



## The Children of Kings

*Deborah J. Ross , Marion Zimmer Bradley (Creator)*

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A Novel of Darkover®

Millennia ago, the planet Darkover, a cold world orbiting a giant red sun, was settled by a lost colony ship from the Terran Federation. Alone on a new world, survivors interbred with the native chieri, psychically Gifted alien humanoids. The children of these matings were Gifted with telepathy and other psychic abilities, and their descendants, the aristocratic Comyn, forged a civilization in which the arts of the mind were cultivated and cherished. When the Terrans rediscovered Darkover, the seven Domains of the Comyn struggled to maintain their unique culture and independence, often at a terrible price. More than once, assassins and environmental saboteurs from the Terran Empire attempted to bring Darkover to its knees and erode the native culture for the benefit of the Federation—seeing Darkover as nothing more than a port of call for Terran mili-tary and trade. Eventually, a vicious interstellar war forced Federation forces to withdraw from Darkover, but Darkoyans knew that it was only a matter of time before they would return.

Prince Gareth Elhalyn has grown up in the shadow of his legendary grandfather, Regis Hastur, one of the greatest leaders Darkover has ever known. But he is also haunted by fear of the insanity that is so prevalent in his Elhalyn family line. His world has become an unbearable counterpoint of meaningless aristocratic frivolity and dangerous political schemes—plots in which powerful lords attempt to use him to further their own ambitions. Overwhelmed by the memory of his famously brilliant ancestor, and fearful of the family's genetic weakness, he tries his best to better himself through the study of languages, swordplay, and training his psychic laran with his grandmother, Linnea Storn-Hastur, Keeper of Comyn Tower. But Gareth cannot stop dreaming about a future without fame or family specters. His romantic spirit longs for escape from a life he feels is unfulfilling and limited. In a desperate attempt to remove himself completely from the restricted life of the Comyn, Gareth confesses his desires to his powerful grandmother, and with her blessing, disguises himself as a simple trader and travels to Carthon, on the border of the barbarous, warlike Dry Towns. The Dry Towns do not live under the rule of the Comyn, and no one in this isolated part of Darkover will recognize a Comyn lord.

In Carthon, protected by his guise of anonymity, Gareth overhears rumors of deadly, illegal Terran blasters being used in the barren lands beyond Shainsa—one of the main Dry Towns. If the Federation has returned and is now arming the bellicose Dry Towners with banned technology, it will mean a disastrous conflict for the Comyn of the Domains, who have long sworn themselves to the Compact, an oath of honor that forbids the use of distance weaponry. Venturing deeper and deeper into the desert lands, Gareth stumbles upon a terrible reality no one could have suspected and he is ill-prepared to deal with.

But in fact Gareth holds the key to protecting his world, if he can only stay alive in the deadly Dry Towns long enough to discover what it is....

Cover art by Matthew Stawicki

## The Children of Kings Details

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## From Reader Review The Children of Kings for online ebook

### Elisabeth Waters says

It was a lucky day for Darkover fans when MZB chose Deborah to continue her work. Deborah has done a remarkable job of matching Marion's 'voice' for her world while continuing the series. In this book, much of the action occurs in the Dry Towns, an area that Marion wrote very little about. If Marion had written about them, however, this is what they would have been (Deborah cleverly drew on some of Marion's very early work: *The Falcons of Narabedla* and *The Door Through Space*). It's a wonderful story--I read until nearly 2 am this morning because I wanted to know what happened next, right up to the very end of the book. And now, of course, I want another Darkover novel.

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### Hilary says

3.5 stars

It's not often that another author can pick up an established world and run with it, but Deborah Ross has done a great job taking over Darkover, updating in some places and expanding in others. This is one of the latter, as the focus moves away from Thendara and the towers and into the heretofore-ignored Dry Towns and desert areas (amongst others - but I won't include spoilers). Culture clash, societal expectations and a hard look at the inner self make the traditional coming-of-age story something new.

