



The Shattered Chain

Marion Zimmer Bradley

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While only women can command the power of the matrix and the secret sciences which keep Darkover from Terran hands, in most respects they are still chattels. But the Free Amazons are considered equal to men, and it is they who provide the key to the Terran-Darkover dilemma.

The Shattered Chain Details

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From Reader Review The Shattered Chain for online ebook

Joyce Reynolds-Ward says

Research read, and a fascinating one, especially in this era of Trump.

Redkitsune says

Me sorprendió la historia, es muy interesante y está bien narrada. Es el primer libro de la saga que leo y sin dudas no será el último. Lo recomiendo ampliamente.

Alejandro Orradre says

¿Cómo viven las mujeres el patriarcal modo de vida de **Darkover**?

La respuesta, o parte de ella, la encontramos en *La cadena rota* y de una forma extensa. La historia nos sumerge en los dilemas a los que se enfrentan tanto darkovianas como terranas, y que al final no deja de ser el mismo: cómo luchar por una libertad que por tradición ha sido negada.

La novela de **Marion Zimmer Bradley** rebosa un feminismo que todavía hoy en día es vigente y muy necesario; las Amazonas representarían todo aquello que se busca hoy en día con el movimiento feminista, aunque tal vez algo extremado y no exento de ciertas contradicciones.

Es sin duda un libro muy interesante de leer y que dota de un prisma especial a toda la saga de Darkover.

Yoon says

One of the better entries in Bradley's sprawling DARKOVER series: Jaelle, a Renunciate (Free Amazon), becomes entangled with the Terran Intelligence agent and linguist Magda Lorne when the latter unsuccessfully disguises herself as a Renunciate on a mission to ransom her ex-husband; Lorne, as consequence, is forced to take the Oath of the Renunciates. Complicating matters are the fact that Lorne, for all her Terran loyalties, was born and raised on Darkover, and is more torn between the cultures than even she realizes at first. The book is weak when it deals with the ex-husband, who isn't given enough space to have much personality, but as an exploration of colliding cultures it is compelling reading.

Mareli says

wow I loved this story! I remembered very well from the first time I read it and I'm very glad I had the chance to read it again. Rohana is one of the most wonderful heroine in all the history of Darkover. I loved her so much. And Magda is another great woman. They are setting the lines for the future relationship

between Darkovans and Terrans

A great book!

Valerie says

This is the edition I have. I find, on checking the publication data, that this is actually the first edition.

As is common with much-read books, this one is shopworn. The cover is taped on (I didn't get very far in conservation classes, so I can only use what I've got at hand). The edges of the cover are chipped, there're torn bits on the cover, and parts of the book are stained and wrinkled, where it seems to have gotten wet.

A well-thumbed book, in fact, and part of the damage probably occurred before I obtained the book, since most of my books are second-hand.

The problems with the chronology persist. The first part is earlier than other books in the series (by internal chronology, that is), and the second part is later.

I find that there's a general misreading of the lives of some minor characters. The Melora who is (marginally successfully, on her own terms) rescued in the first 'book' of this volume is NOT the sister of Rohana Ardais. They were in the same Tower circle, and were thus very close emotionally--but genealogically they are cousins--both descendants of the Aillard clan, in which women have the laran and the Council right. If Melora had not been kidnapped, she might have become a Keeper, or have, in time, taken her seat on the Comyn Council, since her sisters and female cousins, to a woman, all either died or married into higher-ranking clans. Note that Melora's son, Valentine Aillard (children take the rank of the higher-status parent in the Domains) was named after Rohana's brother, Melora's foster-brother, who was tortured to death in an earlier unsuccessful rescue attempt.

Rereading the series after it's effectively completed leaves me dissatisfied with the inadequate stories of people whose lives never are fully followed up. It's not just the fact that Melora's life really isn't fully discussed. Rohana's occasional nostalgic memories of her own early life are never more than sidelights. It's also things like the fact that Melora is Cleindori's grandmother--yet though Cleindori was well-fostered, there's no evidence that she was ever told of her maternal history--something you'd expect an Aillard to learn.

Then there are other stories I wish I knew more of. There's at least one story about Kindra n'ha Mhari in one of the anthologies--but it doesn't really deal with the adventures of a woman who became a mercenary soldier, and who traveled, traded, and learned things all over Darkover. One hopes that records of her life were kept in the Guild House. But it's a shame that no ethnologist seems to have arrived from the Empire to interview people and record their life histories.

