225).

The regul have a great difficulty explaining why it is that humans are even capable of lying. In one of the many discussions between Hulagh and Stavros regarding their mutual interest in the mri, Hulagh muses about this human perversion:

Characteristic of the humans, whose learning resided not in their persons, but in written records, considerable time on Kesrith had not served to give these fluency in the regul tongue. They forgot. It had amused Hulagh that meetings were often recorded on tape, lest the humans forget what they had said and what had been told them: doubtless this one was likewise being recorded. After another fashion,

it did not amuse him at all, to reckon that every promise, every statement made by these creatures, relied on such poor memories. To state an untruth was a terrible thing for a regul, for what was once said could not be unlearned; but doubtless humans could unlearn anything they pleased, and sometimes forget what the facts were (*Shun-jir*, p. 104).

Suth later wrestled at length with the same problem, but with another emphasis: the connection between truth and imagination.

Humans, he had observed, recalled things in time-ahead. Imagination, they called this trait; and since they committed the inanity of remembering the future — Suth had been tempted to laughter when he first comprehended this inanity — the whole species was apt to irrational actions. The future, not existing, was remembered by each individual differently, and therefore they were apt to do individually irrational things. It was terrifying to know this tendency in one's allies — and worse yet not to know it, and not to know how it operated.

They might do anything. The mri suffered from similar future-memory. Presumably two such species even thought they comprehended one another... if two species' future-memories could possibly coincide in any points; and that possibility threatened to unbalance a sane mind.

This was one of the most profound difference between regul and human, that regul remembered only the past, which was observable and accurate as those who remembered it. Humans accustomed to the factual instabilities of their perceptions, even lied, which was to give deliberate inaccuracy to memory, past or future. They existed in complete flux; their memories periodically purged themselves of facts: this was perhaps a necessary reflex in a species which remembered things that had not yet happened and which falsified what had occurred or might occur.

Disrespect of temporal order; this was the sum of it. Anything might alter in them, past, present, future. They forgot, and wrote things on paper to remember them; but they might not always write the truth; and the possibility that they might accurately imagine the truth... Suth backed his mind from the precipice, refusing to leap (*Kutath*, p. 98).

The brink for the regul is more than rhetorical, it constituted madness (see *Kesrith*, pp. 125-126). When Suth finally decides to destroy the mri and their human supporters, the whole issue of human perfidity is couched once again in what would be considered regulan madness.

Suth hissed. It was insanity, that regul adults sat here contemplating trues and maybe-trues regarding human minds. They learned. They all began to think in mad terms of shifting realities. He gathered a stylus from the board before him, held it between his palms and rolled it. "Observe, mates of mine, the flat face of the stylus. Where does it exist? Has it a place as it spins?"

"In fractional instants," Nagn said.

"Analogy," said Suth. "A model for imagination. I have found one. The place faces all directions for an instant, a blur of motion. Human minds are and are not so many faces that they seem ready to move in any

direction. They are composite realities. They apparently face all directions simultaneously. This is human motive." He laid the stylus down. "They are facing us and the mri simultaneously." (*Kutath*, p. 225)

This capacity to face in different directions simultaneously is, of course, a description of humans as a race. Suth concluded in a citation given above, that individual human conduct was unpredictable as well. That is to say, while mankind faced both the regul and the mri at the same time, they did so with different individuals, Stavros with the regul and Duncan with the mri. This facing towards another species turns out to be more than mere diplomacy; it is, as was mentioned in the case of George Stavros, an assimilation of the other's characteristics and thinking patterns. This is patently true in the case of Sten Duncan and the mri. Human adaptability, and the desirability of that adaptation climaxes philosophically in the polemic between Koch and Degas near the end of the trilogy. Degas begins:

"The regul are repulsive, aren't they? No one likes them; the crew shies from them. It's an emotional reaction, I'm afraid. There is nothing lovely about them. But the fact is, the regul are non-violent. They are safe neighbors. Of course the mri are appealing; humans find their absolutisms attractive. They have instincts that almost overlap our own... or seem to; they're handsome to human eyes. But they're dangerous, sir; the most cold-blooded killers ever let loose. Incompatible with all other life. We learned that after forty bloody years. Regul don't look noble; they aren't by our rules; they'll cheat, given the chance... but in terms of property, not weapons. They would be good neighbors. We can understand them. Their instincts overlap ours too; and we don't like to look at that. Not nearly so attractive as the mri. But the end result of regul civilization is trade and commerce spread over their territories. And we've had a first-hand look at the result of mri civilization too... the dead worlds."

