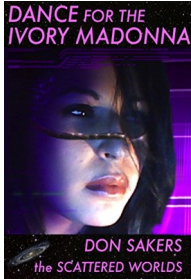




Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



Dance for the Ivory Madonna By Don Sakers *Discussed January 2003*

Discussion Summary

Due to some confusion about who was moderating this discussion, we had no pre-prepared questions. However, a summary of some of the topics and ideas touched upon during the discussion follows! As a special treat, the author - Don Sakers - was present for the discussion and joined in on many aspects of our chat.

The Nexus and Interdict - Would it be possible for something like the Nexus to come into being? Could the total isolation of Interdict be done? Is it/would it be morally "right"?

The idea of the Nexus was a fascinating one, taking the concept of every person having the ability to change to world to a logical destination. What *if* people simply did the things they wished they could to save the world from itself? Of course, it posits the idea that we'd have to hope that the people with ideas we approved of were the ones taking control, and in terms of the book, it's made clear that the Nexus is doing work of which most people approve.

The idea of Interdict was a fascinating one in our discussion. It's clear that for Interdict to work, there must be a significant increase in globalization (some thing that many of the progressive/liberal thinkers portrayed in *Dance for the Ivory Madonna* might be against in today's political climate). In addition, it would require a significantly higher level of dependency on technology and global communications on a ground floor level. That being said, the idea of cutting a geographical area off from the flow of data in such a system would certainly have significant catastrophic effects on that area. Interdict would be a deterrent with real teeth. Whether it is morally "right" or not is a harder nut to crack. Should the populace be punished for the choices made by their government? It would be an easy system to abuse without the strictest of controls on who could use the power and under what circumstances.

Writing Style and Choices - Did the divergent timelines hinder your ability to follow the story? Did you find them to be a positive or negative storytelling choice for you? Did the choice to set the story so close to our real time affect its believability?

In general, this didn't seem to be a problem for anyone in the group, perhaps because it's a technique we've seen used before. Indeed, there seemed to be a general consensus that the interplay between the peeling backwards of The Ivory Madonna's life story and the moving forward of the primary story worked quite well together.

The believability of the near future aspects did cause some issues for some readers. Given the pace of technological advance, it took a lot of suspension of disbelief to see the world getting to the place it was in the story in such a short time. It wasn't, however, a difficult enough suspension to ruin the story.

Africa, Tragedy and Rebirth - Did you feel the devastating "future" of Africa was an accurate portrayal of where Africa is headed? What about the rebirth of Africa as something of a corporate government and social system?

There was little disagreement about the devastating present and future we see for Africa in the wake of the AIDS epidemic there. Indeed, the most difficult thing to believe about the portrayal of Africa was that recovery could occur so quickly given the horrifying direction they're headed in.

The governmental system of the new Africa was an intriguing concept that everyone thought might actually work as a social/governmental system.

The United States Splintering - What did you think about the concept of the splitting up of the United States into several countries? What about the relationship between the various new countries?

Having seen this concept before, particularly in Keith Hartman's *The Gumshoe, the Witch and the Virtual Corpse*, it seemed to make sense as a potential future. The enactment of the secession amendment made it more believable that it could have happened with little bloodshed. Clearly there are pretty concrete divisions within the country right now, and allowing the splintering of the nation would ease those divisions in some ways.

One particularly disturbing issue was how little attention the Ivory Madonna and others seemed to pay to the atrocities in the Christian States, despite the clearly identified lines of communication and the spy network set up within the Fundamentalist theocracy.

Questions to the Author: The Self Publishing Adventure - Having gone through the traditional publishing route in the past, how have your experiences been with the self publishing route? What have been your biggest surprises? The biggest obstacles? Would you do it again or recommend it?

Don talked about the changes in the publishing business that were prompting many mid-list (steady moderate sellers without blockbuster sales) writers to search for alternatives to keep their writing careers alive. Small and medium size publishing houses, electronic publishing, and self publishing are all starting to see some real success stories filling the niches left behind by the conglomeration of major publishers and a short term focus on big hits to the bottom line. He had been pleasantly surprised by getting a self published novel reviewed in some prestigious places, like *Publisher's Weekly*, but cautioned that it was still quite tough for anything outside the major houses to get noticed. *Dance for the Ivory Madonna* has broken even and is now earning a profit, so in financial terms it's been at least a minor success, though in reality the numbers sold would make it a failure in the eyes of a major publisher. This route is certainly not for everyone right now, and would be unlikely to benefit a new writer without a history of major house publications. Moving forward, he'll continue pursuing mass market paperback publication for the book, but is looking toward a sequel to be originally published in the same way.