Then there's Valentine Aillard. He does appear in some other books (he was Valdir Alton's bredu, for example). Apparently Valentine and Valdir met at Nevarsin, after Valentine, who was fostered by his elder cousin Rohana (first cousin once removed, technically), was sent to Nevarsin to be educated; and there met the young Valdir, the third legitimate son of Valdir's father, who was sent to Nevarsin for the same purpose. But what became of Valentine after Valdir's father died, and Valdir became Lord Alton? It's likely that Valdir, who had only two living nedestro brothers (and two brothers-in-law), took his paxman along with

him to Armida--but Valentine is not mentioned in later books starring Valdir.

The second 2/3 of the book, which introduce other characters (including the influential but largely forgotten later Magdalen Lorne), might as easily have been a completely separate book. There's some linkage--but very nearly as many characters are introduced in the latter chapters as are carried over. Some never do play a very big part in the story. I almost always have to look up Margali n'ha Ysabet's oath-sisters, for example, and I don't think she ever really got to know most of them.

Other characters also never do get very well developed. There are said to be major differences between Kyril Ardais and Peter Haldane, in addition to the fact that while they look alike, Peter has five fingers on each hand, and Kyril has six (I always wonder, by the way, about toes). But the implied differences are not always obvious--even the emerging telepath Jaelle often doesn't realize how different, and how alike, they are.

I should point out that the elderly and disabled Gabriel Ardais (he's apparently suffered from a convulsive disorder most of his life) would evidently like to be more gentle and nurturing than his society permits him to be. Part of his problem is evidently that people have indulged his whims either out of fear of bringing on a seizure or out of fear of offending Rohana, who is fairly universally loved and respected. It's evident that Rohana is the main mover in indulging Gabriel, and that she's kept his disabilities concealed even from close family members for most of her life.

We'll get into Rohana's disappearance in later volumes; and those of other characters. For the present, best merely to remark that if the Darkover books are considered in the light of Earthly sagas (as founding myths on which later stories are imperfectly based), there's evidently material for quite a few more stories.

Berni Phillips says

Ah, comfort reads. I had not read this in decades. I was afraid the suck fairy would have gotten to it, but it was fine. But then, I'm not the most discerning of readers.

Pam Baddeley says

One of the Darkover series, this book is structured into three sections which each focus on a different woman. In the first part, Lady Rohana Ardais, a member of the ruling caste, has employed a group of women, called Free Amazons, to rescue a kinswoman of hers (not a sister as I see some reviews have called her) called Melora. Years before, Melora was kidnapped by a bandit of the Dry Towns, a part of Darkover where women are chained and treated as slaves. Melora and Rohana were brought up together in a Tower, a place on Darkover where those with psychic powers were trained, and were once close, and Melora has made a telepathic appeal to Rohana for help because her daughter Jaelle is old enough to be chained, and she herself is pregnant again by her abductor, probably with his son.

Women on Darkover are indoctrinated to accept men as protectors and masters, though not usually as brutally as in the Dry Towns, so Rohana has to defy her husband to hire the Amazons, women who have renounced men's protection, taken a long oath (which is printed at the front of the book), and who are organised into a system of Guild Houses. Her kinsmen won't send anyone else to try to free Melora following the gruesome death by torture of a foster-brother, Rohana's own half-brother.

In part 1, we learn of the personalities of some of the Amazons and Rohana herself, and how her exposure to living among them makes her start to question the certainties of her life which she previously took for granted. When she finally returns to her husband to face his censure, it is as a conscious choice to accept the downsides of her life as well as the positive aspects. She wants to foster Jaelle, but the little girl bonds with the Amazon leader, Kindra, on their long journey to escape, and becomes her foster-child.