Koch made a face. It was truth, though something in it was sour in his belly. "But it's rather like what Duncan said, isn't it, Del — that we shape ourselves by what we do here. We become... what we do here."

Degas' face went flat and cold. He shook his head. "If we kill here, we stop them. We stop them flat. It's our doing; it doesn't go any further than that. We have to take the responsibility."

"And we become the killers we kill to stop, eh? Paradox, isn't it? We can sneak out of here regul-fashion and let the regul become the killers; or do our own killing, and how will the regul look on us then, a species that looks like the mri, that could do what the mri did? Another paradox. What is the human answer to this situation?" (*Kutath*, pp. 174-175)

The fascinating thing here is that the mri are not the planet-erasing people that Degas imagines they are, and yet he, himself, has become like that imagined race. This adaptability through imagination happens with other human characters as well. Dr. Boaz, the human xenologist, at the end of the trilogy is without question recognized as a sen'e'en, one of the learned, not only by the mri, but also by the narrator of the story. The human Galey is the second

tsi'mri, one not of the People, to be accepted into the Kel, the warrior caste of the mri; Sten Duncan was, of course, the first.

The nature of imagination and adaptation being as they are, the portrayal of the various human characters must needs reflect the proclivity of each personality, his or her leanings towards the regul or the various castes of the mri. Cherryh accomplishes this well, bestowing bits of associative charisma on even what would be considered minor personae in most novels. I had the feeling that there were no minor characters, that each one was precious to her as they came into existence through her writing. Even when those characters died or were destined to pass out of the narrative in some fashion, I still felt that a great amount of consideration was exercised in their representation. In this I think that Cherryh exemplifies Tolkien's own deep affection for his creation, Middle-earth.

The Mri: Truth in Masquerade

I have left the mri for last primarily because they are the central complexity of the *Faded Sun* trilogy. It is their story that is being told. It is with them we are to be sympathetic, although Cherryh maintains a continuing tension of doubt regarding their integrity throughout the three volumes, particularly from the point of view of the regul who are in deadly fear of them.

When Sharn, the commander of the regul pursuit ship, first senses the beacon-pulse of friendship set by Sten Duncan on the planet Kutath, she assumes treachery and fires on the source and destroys it:

Human voices chattered at her in a few moments, seeking to know why she had fired. They had not, then, picked up the signal.

"Debris," Sharn answered. Regul did not lie; neither did they always tell the truth (*Shon'jir*, p. 184)

The regul perception of the mri is founded in part on their own view of themselves, rather than a true understanding of the nature of the mri as a race. When the last mri ship, containing what was thought to be the last survivors of the People, nears Kesrith, Suth informs Hulagh.

Hulagh's hearts became at once agitated and anger heated his face. It was like the mri to be inconvenient.

To arrive always in the moment other elements had reached their maximum vulnerability.

"They have given notice of their intentions?" Hulagh asked of Suth.

"They say that they will land. We urged them to make use of the station facilities. They did not respond to this. They said that they have come for their people onworld and that they intend to land."

"Mri never lie," said Hulagh, for the youngling's reference, if it had never dealt face-to-face with the mercenaries. "Neither do they always tell the truth. In that they resemble regul."

Suth blinked and sucked air. Subtleties were wasted on this one. Hulagh frowned and blew heated air through his nostrils (*Kesrith*, p. 108)

The unsubtle Suth, of course, is the same fellow who will show up later as the designer of regul and human policy toward the race which even his mentor did not understand. When he and Koch are coming to terms, in orbit above Kutath, the mri homeworld, Suth puts himself forward as an authority on mri psychology.

"Our experience of mri is two thousand years long; and it argues against yours, of recent duration. Mri are intractable and inflexible. Certain words are beyond their understanding. *Negotiation* is one such. The concept does not exist with them. Observed fact, bai. Where concept does not exist... how does action?"

Koch considered this, not alone of mri... glanced at Averson and back at Suth. "A question you have evaded, reverence: do you have a mri expert among you?"