The beginning is a little clunky, and it takes a while to get going, but it kept me reading late into the night, and it was worth every second.

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### Morgan Dhu says

*The Children of Kings* (pub. 2013), focuses on Gareth Marius-Danvan Elhalyn y Hastur, the oldest son of Dani Hastur and Miralys Elhalyn, grandson of Regis Hastur and Linnea Storn. Last seen in *Traitor's Sun* as an angry adolescent manipulated by Javanne Hastur and Francisco Ridenow, Gareth has grown to be a more tempered young man, chafing as others of his kin have done before him at the restrictions placed on a Comyn Heir. As heir to Elhalyn, he is destined to inherit a wholly honorary title. Thanks to years of inbreeding and other misfortunes, the Elhalyn line is seen as being tainted by mental instability and a lack of intelligence. Thanks to his youthful mistake in listening to Javanne, many see him as either weak-willed and easy to manipulate, or a potential traitor. He longs to prove himself, to be useful, and to get away from sycophants hoping to entangle him in their marital or political schemes.

The novel begins with the departure of Mikhail and Marguerida on holiday to Armida. After seeing them off, Gareth inadvertently "overhears" snippets of a telepathic conversation between his cousin Domenic, acting Regent in Mikhail's absence, and Danilo Syrtis, advisor now to three generations of Hasturs. Domenic, who possesses a previously unknown form of laran which can sense geological activity, has perceived unusual tremors which may have been caused by the landing of a spacecraft.

Curiosity aroused, Gareth follows Domenic and Danilo as they slip out of the Castle, and observes their meeting with a Dry-Town merchant who appears to be their agent. Suddenly embarrassed over spying on his

friends and seeing something he ought not to have seen, he wanders aimlessly around Thendara before, ending up in the city's caravanserai quarter - where he is struck with the idea of running away to Carthon, to be free of his life for a while and to see something of life. When he encounters the trader he saw meeting with Domenic and Danilo, he makes up a cover story and asks to travel with him.

Two days later, with only his grandmother Linnea and a household retainer having any idea of where he is headed, Gareth sets out on his adventure.

In Carthon, staying with the merchant Cyrillon (who has received a message from Danilo Syrtis alerting him to Gareth's identity) he hears rumors suggesting that Terrans have landed in the desert and are trading with the tribes for blasters. Cyrillon is equally concerned by this and agrees to take Gareth to Shainsa. Gareth is guided into the desert region that appears to be the source of these rumours by Cyrillon's daughter Rahelle, who travels with her father disguised as a young boy apprentice.

When he discovers the landing site of a group of offworlders, Gareth attempts to persuade them not to trade blasters to the local tribespeople. They dismiss his concerns, but take him on as a labourer. He learns that they are arms smugglers intending to use Darkover as a base for rendez-vous with customers - mostly planets rebelling against the remains of the Federation, now known as The Nagy Star Alliance. He also discovers that the blasters are no more than cheap trade goods, obsolete and nearly depleted.

Meanwhile, Linnea has discovered that the reclusive Silvana, Keeper of Nevarsin Tower is in fact her long-lost daughter Kierestelli - who believes that Regis and Linnea abandoned her, and wants no personal contact with Linnea. While Linnea mourns losing her daughter a second time, Silvana, in emotional turmoil, returns to the chieri who raised her. There she learns that Regis had in fact returned many times to look for her after the threat to her was over, but that her foster-parent had "closed the Forest against him" for reasons that are not entirely clear. She also learns that the chieri are aware of Terran spaceships near Darkover, and fear that eventually Terran ships will return to wreak horrible destruction on the planet. They give her a special starstone, a heartstone, imbued with memories of the chieri, and tell her to use it to contact them when the need is greatest. Silvana then returns to Nevasin.

What especially pleased me about this section is that Silvana's visit shows us what happened to s'Keral and David Hamilton from *The World Wreckers*. They are both living in the Yellow Forest, though David is now quite old - and s'Keral is pregnant again. More, their first child Lian is also pregnant.