There is a twelve year gap between parts 1 and 2 of the story. Part 2 is the story of a Terran woman who was born and brought up on Darkover apart from three years spent in her teens on another planet where she was trained to work in the Intelligence service. Magda is now facing frustration and a growing sense of not belonging in either world: she has been socialised as a 'normal' Darkovan woman who relies on men's protection, which clashes with her training as an intelligence operative to defend herself capably. As a woman agent, there are places she cannot go because of Darkovan attitudes, and although even her ex-husband Peter admits she is far more capable than he, and should lead the Communications section within which Intelligence operates, a buffoon with no sympathy or understanding of the culture is in charge, and she is largely relegated to writing this man's speeches and interpreting to make sure he doesn't offend the natives. Then Peter goes missing on a mission, and Lady Rohana informs them he has been abducted by a bandit who believes he is her own son because of a great resemblance between them. If Peter is discovered to be a Terran, he will be murdered, and he will be executed in any case at midwinter, if a ransom is not forthcoming. Magda takes up the mission and on Rohana's advice, disguises herself as a free Amazon as only such women can travel alone, but gets into difficulties enroute and ends up having to swear the oath to Jaelle - now a free Amazon herself - when her disguise is seen through. Magda finds herself increasingly torn: as a Darkovan, her oath is binding, but to her Terran identity and colleagues, one given under duress is meaningless. If she honours it, she will have to submit to Guild authority and be trained for six months in a Guild House, regardless of her service to the Terran Empire.

In part 3, Magda, Jaelle and the rescued Peter end up spending time at Rohana's house during the severe Darkovan winter. The issues in this part of the story are the continuing tension between Magda's two sided identity, the conflict between Jaelle's attraction to Peter and her sworn oath (she can be involved with a man and even have a child, but only if it is solely for herself, not to benefit or serve him), and the pros and cons of Lady Rohana's ongoing subordination to her husband, while practically running the place and organising everything not to upset him, because there turns out to be a medical reason for her solicitude. Also, perhaps because of being raised on Darkover, Peter has some unreconstructed patriarchal attitudes which begin to show in his relationship with Jaelle although she is too besotted to take any notice of Magda's veiled warnings about him.

This was quite a good adventure story with an ongoing psychological study of the differing roles and tensions between women and men and also between groups of women, plus women's internal battles to fit into a world that is not ideal, either the Terran based one or the native Darkovan one. One note seemed odd - why would a culture cut off from Earth for millennia name an organisation of women who want to live independently as 'Amazons', a name that would surely mean nothing to them. I've since discovered from starting the sequel that the author apparently revised this later to be a Terran mistranslation of a name that should more properly be 'Renunciates' as the women renounce men's protection in exchange for their independent living and mutual support.

Beatriz says

En esta entrega se adentra al lector en el mundo de las Amazonas Libres de Darkover, que se había

adelantado brevemente en El Sol Sangriento. Definitivamente, el tema del feminismo es el que Bradley maneja a la perfección, incluso en un mundo ficticio como Darkover en que crea toda una cultura antitecnológica en una sociedad eminentemente machista. Muy bueno.

Respecto de otras "experiencias lectoras" que he tenido últimamente, puedo decir que esta saga ha envejecido muy bien.

Chuck says

Yet even more on my Bradley kick; I had a heck of a last week and, to escape and cope, buried myself in the 'Renunciate Trilogy.' The Shattered Chain is the first; I understand that many Bradley fans consider it her best.

I think it's excellent; I would have to say that, so far, the second in the Trilogy, Thendara House, is the best, but Shattered Chain is superior, and, as an aside, I have to say it's amazing to me how much better a book this is than Two to Conquer (which I liked, but I mention because it was penned after 'Chain.'

SORRY--THIS WAS SAVED BEFORE I WAS DONE

As with most Darkover novels, you have intertwined narratives of a Terran and a Darkoveran. Lady Rohana, a woman of the Comyn, or telepath caste, is the Darkovan, and she begins a quest to save her sister, who has been kidnapped and taken to the Dry Towns. Fearing political and military reprisal, the men of her kingdom will not mount a rescue. She turns to a band of women warriors who are part of the Renunciates, a women's society that demands that women have choice. She rescues her sister and her sister's children, but the sister dies in the attempt.

Many years later, Magda Lorne, a Terran born on Darkover, realizes that her ex-husband, Peter, also a Terran, has gone missing. Lady Rohana alerts her that Peter may be held in a remote village long away as ransom, and warns her that any revelation that Peter is a Terran will result in his death. She suggests Magda travel disguised as a renunciate to save Peter.

Magda does so, but on the journey runs into a band of Real Renunciates, who are headed by Jaelle, Rohana's niece and daughter of the now-dead sister. Magda must either really become a Renunciate or face death, so, under threat of death, takes the Oath of the Renunciates. As she travels and learns more about the Renunciates, she comes to realize they are honorable and are, in some ways, more free from gender - inscribed roles than the supposedly advanced, technologically savvy Terrans.

The novel is, like many of Bradley's works, about the things Darkover and Terra can teach each other, about freedom, about gender roles, and about personal integrity in the face of demands made by society. It's really a superior book.