The mouth gaped at once into a hiss, amusement. "He sits among you, bai Koch. I am that expert. I am, you may mark for your memory, a colonial of doch Horag. Horag has employed mri as guards for most of the two thousand years in question. Doch Alagn misled you; they were amateurs and newcomers, and you believed them expert. My adulthood has put into authority... a true expert in these matters. And a new doch. You are very prudent to inquire."

"Are you fluent in their language too?"

"There are two languages. I sorrow, bai, but the languages of the mri were always a point of stubbornness with them. They persisted in coercing the regul language into their sluggish memories and speaking it badly."

"Meaning that they would not permit outsiders to become fluent."

"Meaning whatever that means within their mental process, reverence. These leaps of analysis are perhaps a natural human process, or you are withholding data. It means what the mri wish it to mean; we are patently not mri, neither you nor I. Are you withholding data?"

"No. No, bai Suth." Koch reflected on that matter, staring at the bai, nodded finally. "You are an authority on mri. Without access to their thought processes."

Nostrils shut and flared in rapid succession. "I contain information, bai, and without it you may deal in errors and experimentations at hazard of life. I tell you that we have never been able to translate the concept of negotiation into the mri understanding; and that should be marked for memory. I tell you that at any time a mri was hired to fight, there was no deviation from that path; he would kill or be killed and no offer would sway him. Trade concepts are not in their minds, reverence bai. They hired out their mercenaries, but *hired* is our word for the process and *mercenary* is your word. We deal in regul and human words; what do they think?"

"The bai is right," Averson interjected. "There is no exactitude between species. Regul *hocht* and our *mercenary* aren't the same either."

Nostrils expanded. Koch watched and wondered how much of his own expression the bai had learned to read. (Kutath, pp. 166-167)

Not only was there a problem associated with the fact that no ts'i mri had mastered even the lesser of the mri languages, but the major portion of the mri culture was completely hidden

from those not of the People as a result of the formal organization of their society, undoubtedly designed for the very purpose of maintaining inscrutability.

The mri, or the People (with a capital "P"), were divided into three distinct castes (Kel, Sen, and Kath), each presided over by a caste leader, the whole presided over by the she'pan, the Lady Mother of the House. But that tripartite structure, which is revealed in the opening pages of the *Faded Sun* trilogy, is veiled from all ts'i mri, or those not of the People. "They were, as outsiders believed, a species of warriors, of mercenaries—for outsiders saw the Kel, and rarely the Sen, and never the Kath" (*Kesrith*, p. 3). The Kath was the caste of child-bearers and children, the Heart of the People, to which all mri belonged until they received an appointment to another caste upon reaching adulthood; they were robed in blue. The Sen was comprised of the scholars, the light-bearers, the high-caste, the Mind of the People; their vestments were in gold. The Kel was the Hand of the People, and essentially the only part of the culture that came into direct contact with ts'i mri; they dressed in black, generally with veiled faces. The Lady of the House dressed in white. Thus, in much more than symbolism, the Heart and Mind of the mri were really not accessible outside of the mri community, the Hand was veiled.

In the description given of Niun, the last son of the she'pan Intel, we are given some insight to the nature of the isolation:

He was tall, even of his kind. His high cheekbones bore the *sets'al*, the triple scars of his caste, blue-stained and indelible; this meant that he was a full-fledged member of the Kel, the Hand of the People. Being of the Kel, he went robed from collar to boot-tops in unrelieved black; and black veil and tasseled headcloth, *mez* and *zaidhe*, concealed all but his brow and his eyes from the gaze of outsiders when he chose to meet them; and the *zaidhe* further had a dark transparent visor that could meet the veil when dust blew or red Arain reached its unpleasant zenith. He was a man: his face, like his thoughts, was considered a private identity, one indecent to real to strangers. The veils enveloped him as did the robes, a distinguishing mark of the only caste of the People that might deal with outsiders. The black robes, the *sigz*, were held about the waist and chest with belts that bore his weapons, which were several; and also they should have held *j'ai*, medallions, honors won for his services to the People; they held none, and this lack of status would have been obvious to any mri that beheld him.