Back in the Desert, a party of warriors from Shainsa led by Hayat, the son of the Lord of Shainsa arrives at the smugglers' camp seeking blasters, and Gareth acts as the go-between in negotiations, which take several unfortunate turns. When a message reaches the smugglers from their client that they are being tracked by a former Federation warship, the smugglers decide to abandon camp, leaving behind the "trade goods" for the Shainsa warriors. The captain gives Gareth a warning: "Get clear of this base but stay away from any place that has a space port. I know there's one up toward the big mountain range. When the sharks catch up with the Castor Sector ships, they'll like as not decide the rebels have set up a base there. The way things are going, they'll bomb first and ask questions later."

After the smugglers leave, Hayat takes the blasters, but before heading back to Shainsa, he takes a Dry-Town religious amulet Gareth is wearing - actually a hiding Place for his starstone - saying that in working for the Terrans, he disgraced his faith. Hayat and his men ride off, leaving Gareth reeling from the effects of losing contact with his matrix. Even so, he knows that even if he does not survive to see Thendara again, the Domains must be warned of these dual threats from Shainsa and from space. Trying desperately to reach Linnea, he instead manages to send the warnings to Silvana in a dream - demonstrating that he, like Silvana, carries the Hastur gift of the living matrix. Silvana passes what she has perceived on to Linnea, who realises that the message comes from Gareth.

Rahelle takes Gareth back to Shainsa, where her father waits for them, but once there, Gareth decides to challenge Hayat for his amulet, and also to accuse him of bringing useless weapons to his father, in the hope that he can dissuade the Lord from going to war against the domains. He mortally wounds Hayat, thus proving his challenge, and takes back his starstone - which he then uses to save Hayat's life, as explosions in the skies speak of battle in near space.

Back in Thendara, Jeram, whom we met in *The Alton Gift*, has received a distress call from a rebel ship, the *Grissom* - the smugglers' customer. Damaged in a fight with a Star Alliance ship (which they destroyed), they need to set down to make repairs, and present themselves as allies. Domenic, acting Regent as Mikhail is still on holiday, offers them sanctuary as long as they respect Darkovan neutrality and Darkovan law - including the Compact. The Captain of the *Grissom* reluctantly agrees.

Not long after they land, a warship from The Star Alliance hails them, demanding the *Grissom*. When Domenic asserts Darkovan neutrality, the starship refuses to recognise it, and gives them an hour to reconsider before the city is destroyed along with the *Grissom*. As the Comyn Tower circle prepares to attempt to destroy the ship, Linnea contacts Silvana to say good-bye. Silvana, knowing that no human telepath circle can succeed, uses the heartstone to contact the chieri, who are able to disarm the battleship, rendering it incapable of attacking Darkover. The ship retreats from Darkovan space.

As the novel ends, all three children of kings - Domenic, Silvana and Gareth - are together in Thendara, celebrating Midsummer as kin. Gareth resigns his claim to the Elhalyn Domain and the kingship, to be a liason between Domains and DryTowns - and to be free to marry Rahelle.

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## Coreena says

Don't read "high fantasy" novels? I didn't either, at least before this book. I won an advance copy in a goodreads giveaway as I wanted to read something in a different genre. I had been reading a lot of urban fantasy (stories set in modern times) lately.

I was skeptical about the book: Would I be able to follow the story? (MZB was a very prolific sci-fi writer. The world in this book is contained in many - maybe all - of her works. This is the first of her or Deborah J. Ross' books I have read.) I was pulled right into the story, following the "black sheep" of the family, Gareth. I had little trouble following his journey, and really enjoyed seeing him grow from spoiled prince to responsible and thoughtful adult by the end. The sweet story between Gareth and Rahelle appealed to the romantic in me, too.

While I think it would have benefitted me to have read other Marion Zimmer Bradley books set in this world, I still very much liked the read. I would say if you want to read this then go ahead and don't worry about reading any of the other books by these author(s). I plan to put more of her books on my "to-read" list!

