



The Sardonyx Net

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Captured trying to recover his stolen property, Starcaptain Dana Ikoro is arrested and sentenced to ten years of slavery on the slave world of Chabad. There could be crueler masters than Rhani Yago, the beautiful and powerful aristocrat. Dana forges a dangerous bond with his master--and discovers that on a world where drugged criminals are used as slaves, rebellion may be the highest form of love.

The Sardonyx Net Details

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From Reader Review *The Sardonyx Net* for online ebook

Juushika says

When a drug deal goes bad, smuggler and Starcaptian Dana finds himself in custody of a slaver and embroiled in the politics of the ruling families of the planet of Chabad. Of all Lynn books, this is reminiscent most of *The Northern Girl*: a political and personal drama about complicity and power, trauma and sympathy, how social systems effect and are changed by the individuals within them. Plot developments are logical rather than dramatic and three PoV characters makes for a lot of reiterated information, but this doesn't feel like an oversight because the emphasis is always on personal responses and motivations within a larger context. This isn't my favorite Lynn novel, but I am consistently in love with her work, with her interpersonal focus and diverse characters and dynamics, and *The Sardonyx Net* is no exception.

The Sardonyx Net takes place in the same universe as *A Different Light*, but can be read alone.

Koji Mukai says

I consider this to be among the best SF novels of the 1980s. The protagonists and the antagonists are both complex characters, and the plot is not a simple struggle of the good against the evil - maybe that's why this book isn't as popular as I think it should be.

Kat says

I just noticed that I'm getting more and more picky with my star system. Basically, any book I wouldn't recommend to others is getting <3.

That doesn't mean I didn't like *Sardonyx Net*. I was involved in the story and the characters. I thought the concept was interesting: Chabad is a sort of "Australia" planet where other planets send their prisoners to serve their sentences as slaves. The perk of being a slave is that they drug you up, so you spend the years all blissed out.

The best part about Lynn's society is that the rules of patriarchy, sexuality, and desire are all over the place. Also, this novel explores non-consensual sadism that manifests from sublimated sexuality.

Feliz says

This was the very first "popular" book I came across which contained a whiff of gay content. There are no graphic scenes, and the main romance is between Dana, the male Starcaptain, and Rhani, the female Head of a famous and wealthy family. Yet, there was Rhani's brother Zed, who takes his pleasure from torturing young men, and the world of the Starcaptains, which is colorful and a little crazy and reminds me of Christopher street day parade (in hindsight, mind you, for back then I wouldn't have known what CSD meant).

A great, multi - layered sci-fi. Read now, in 2010, some of the gadgets seem a bit ridiculous, and some of the imaginations (like the Enchanter Genetic Labs) are disturbingly close to reality. But it's still a great book, one I hunted down for almost ten years now until I was able to put my hands on a copy.

Lorelei says

I didn't really like this book, it's more that I was fascinated by it. Something gripped me and I couldn't put it down, although when it was over I felt that it was rather distasteful, something I wished I'd not swallowed whole. Still, I couldn't quite get rid of it and I read it at least two more times, both times reading straight through and unable to put it down.

I don't know what else to say about it. It's not a nice story and it's about not very nice people. The ending is only somewhat satisfactory... but I still have it, and may read it again someday. It's something about the relationship between the characters Zed (torturer) and Dana (slave and victim). Very disturbing.

Steven Drachman says

I liked this just-ok, although Elizabeth Lynn is one of my favorite authors. Star captain Dana Ikoro is arrested as a drug runner and becomes a slave on a planet called "Chabad" (no relation to the Rebbe), in servitude to the wealthy Yago family heirs, the Donny and Marie of weird, sexual sadist Zed and his gorgeous sister Rhani. Lynn seems bizarrely sympathetic to the Yagos (who keep most of their slaves doped up on "dorazine) and bizarrely unsympathetic to the "Free Folk of Chabad", who are working underground to free to slaves. In a better book, this would have been audacious. Lynn wrote two of my favorite books, "Dragon's Winter" and "A Different Light", and one of my daughters' favorite books, "The Silver Horse", but here she just doesn't create a real world. Still, any book by Elizabeth Lynn has moments of lyrical beauty and great excitement, and this is no exception.

liz says

Read for queerlit50, bought used and local.

Most of the lesbian sci-fi authors I found online weren't available at the local used book store, but I did find about 5 of Lynn's books. I took a chance and bought them all (a combo of \$1.99/ea price and bitchin' covers).

Pros: For the most part, I liked the book. I bought it to have something mindless and fun to read as a break from my schoolwork. It was exactly that. I liked Rhani (female lead) a lot more than Dana or Zed (male lover interest and brother, respectively). For once, I liked the interesting female character because she was well-developed, not because I was clinging to the only intelligent female presence in the entire novel (I'm looking at you, Asimov). Most of the characters has really fluid sexualities, which I also appreciated. So: mindless, without the major irritants I'm used to.