Being of the Kel, he could neither read nor write, save that he could use a numbered keyboard and knew mathematics, both regul and mri. He knew by heart the complicated genealogies of his House, which had been that of Nisren. The name-chants filled him with melancholy when he sang them: it was difficult to do so and then to look about the cracking walls of Edun Kesrithun and behold only so few people as now lived, and not realize that decline was taking place, that was real and threatening. He knew all of the songs. He could foresee begetting no child of his own who would sing them, not on Kesrith. He learned the songs; he learned languages, which were part of the Kel-lore. He spoke four languages fluently, two

of which were his own, one which was the regul's, and the fourth of which was the enemy's. He was expert in weapons, both the yin'ei and the zehen'ei; he was taught of nine masters of arms; he knew that his skill was great in all of these things (*Kesrith*, p. 12).

In addition to not being able to read and write, the members of the Kel were isolated from the Sen and the she'pan, to the degree that they knew nothing regarding the policies and rationale of the mri. They simply did as they had contracted with the tsi'mri or as they were commanded by their own leadership. The effect of this is that the Kel could always tell the truth, as much as they knew. Their ignorance shielded the main body of the mri from exploitation by the regul or the humans. Mri were perceived, as was indicated above, solely as a race of fierce mercenaries, cold-blooded killers for hire. Hulagh's musings when the mri vessel is preparing to land illustrates this perception.

There were regul jokes about the mri, that mri had made records about their home and origin, but had forgotten where they had left them: hence their nomadic condition. The fact that mri had no memories was a laughable matter to one who had not dealt personally with the intractable mri.

One could not argue with them, could not reason, could not persuade them from old loyalties, and could not — above all could not tamper with their sense of proprieties. He remembered Medai's suicide with a shudder: stubborn and without memory and prone to violence. It was like the mri to prefer bloodshed to reason, even when it was one's own blood that was shed. Medai, Kesrith-born, would not compromise: the mri treaty held only so long as regul maintained a homeworld for mri, so long as that homeworld was inviolate from invasion. Medai had seen what he had seen, and could not reason otherwise; and therefore he had chosen to set himself against his lawful employers (*Kesrith*, p. 109).

The effect of these regulan observations about the mri come after the reader is approximately one third of the way through the first volume of the trilogy, and it is quite apparent that the regul are decidedly wide of the mark as to a correct understanding of what the mri are about. It is this gap that eventually destroys the regul control of the mri, and effectively unravels their relationship with the humans as well. The mri do have records, vast comprehensive accounts of their travels and dealings for thousands of years, but the Kel has no knowledge of them, and thus neither do the regul.

What is fascinating to me is how varied the possible narrative tensions become as the three castes deal with each other, and the three races interface along similar lines. Not only is the conception clever, it is masterful. Within the overall cultural superstructure of the story are placed the individual lives of the characters, who (with few exceptions) are far less informed than the reader. Thus, through the glass of omniscience, the reader is able to discern the developing nature of the characters. And because the field is so high, wide, and deep, there is plenty

of narrative room to depict each character, major and minor, with great depth and detail.

There is another key to the element of truth versus untruth with regard to the mri. It concerns the dusei, the great lumbering, bear-like creatures who accompany the members of the Kesrithian Kel. It is quite apparent that the relationship between the mri and the dusei is primarily mental and emotional, although it is quite some time before we learn the significance of that almost symbiotic joining. When Medai, one of the last of the mri mercenaries to hire out to the regul, commits suicide, his dus goes mad and, once on Kesrith, seeks out his dead master who has been laid in state near the shrine of the edun. Niun spots him:

Medai's dus.

There was no mri who could claim, other clues removed, to know any dus but his own, and not even that one, given much passage of time. Dusei were too similar and too mutable, and one could only say that this one was like the dus he knew.

But that this particular one had not killed him, that it had been primarily interested in the body, and departed unsatisfied — that action he understood. Dusei were troubled at death. Other animals ignored it, but the dusei did not understand, did not accept it. They grieved and searched and fretted, and eventually died themselves, more often than not. They rarely outlived their masters, pining away in their search.

And this one was hunting something it had not found.

Medai's dus, coming looking for him.

A dus that was sickly and covered with sores and deep in the throes of a madness that did not come on swiftly, although regul said that Medai had died but a night ago.

A dus that was thin and starved as its dead master (*Kesrith*, pp. 68-69).

Although Niun has not impressed a dus of his own, he is able to draw some rather significant conclusions about the death of Medai because of the condition of Medai's dus.

