



Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



Carnival
By Elizabeth Bear
Discussed April 2007

Discussion Questions

1. *Carnival* has been described as a combination of "a first-contact novel of sorts and a political thriller." How well does Ms. Bear combine these two genres? Does the combination "work" for you?
2. When people mention the word carnival, they often think of parties, masks, games, and giving free rein to enjoyment - in other words, New Orleans-style Mardi Gras or the TV series *Carnivale*. How well do you feel the book's title and the subtitles of its two parts (*The Festival of Meat*, and *The Mortification of the Flesh*) fit the story?
3. Everyone seems to be wearing a "mask" of one sort or another in this novel. In your opinion, what does Ms. Bear seem to be saying about the trust-doubt dichotomy (politically, socially, emotionally)?
4. How well do you feel Ms. Bear incorporated the alien species (the Dragons) into the storyline? How did the inserted (italicized) thoughts of "Kii of the explorer-caste" either contribute or distract from the developing plot?
5. What did you think about the back story about Earth society (i.e. the origins of the Great Cull, the Governors, the Assessments, and the Coalition Cabinet)? Is it plausible? Does it add to the story?
6. What do you think of the way Ms. Bear depicts the high-tech gadgetry in the story, either Earth-based (spaceships that reconfigure, programmable wardrobes, etc.) or alien (the living houses of New Amazonia)? Did you have a favorite piece of techie stuff?
7. In *Carnival*, Ms. Bear sets up three different utopian socio-political systems, each of which attempts to control the negative/destructive impulses of its members in a different way: (1) the New Amazonian female-dominant society; (2) Earth/Coalition society, with its Governors and Assessments; and (3) the Dragons, with their absolute democracy and biochemical, retroactive Consent. Do you think Ms. Bear is advocating one of them in preference to the others? What does she seem to be saying about utopian systems in general?
8. Michelangelo Osiris Leary Kusanagi-Jones and Vincent Katherinessen are long-term lovers who - after a long, enforced separation - are reunited for an important political project. Did you enjoy the way Ms. Bear depicts their relationship (both old and renewed)? Did it seem realistic to you? Did their different political

motives and their opposing abilities (Michelangelo = Liar; Vincent = super-perceiver) contribute to your enjoyment of the story? If so, how?

9. The novel's Epilogue has proved to be controversial in some fanish circles. How did the Epilogue contribute or detract from your enjoyment of the story?