Cons: I thought Zed was a terrible, stupid character (though Rhani's affection and dependence on him was sort of interesting). I wasn't interested in The Morality of Slavery or any of the other Big Questions, though I may have been if the racial and socioeconomic issues underlying Chaban Space-Slavery had been explored

explicitly instead of briefly flirted with but dropped in favor of incest drama (what the hell, sci fi?). Also: I hated the incest drama.

3/5 ain't bad. I'll read Lynn's other books.

Jabbryan says

This book sucks me in every time. It is dark, and there is something different about it that I can't put my finger on. Probably has something to do with how complex the characters are. Some of the ones that do evil acts are not evil, or not entirely evil. It becomes an exploration of how much bad can a person do, and still be treated in society as a good person.

Wise_owl says

I knew Elizabeth A. Lynn from her participation in the 'Thieves World' Anthologies, and hadn't actually read any of her works, something that after reading Sardonyx Net I will certainly be working to fix.

In the far future the planet of Chabad has a system of criminal slavery, in which people are sentenced to terms of slavery for their crimes. This system is sustained through the use of drugs, and has enriched several of the families of this dry planet. The story itself is about a star-captain who falls afoul of the law and ends up a slave.

The Book deals with issues of society and morality in what I can only call a rather complex way. In many ways, none of the central characters are especially likeable. Many of the main characters are down-right undeniably evil, and yet the story itself offers a morally complex examination of its society without the resolution one might expect in a more ham-fisted story. Nobody really seems to change their minds in terms of the society, and in a way it's more a story of the people caught within the social milieu it presents than the story of that milieu.

There is a part, quite late in the book, where a character makes an intensely acute observation about slavery under what can only be considered horrible circumstances. The observation with regards to how even a 'nice' person within such a society has to abdicate their moral responsibility and allow monsters to operate, to do the things they can't or wouldn't in order for the society to function. This underpins almost everything in the rest of the book and kind of colours my perception of the first bit of the book.

All in all I really enjoyed this book. The writing was superb, the characterization, even of truly horrible people, was compelling and interesting. It has many qualities of sci-fi writing that I really enjoy and I would recommend it all around.

Dana says

This book, while intriguing, was disturbingly violent. If it had not been so graphically violent, it would have been much better.

Randy Patton says

This book was pure sci-fi and I loved it. Dana is a starcaptain who ends up getting busted for being a drug smuggler and is sentenced to a term of slavery. His sentence is on a strange world where customs that are considered taboo elsewhere are perfectly acceptable. Fun piece of storytelling.

Howl says

“Ramas I-Occad—?” he said.

“That's Binkie's full name,” she said.

“Sweet mother. Why did you call him Binkie?”

Rhani said, “It was the name of a toy I once had.” Dana stared at her.

“A toy? A toy what?” His tone annoyed her.

“What difference does it make? A toy animal, as I recall. Stuffed. It was some ancient Terran creature—a giraffe.” She stretched her hands apart.

“It had a long neck. Dana, this is all irrelevant.”

“Yes,” he said. “It must seem so, to you.”

This conversation takes place between Dana (an erstwhile drug running Starcaptain who has been enslaved for a crime he had not yet committed, by a member of the society that would have benefited from his crime) and Rhani Yago (a member of the First Family's of Chabad who owns Dana as a slave). They are discussing another of her slaves, "Binkie".

I don't know that this book counts as great literature, or has any huge insight, but it does do a good job of showing how insidious and pernicious slavery is. At the same time, you don't end the book with any notion that slavery in the Sardonyx Sector or on Chabad will change greatly or that conditions will improve.

It makes me wonder what message (if any) the author was trying to convey. The whole thing is very shades of grey. None of the characters are blameless. Dana did not commit the crime he was convicted of and enslaved for...but only because he hadn't had the chance yet. That this was a crime on Chabad is entirely hypocritical since the Chabadese economy depends on the drug he was attempting to smuggle, and its *use* is legal, but its import is not. He grows to understand that slavery is wrong, but is still tied to Rhani Yago at the end of the story.

Rhani is not a bad slave owner, but the text clearly illustrates how dehumanizing slavery is (as shown by the quote above). She thinks nothing of taking away the name of one of the slaves that has served her the longest. It is not even a consideration for her.

Zed Yago, her brother and commander of the Sardonyx Net (the prison ship that transports slaves to Chabad) is a sadist obsessed with an abortive incestuous relationship with his system. He knows his actions are wrong, that his desire to non-consensually cause pain is immoral, and yet offered opportunities to engage in consensual sado-masochism or to realign his sexuality (which causes him great pain) he instead elects to continue torture and dominate slaves owned by his family.