He had in him a gathering certainty that, whatever the evidence of his eyes and the testimony of the regul, Medai had not laid down his life willingly.

The dus, so close to a kel'en's mind, was *miuk'io* and grown so thin that it could pass shrine doors; and the body of Medai, once solid with muscle, was thin as the mummified dead (*Kesrith*, p. 70).

Niun's later conclusion regarding the appearance of Medai's dus is revealing as well.

Dusei, it was said, lived in the present; they had no memories for what had happened, only for persons and places. It had sought home, the House where it had first lived; it had sought Medai; it had found the one, and not the other (*Kesrith*, p. 71).

Although it is not explicitly said, I believe the connection between the mri and his dus was far more than acquaintance, but rather an intertwining of being, the ef-

fect of which was to cause in one or the other an almost exact reflection of the condition of their partner. Medai's dust did find the body of Medai, but he could not find Medai's mind.

One can not help but wonder the advantage of a mri having such a partner. That advantage becomes more and more clear as the story progresses. When Duncan nears the decision that will make him the first *tsi'mri kel'en*, he is confronted by the two *dusei* that have accompanied Niun, Melein, and him on their journey to Kutath.

A *dus* crowded them, warm and urgent with emotion. Duncan felt a numbness; sensed, almost, Niun's anxiety. Violation of privacy, of self-control: he edged back and the *dus* shied off, then returned obstinately to its closeness. There was no lying to the *dusei*; none, eventually to the *mri* (*Shon'Jir*, p. 98).

The *dusei* are, for all practical purposes, lie detectors by nature. They were able to sense and transmit to their partners the nuances of other sentient beings within their range. Thus, the *kel'en* were capable of not only cloaking the thinking and feelings of their own people because of their training and demeanor, they were also able, with the aid of their *dusei*, to detect the perfidy of their employers or anyone else with who they came in contact. *Mri* could not lie to themselves, but they could tell when someone else was attempting to do so. This awareness of the significance of the *dusei* culminates at the end of the third volume and explains much of the conduct of Niun and the other *kel'en* as the action proceeds in the *Faded Sun* and extends the richness of Cherryh's creation. It is a wonderful gift that an author has to entice his or her readers to reflect frequently on the traveled course of the story.

Epilogue

I have been purposefully narrow in my treatment of the *Faded Sun* in order to demonstrate as clearly as possible the great care with which one of the major tensions was conceived, and what made possible the great number of characters in the story that received such close attention. Considerable effort was expended by Cherryh to stretch a piece of canvas large enough to allow for realistic portrayals of each of her characters without blurring or losing a sense of depth.

The trilogy allows for other areas of investigation as well, with sufficient detail to demonstrate that Cherryh's talent for conception measures up to the tremendous facility for developing character. I, for one, would like to see more work done on the languages of the *regul* and the *mri*. I would be curious about Cherryh's own observations about her use of invented language in her stories. I am convinced, however, that her language invention is far more complex than the representation given in the trilogy.

Another area which I think needs academic attention has to do with the Right of Passage motif that runs throughout the novels. The youngling-to-adult transition is presented in conjunction with each race, which in turn

contributes significantly to the characterization of each race and individual.

I am also curious about Cherryh's almost mystical use of the number three throughout her narrative: *regul*, *mri*, *humans* in conflict; male, female, neuter among the *regul*; Sen, Kath, and Kel among the *mri*; the three scars on the face of the *kel'en*; and many other instances, almost without number (pardon the unintentional pun).

It is quite obvious that Cherryh had done her homework long before the narrative was begun and the story was embroiled into an existing piece of cloth, much like Tolkien's conception in the *Hobbit* and the *Lord of the Rings* was woven into the world of the existing, but then unpublished, *Silmarillion*. I think that it would be more than interesting to have C.J. Cherryh discuss the process that brought the *Faded Sun* into existence.

In conclusion, what can I say that will get me my annual hug from the Author Guest of Honor? From all that I can tell from her writing, I believe that C.J. Cherryh is a natural observer of people, one who invests a great amount of time sensing the motives and designs of those around her, for good or ill. People who have this penchant for analyzing personalities, generally end up in one of two camps; they either fester in the tents of the cynic, or they dwell within the pavilions of the gentle, guarded heart.