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## Sylvia McIvers says

I liked the Darkover books. I really did. This book, on the other hand...

There are two plots. Which is more boring or cliched?

Our Intrepid Young Hero realizes that he'll never get any respect in the city, so he goes off for an adventure. Yada yada, he meets a girl, he meets foreigners, the girl is spunky, the strangers who know his family help him, the strangers who don't know his family try to use him or kill him. Or both. He manages to do magical things even though he's only half trained. When he gets into a situation that half kills him, he manages to mind-shout for help, which he - according to the in-universe rules - should not be able to do. Oh, he's special alright. And guess what? SpunkyGirl(tm) falls in love with him! Gosh, never saw that one coming.

Our Intrepid Young Hero's Grandmother once had to give up her baby because Reasons, and when she and Grandfather went to look for Baby, she was nowhere to be found. Now, after decades of searching, Grandma finds Daughter (who is Hero's aunt?) completely by accident, while both women are doing something slightly out of character for them. The plot-hole is gently glossed over in the emotional reaction. And just like the Hero's story, the Path of True Love(tm) runs rough, then smooth.

Yawn. This book is so formulaic, you can check off all the plot milestones on the list. And you can look at the checklist because the story is not emotionally gripping enough to make you forget that formulas exist for a reason.

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## **Marie Parsons says**

The Children of Kings is a worthy successor in the continuing story of the world of Darkover.

Darkover, as created by Marion Zimmer Bradley, was colonized by humans who, after generations of living on this strange alien world, and a few incidents of mating with the indigenous alien chieri, now possess psychic talents and abilities. While their own society has become somewhat medieval in feel--with feudal loyalties given to the now noble Comyn families and using swords and daggers- the Darkovan humans have been drawn back into galactic contact with the rest of the human Federation. The Federation, with its starships, technology of metal and blasters, sees Darkover as a precious possession and wants to own it.

Deborah J Ross has united all the magnificent elements that have made Darkover so wondrous. Characters like Gareth, the protagonist of this novel who could be King himself, or like his aunt Silvana/Stelli, the firstborn child of Regis Hastur and his Linnea fostered by chieri, rise from feeling unworthy, unwanted, out of place, to realizing they have and can make choices that affect and shape their entire world. Characters like Merach, a man of high honor and dignity-- to some is little more than a dusty desert savage--yet he sees his way to helping his lord form new alliances that will change Darkover for generations.

Some must choose how, or if, to choose weapons--whether these are blasters that could level an entire city, or are psychic abilities that could bring down a starship. Some must choose to see past the strange other, whether that is a Dry-Town savage lord or a scion of an often mentally incompetent noble line.

Gareth begins this story as the un-confident prince who is certain everyone thinks he will never amount to anything, or, want to use him as a weakling puppet. So he leaves his home secretly, half-hoping only for adventure, but eventually finds that he holds the key to saving not only his home city, but can bring about an alliance never before attempted, a bond between two cultures. Along the way, Gareth also finds that love can also be his, not just mere simpering romantic love, but a love of strength, acceptance, and fervent devotion.

Darkover stories have always at their heart been about transcendent acceptance-not only one's own acceptance of who and what one is, and not only the acceptance, of one, by others. Darkover's tale of

acceptance is the story of how, in the very act of accepting oneself and of the other--which too often is perceived as an act of weakness or simple naivete--instead, brings about a unity of soul and spirit that carries with it immense power and purpose.

The Children of Kings definitely does not disappoint, in this regard. It opens another brilliant chapter into a world of future possibilities, where not only do humans travel between the stars, not only find destiny and heart's home in the strangest of places, but also, find that they can do anything wondrous, build anything marvelous, if they find the way to do it together.

Well done, Children of Kings. Be warned, once you begin this book you will want to continue through to the end.