Morgan Dhu says

In The Shattered Chain (pub. 1976), Marion Zimmer Bradley explores both the quality and nature of relationships between women and the dimensions of power, control and equality (or lack of equality) in

relationships between women and men in a manner that recalls the consciousness-raising of the early years of feminism. Set after the events of *Rediscovery*, in which a Terran survey ship finds the lost colony on Darkover 2,000 years after it is founded, *The Shattered Chain* covers a period of 12 years, and introduced the Guild of Renunciates, or Free Amazons, into the world of Darkover. The novel, divided into three parts, focuses largely on the relationships of women - Rohana Ardais, Magda Lorne, and Jaelle n'ha Melora - with each other and with the men in their lives, but also provides glimpses into the lives and relationships of other women.

The *Shattered Chain* opens with a daring rescue of a Comyn woman, Melora, and her daughter, Jaelle. Kidnapped twelve years ago by a Dry-Town chieftain, Melora, pregnant with her kidnapper's only son, is desperate to escape or die before her daughter is chained, as all Dry-Town women are, at 13. She manages to telepathically contact her childhood friend Rohana Ardais, who defies the Comyn and her husband and hires a band of Renunciates, lead by Kindra, to free Melora. The rescue is successful, but Melora dies in childbirth on the way back to the domains, leaving her children in Rohana's care. Jaelle asks Rohana to foster her with Kindra, and Rohana agrees.

The second part of the narrative begins 12 years later, and tells the story of Magda Lorne, a Darkovan-born Terran Intelligence operative who spend most of her field time observing and reporting on the nuances of Darkovan culture from a woman's prospective. When her ex-husband Peter Haldane is held for ransom by bandits who mistakenly believe him to be the son of Rohana and her husband Lord Gabriel Ardais, and her superiors refuse to mount a winter expedition to save him, she turns to Rohana for help. Rohana advises her to pretend to be a Renunciate and deliver the ransom herself. While travelling, Magda's disguise is exposed by group of real Renunciates, led by Jaelle, and she is required to swear the Oath and become one of them in fact. Jaelle and Magda, now oath-mother and oath-daughter, complete Magda's mission but Jaelle is wounded. The three seek assistance from Rohana at the Ardais family seat.

The third part of the novel details the developing love affair between Jaelle and Peter, as they remain at Ardais over midwinter, and the consequences of this relationship for Jaelle, Magda and the others around them. This section of the novel is the most intimately focused, as both Jaelle and Magda examine their feelings for Peter, the relationship they have with each other, and their own needs for autonomy. Meanwhile, Rohana is assessing the costs and rewards of her own sometimes troubled relationship with Gabriel. As winter breaks, Magda, Jaelle and Peter return to Thendara, where Magda enters the Thendara Guildhouse to begin training as a Renunciate while Jaelle and Peter marry as freemates and Jaelle goes to work for the Terrans, in much the same capacity as Magda before her.

In many of the Darkover novels, MZB sets up contrasts between the status of women in different cultures and situations - Terran and Comyn, Comyn and Tower, Comyn and Renunciate, Tower worker and Keeper. *The Shattered Chain* adds into this range of possibilities the extreme limitation imposed on women in the culture of the Dry-Towners and the rejection of patriarchal control and protection implicit in the Guild of Renunciates. This is perhaps the most fiercely feminist of the Darkover books, and takes a close and critical look at the roles, lives and status of women in mainstream Darkovan society.

Grace says

This redeems MZB for me a bit, after that hideous "Forbidden Tower" crap.

Good thoughts about gendered behaviour and politics, and a fair amount of action. Still too much anguished

navel-gazing for me to ever want to read it again, but seriously - vast improvement over the last one of hers I read. But at the same time, none of the characters were particularly compelling, and the setting really doesn't do it for me. I've no interest in reading further.

But like I said, leaps and bounds better than the book that I ended up writing scathing paragraphs about. In this case, the short and sweet review is actually a form of approval

Brian says

Ah, the good old days. When the Terrans were still an Empire and when they knew that psychic powers were actually a thing that exists.

The Shattered Chain is about choice, and while I thought it was mostly going to be a kind of facile analysis on the level of "It's better for people to make a choice about their life than to be forced into it," which I think we can all agree with, it's actually a better book than that.