I came away from the *Faded Sun* uplifted and encouraged about my own species, and had my soul's conviction confirmed once again, that mankind is capable of bridging vast chasms of differences by giving himself to the differences and resolving them from within. The ability to change, to adapt, to accommodate; the capacity to sense another's pain, and to comfort those in distress and sorrow; the desire to facilitate, negotiate, and resolve tensions at personal cost; this is the humanitarian genius which appears from time to time among ourselves, at which we should marvel. C.J. Cherryh has marveled at it in the *Faded Sun*. She has reflected back to us the best that we have to offer each other: the Truth.

One last metaphorical image. Tolkien was asked once how he saw himself within the confines of the creation of Middle-earth. He said, that except for stature, he was a hobbit, a child of the Shire. I am sure that C.J. Cherryh has her own favorite character in the *Faded Sun*, the one with which she can best identify. For me, however, as the reader, I have felt the symbiosis that every author hopes to create with his or her audience; that odd and intimate relationship that makes writing and reading not only worth while, but exalting. I have danced with one of the *dusei*; and it was like being embraced by a bird in flight.

Afterwards Words

After having made my views on C.J. Cherryh public at San Diego, someone asked me whether or not our Guest of Honor was really a Mythopoeist (yes, the Mint has coined another one). In response, I think that it would be proper to admit that mythology and the mythopoetic

Tributes and Articles about J.R.R. TOLKIEN Sought for Special Issue

As should be known to all now, 1992 is the 100th Anniversary of the birth of J.R.R. Tolkien. The Mythopoeic Society is preparing to hold its 1992 annual Mythopoeic Conference in Oxford, England (see page 67). In addition to this, *Mythlore* is planning a special Centenary issue with the next issue.

Whether or not you will be attending this once-in-a-lifetime Conference in Oxford, you, the readers of *Mythlore*, are invited to submit special articles and tributes in praise and honor of John Ronald Reule Tolkien. The articles may be on any aspect of Tolkien or his works, but ones dealing with his overall achievements and significance are especially welcome.

Tributes may be as short as one paragraph to as long as

two typewritten pages. They may include your first reading of Tolkien, your initial responses, what influence Tolkien has been on you, your appraisal of his genius and greatness, and your thoughts on how your response has changed over the years.

It will be gratifying to see many people share their thoughts and feelings with the other readers on this not-to-be-repeated occasion.

The deadline for tributes is May 18th. The deadline for articles to be considered for the special issue is May 10.

Please send these tributes and articles to the Editor:

Glen H. GoodKnight

742 S. Garfield Ave., Monterey Park, CA 91754 USA

process are not generally associated with Science Fiction. Were I to guess, I would say that most people intuitively associate Fantasy with mythology. In defense of the Conference Committee's selection, I will share a little literary theory about SF&F that I adopted from Darko Suvin. He suggests that the basic difference between the two is that Science Fiction involves what Suvin calls a *novum*, a created novelty which the SF writer spends the rest of the novel or short story revealing, explaining the "novum" by way of known scientific information. The Science Fiction writer deliberately connects what is unknown with the known, thereby establishing a kind of future continuity. Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein are probably best known for this kind of "future history" approach to their works. By definition, however, a Fantasist has no responsibility to explain a "novum" in primary world terms, it simply exists and operates in the secondary world. Needless to say, there are vast regions of literary grey area where the two genres seem to merge. Cherryh's work is Science Fiction in many respects, but within the secondary world of the trilogy there is a deliberate attempt to reveal why the social and political relationships have come to be as they are. In other words, Cherryh has taken the time to make her characters mythological; at least in the sense that the story line spends as much time revealing *why* the various characters are the way they are, as it does revealing

what they are. Mythology tends towards the personal and the intimate; Science Fiction tends towards the cosmic and the empirical. It may be difficult to imagine intimacy with the cosmic, but I think that C.J. Cherryh approaches it. ☞



Art Submissions



Mythlore welcomes the submission of new artists to its pages. Both full page and column pieces are encouraged. Full page art should be 7.25" wide by 9.25" tall — it may actually be larger if it is in proportions. Column art should first be 5" wide by 6" to 8" tall, which can be photographically reduced to fit the printed size of the column. Material inspired by or illustrating the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, or Charles Williams is especially sought, but other mythological and fantasy inspired artwork is also welcome. Write directly to the Art Editor, whose address is found on page 2.