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### **Sdluvingit says**

I'm a big fan of the Darkover novels. When Bradley died I just assumed, incorrectly, that was the end. When I heard about The Children of Kings I discovered that there have been others taking up the tales of this wondrous and mysterious place. In Darkover, Bradley created a rich and imaginative world full of interesting cultures, mysterious powers and a great historical narrative. In this third novel, Deborah J. Ross has shown herself a worthy heir to Bradley. Darkover is a world home to non-human sentient races and humans descended from colony ships from Terra long forgotten until they were rediscovered. Some of the human inhabitants (the Comyn) developed great mental powers (laran). Miss-use of these powers in the distant past gave rise to the Compact that forbade all weapons that did not put the wielder into as much danger as the target. Few realized that this abuse of mental powers was the main purpose of the Compact and not modern weapons. The exposure of Darkover to rest of the galaxy has put the Compact under great stress.

This is the story of Gareth Hastur, heir of the Comyn and the Seven Domains. Because of unfortunate events he is thought a fool and incompetent, unworthy of the throne, and his laran weak, making him useless to working in the Towers; in his own words, a parasite on the Domains. Hearing rumors of strange happenings out in the desert cultures he decides to strike out alone to discover the truth and to earn himself a worthy place in Comyn society. The story draws you forward as Gareth searches out his destiny, learning about himself and his heritage. Ross does an excellent job of providing the historical back story so you can read this without prelude, but it would that much more enjoyable to have read Bradley's stories to guide you. If you are a fan of Darkover, you will not be disappointed and if are new to Darkover please go back and read Bradley's books and you will become a fan.

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### **Gregg Wingo says**

"The Children of Kings" is the last in a series of make-up stories for the Darkover series by Deborah J. Ross. These are set in the "present day" of the chronology unlike her Clingfire trilogy. The first published (second chronologically), "The Alton Gift" concludes the Margaret Alton trilogy done by Adrienne Martine-Barnes under Marion Zimmer Bradley's name and advisement. The second published and first chronologically, "Hastur Lord" explains how the Regis Hastur, Regent of Darkover and a confirmed homosexual, ended up being a married heterosexual and progenitor of a vibrant dynasty.

"Children" picks up on these stories and expands them to other generations. It also moves the story in the direction of space opera. Ross is taking the series into places Marion was not interested including less mental, physical, and sexual abuse. We will definitely lose something in this transition from gender roles and

culture clash to fantasy and adventure. Ross has the following to say on the evolution that has occurred for her:

"By the end of the sixth book (The Children of Kings), I realized how much of my own imagination colored the story and its landscape. I found myself drawn away from the characters and situations that Marion had envisioned, and toward those I had invented. I believe it's a healthy thing, to simultaneously allow for the introduction of new characters, themes, and resonances, at the same time staying true to the spirit of the world, a wondrous place of telepaths and swordsmen, nonhumans and ancient mysteries, the clash of cultures between a star-faring, technologically advanced civilization and one that has pursued psychic gifts and has turned away from weapons of mass destruction. It's an engraved invitation to gritty, romantic, action-adventure, gender-bending, inclusive, poignant, uplifting stories!"

I think the fun will remain but not the questing that was the real highlight of reading the Darkover series.

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### **William says**

This is, I think, the final book in the Darkover series started by Marion Zimmer Bradley. It is a very worthy final chapter and finishes the saga pretty well if it does in fact end there. I have been reading/rereading the entire series and enjoying it.

Notes about the Darkover series itself:

One of my favorite series. Over the years I'd read many books from it, out of order of course. This is, in fact, the way MZB wrote them, out of order. It shows a bit when trying to read them consecutively. There are slight continuity issues here and there. In fact, Ms. Bradley herself admits that that is the case. It's not a huge thing, and doesn't detract from the enjoyment very much.

Thank you, Deborah J. Ross for continuing the series.

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### **Fredrick Danysh says**

Prince Gareth does not fit in on Darkover His sense of adventure leads him to the Dry Towns and beyond where he uncovers off worlders who sell forbidden weapons. He also discovers a plot against his own people by a Dry Town noble. Keepers of the Tower use their telepathic powers to fight destruction of Darkover by a foreign star system. This is a good science fiction read with a touch of romance.