The basic story isn't super exciting and mostly serves as a vehicle to carry the speculation. It starts with a midnight raid on a Dry Towns citadel by a group of Renunciates and their employer Rohana to rescue a comyn woman from slavery, continues into the future with the life of Terran agent Magdalene Lorne and her attempts to rescue fellow Terran Peter Haldane from a bandit at the behest of Rohana, and ends with the Renunciates offering to work for the Terrans and ending a quarter-century of almost complete isolation between the Terrans and the Darkovans.

The commentary about choice along the way is the real reason for reading it, though, and I really liked how it got more nuanced as the story progressed. In the beginning, it's fairly obvious that being kidnapped into sex slavery is bad, but the section also serves to plant a seed in Rohana. By spending time with Renunciates, she gains a contrasting viewpoint to her own life as a daughter of the comyn whose whole life was laid out from her and when her niece Jaelle angrily renounces her birthright for the Renunciates, realizes that returning to her life as the lady of Ardais is actually a choice.

There's a similar thread after the timeskip, with Magdalene having to decide between loyalty to the Empire and the oath she swears to the Renunciates, whether oaths made under duress are valid (the Terran view) or whether your word is your bond (the Darkovan one), whether her love for Peter is mostly because he is the only man she spent any time around who understood what being raised on Darkover was like, and so on. Not bad, but still kind of a basic level of discourse.

What pulled this up to four stars for me was the conversation at the end between Rohana and Jaelle, where Jaelle is agonizing over her love for Peter but her inability to marry him due to her Renunciate oaths. Rohana points out that free choice is not always a good thing, with the specific example of marriages. There are plenty of couples who break up due to a single rough patch who might be able to stick it out and reach greater happiness on the other side if they had some kind of structure to their relationship--like marriage vows, for example--to provide an external constraint on their choices. And while in a Darkovan context, marriage vows are often literally chains, that doesn't mean that rejecting them entirely is a good idea.

Another major point is how so many choices are made with incomplete information. Jaelle did spend six months in Rohana's household to learn how the comyn lived, but she went in assuming she would hate it and her assumptions came true. And now that she has found someone she wants to dedicate her life to, her

Renunciate vows prevent her from doing so.

And I appreciate Rohana's comments about her marriage to Gabriel and how she initially hated it but came to love him. Statistically, there's no difference in happiness between love marriages and arranged marriages, after all. When people make choices that are different from ours, it's easy to assume that they're wrong, but that's a bad assumption.

This is all in a conversation in the end, though, and most of the rest of the book is slightly flat characters and a plot where not much happens, so I can't actually recommend it despite my rating. And the patriarchal paternalism on display among the Terrans, like how women are prevented from attaining positions of power on Darkover because of the locals' feelings, limits their use in contrasting with the Darkovans' culture, though admittedly I think that kind of attitude lasting into the space opera future is depressingly likely. With more interesting characters this could have been a great Darkover book, but as it is, it's merely an interesting one.

Next Review: Thendara House.

Miriam says

Background: a human colony ship crash lands on the wrong planet. They name it Darkover and do their best to survive. Over the centuries they forget their origins and develop a vaguely feudal society. The nobility, called the Comyn, is comprised of seven families of red-heads with different psychic gifts. Women have few legal rights and are the property of fathers and husbands. Renunciates, sometimes called by others the Free Amazons, are women who reject the social system and band together in groups for mutual protection.

In *The Shattered Chain* Rohana, a Comyn woman, recruits some Renunciates to help rescue her sister, who was kidnapped many years earlier by the even-more-sexist-and-abusive vaguely Middle Eastern-ish desert society that rarely has any role in this series where she was added to some lord's harem and never saw the light of day again. Her family refused to help her (because once she lost her virginity she didn't have any practical value to them), but now that her daughter Jaelle is twelve and about to be married off she begs Rohana to save the child. Pregnant with what is predicted to be her rapist's long-desired male heir, she uses her delicate condition as an excuse to get a private room outside the harem quarters so there is finally a chance at escape. Rohana, who has never really done anything on her own before, defies her family and travels across the desert with a small band of tough women.

I liked that all the Renunciates had their own personalities. I also admired Bradley for recognizing that the rescue itself is not the end of a victim's problems (view spoiler). The gender politics here aren't subtle, and the lack of any redeeming male characters [In this particular book. Although Bradley has her man-hating moments, she has plenty of sympathetic men in other Darkover books] may be off-putting to some male readers.

Edward Pagtakhan says

Bruh the romance subplot ruined the book