This lack of resolution is both frustrating and at the same time in some ways makes the story stronger.

Pam Baddeley says

Started this but couldn't get very far. Initially, I found it very boring and then realised that it is about a planet, Chadbad, where slavery is the basis of society and is enforced by keeping the slaves drugged. The 'justification' is that they are criminals. Dana is a space captain who is trying to make some illicit money by smuggling the drug used to dope the slaves: another space captain steals it and he goes to Chadbad, centre of the slave trade, to try to get it back but is caught and becomes the slave of the sadistic Zed Yago, head of a leading family and a man with a lot of power. His sister Rhani has a more humane attitude to slaves but sees nothing immoral in turning a blind eye to her brother's torture of slaves or trying to get the formula for the drug so that her family can control the supply. Basically everyone in the book is on a sliding scale of criminality and even the organisation that opposes slavery is, from a flick through the rest of the book, controlled by someone who has his own agenda rather than having any moral concerns about the welfare of slaves. Apparently Rhani eventually has a relationship with Dana and he does finally regain his freedom, but to do it has to save Zed despite what Zed has subjected him to. Couldn't face reading over 400 pages of this so gave up which is something I seldom do with books.

Brownbetty says

This is a book that wants the reader to sympathize with its monsters. It mostly succeeds, and mostly plays fair. I'm not quite sure what to think of this.

The Sardonyx Net takes place on the planet Chabad, a planet with an economy dependent on slavery. It focuses on the household of the family in charge of supply slaves for the entire planet, Rhani Yago, and her brother, Zed. On Chabad, slavery is enforced by drugging the slaves, but Chabad doesn't manufacture or control the drug, and the interplanetary police force, although it tolerates Chabad's slavery, does not tolerate the import of the drug.

The monsters in this book are the slaveholders. Rhani is a generous woman who prefers that her slaves see her as a benign mistress. However, Zed is a sexual sadist who uses slaves to fulfil his urges. Rhani knows this, and while she takes some steps to minimize his access to slaves she wants use from, she accepts his predations as to some degree inevitable.

Zed himself manages to be a complex character; he's in love with his sister, but unwilling to inflict his sexuality on her. (Intra-generational incest is not taboo, on Chabad, so his choice is more meaningful than it might otherwise be.) He only hurts slaves who (he feels) deserve punishment, and chooses to focus on slaves as an outlet, so he can avoid hurting innocents. He knows he's a monster, and tries to channel it.

And the slaves themselves are not, entirely, innocent: slavery on Chabad is based on convict labour, and once a convict serves their term, they are freed. Chabad empties the prisons of neighbouring worlds to meet its labour needs.

The story is mostly told from the point of view of Rhani Yago's newest slave, and Zed's latest victim, Dana

Ikoru. Dana himself is an interesting character, convicted as a drug runner who was involved in the trade to keep Chabad supplied with Dorazine, the drug that keeps slavery on Chabad economically feasible. Once he's exposed to slavery, first hand, as it were, he discovers moral objections, which are no less sincere for being very self-interested. He sympathizes with Rhani, and despises her, hates his slavery, and yet seems to accept its argued 'necessity,' at least for Chabad's economy.

By itself, this would be a little easier to take, except that the book also provides an anti-slavery voice in the place of Michel A-Rae, a fanatical anti-slavery crusader, and chief of the Hyper-police in Chabad's sector. A-Rae is against slavery because, the book tells us, he was denied a position on the slave-trading ship which Zed came to command, and because he shares Zed's sadistic tendencies, but not his outlet. As a result, his opposition to slavery is entirely the result of a twisted desire for revenge, and he doesn't care how many slaves are injured or killed in his quest to dismantle the institution.

A-Rae seems to function to make the Yago siblings seem less monstrous by comparison, and I object to that. It's facile, it's cheating, and it makes me feel like the author expected me to let her get away with it.

I really don't know how I feel about this book. It doesn't take a clear moral stance, and remains ambiguous on moral points I would have thought were relatively clear. I don't require my books to be "moral," but really, was a sympathetic exploration of slavers and torturers something I wanted?

A note: I began reading this book and thought, "Well this is rather boring," so I skipped ahead a few pages to see if it got more interesting. It abruptly became quite interesting, so I backtracked to find the start of the interesting bits. Turns out, you need to get about to the middle of the second chapter to find out if you're interested or not.

Anthony says

This old SF novel deserves a bigger reputation than it's been given. The narrative architecture is finely drawn with cool precision, and the story depicts power relationships--ranging in scope from the broadly political to the personally sexual--with a lucid and subtle objectivity that allows readers to make moral judgments about the characters' actions without heavy-handed directions from the author.