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### **Kathy Davie says**

A novel set in Marion Zimmer Bradley's Darkover series. The focus is on Regis Hastur's grandchildren---what they're doing, how they're coping---and Regis' missing daughter. As usual, outside forces are creating problems and the ruling Comyn are struggling to be true to themselves and to their world.

### **My Take**

This story about Darkover is written using Marion Zimmer Bradley's stories and notes. And it's reasonably well done, although a tad juvenile in its character depiction and actions with a slight fumble in that Ross misses the depth of Bradley's warmth and the full richness of her writing. Otherwise, Ross has pulled enough of the feel and flavor of Bradley's Darkover that I want to start the series all over again. Of course, it will be so much easier with the Internet, LOL. Yup, I'm old enough to remember life before easy access to

information, and I absolutely adore the world wide web! It so satisfies my need for data and order.

As Gareth considers: "Freedom is a matter of how we choose our chains."

Which sums up the main theme: acknowledging our chains, whether they are worn openly or those of the mind.

It's too cute that Gareth is still imagining himself as a super secret agent, an influence of childhood novels--- Race Cargill, Terran Secret Agent. It helps make him both normal and rather pathetic, reinforcing the frustration with which Ross has infused his character. This journey will make him. He will come to learn the true meaning of the blood in his veins. Not what he had thought it meant. I have to confess that I am surprised he was as clueless as he was when he first arrived in Carthon, the immaturity reflected in his thoughts and actions.

As desperate as Linnea is to find her daughter after all these years, this was just too easy and too improbable. Somewhere in all those years, I'm sure that Comyn and Nevarsin towers must have communicated.

It's the most amazing world that Bradley created. Centuries of tradition, of family, wars and alliances, culture, economics, betrayals, evolution. I am so pleased that Ross carried on with this story. Part of me hopes she will continue. Part of me hopes she will be very, very careful not to get careless with Bradley's legacy.

Ooh, I like that bit about the embroidery and its purpose on clothing. I do recall having heard this reasoning before, and I'm pleased for the reminder.

I still don't understand why the *chieri's* actions regarding Regis and his daughter, especially when they claim to honor him.

### **The Story**

Gareth is fed up with his uselessness, with how everyone looks at him and sees only a crazy Elhalyn. Raised on the stories of his grandfather's exploits, Gareth is determined to have his own adventures and heads off to the Dry Towns.

The Compact is everything, every thing, on Darkover. Learning of the possibility of a Federation ship whose captain is handing out blasters to Dry Towners, Gareth intends to discover the truth of it and prevent such a violation of the Compact.

An adventure on which Gareth will learn so much about himself.

### **The Characters**

**Gareth Marius-Danvan Elhalyn y Hastur** is the uncrowned prince fed up with his uselessness and how the rest of the Comyn perceive him---and encouraged by the stories of his grandfather's adventures. His father is **Danilo Hastur**; his mother **Miralys** is a royal Elhalyn. He also has a brother and a sister: **Derek** and **Regina-Javanne**. **Narsin** serves the Hastur family and tries very hard to protect Gareth. It seems that Gareth did something very stupid and treasonous in his youth. Well, younger youth!

**Dom Mikhail Lanart-Hastur** is the current Regent of Darkover; **Lady Marguerida** is his wife and Lew Alton's daughter. **Domenic Alton-Hastur** is their son and a regent-in-waiting. Domenic's Gift is to sense geological conditions. He's with, but not married to, **Illona Rider**, a non-Comyn with a Psychic Gift working

as an under-Keeper at Comyn Tower under Linnea. And she's pregnant.

**Regis Hastur** is/was Gareth's grandfather. **Javanne** was Regis' sister, and Regis adopted her son, Mikhail, to be his heir. A promise he kept even when Regis' son, Gareth's father, Danilo Hastur, was born (he refused the regency and the lordship of Hastur to marry Miralys, taking him out of the line of succession). **Danilo Syrtis-Ardais** had been Regis' *bredu* and is still Linnea's close friend; he is family. Linnea Storn-Lanart was Regis' wife; now she is a Keeper who is giving her grandson, Gareth, private lessons in the use of his *laran*. **Kierestelli** is the daughter born to Regis and Linnea during the time of the World Wreckers. Protecting her was paramount; losing her was devastating.

#### *Dry Towners*

**Cyrillon** is a merchant who has dealings with Danilo and Domenic, but he's a very atypical Dry Towner. His trading party includes **Korllen**, cook; **Tomas**; **Alric**; and, **Rakhal**, who is one of the camp boys who handles the horses and the *oudrakhi*. **Rahelle** is Cyrillon's daughter, who educates Gareth in the freedom of the chains the Dry Town women wear.

**Lord Dayan** is a Dry Towner and lord of Shainsa. **Lord Merach** of Shainsa is the sword arm of Dayan. **Hayat** is the spoiled son of Dayan.

**Adahab** is the oldest son of **Rivoth**, the headman of the village Korllen is from; he will guide Gareth and Rahelle further into the desert. **Cuinn** is the village headman whose interactions with **Captain Poulos** of the *Lamonica* will have such a strong effect. **Offenbach** is the ship's mate. **Robard**, **Taz**, **Viss**, **Jory**, and **Lakrin** are the men with whom Gareth works. **Deester** is the captain's bodyguard.

The *Grissom* is a rebel ship in need of repair; **Harris** is the captain. The supposed Federation ship, *Dauntless*, is tracking them.

**Jeram**, Jeremiah Reed, is a *Terranan* renegade, who stayed on Darkover when the Federation left. Now he monitors for radio activity about the Federation and teaches other Darkovans how to use it, including **Cassandra Haldin**, **Hermes Aldaran**, and **Ethan**. **Vistarín of Temora**, **Octavien MacEwarin**, **Rufus DiAsturien**, and **Lorrill Vallonde** are all trying to befriend Gareth for their own purposes.

**Silvana** is the Keeper of the Nevarsin Tower. **Lew Alton** appears more as a reference; he's an old man now who has suffered two heart attacks and has retreated to Nevarsin.

**David Hamilton** is living with the *chieri*; he mated with **Keral** and they had a child, **Lianantheren**. **Diravanariel** is the *chieri* who threw Stelli out.

I suspect I've missed some stories as the Federation has left Darkover to battle rebellion amongst their worlds. The **Compact** is an ancient code of honor that requires men to fight with weapons that bring them within reach of each other. It is intended to prevent Darkovan use of the weapons of the mind.

*Laran* is the psychic ability possessed by the Comyn and some of the Darkovans. Over the centuries, the survivors of that initial shipwreck learned to use their *laran*, they bred for it, and as the rulers of Darkover established their domains, certain Gifts became exclusive to certain domains: "the **Ridenow** were celebrated for their empathy" and the **Altons** could kill with their anger and force a rapport with anyone.

Today, many of the Gifts have been lost: the **Aillards** are almost extinct and no one alive remembers what the **Elhalyns** could do.

#### **The Cover**

The cover is a soft blend of lavenders to almost-pinks as the suns rise over a spaceport while Gareth and Rahelle, holding back their *oudrakhi*, looking over it.

The title sums it up as this is a story about *The Children of Kings*.

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### **Leslie says**

With the addition of writer Deborah Ross, this series just gets better and better!

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### **Peggy Hall says**

I just couldn't get into this story.

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### **Helen-Louise says**

Written by Deborah Ross, not Marion Zimmer Bradley, despite what the cover says, but read the author's note at the beginning. She makes a good case for her credentials to write such a book. And it is a good story. She takes a rather different view of the Dry Towns than in earlier books - the view of Dry Towners themselves. Her lead character, Gareth was a bit of a whiny pampered kid, but he grows up during the book. I will be looking to see if MS Ross has written any more Darkover books.

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### **Brian says**

I think the main reason I gave this five stars is because it does something different.

Through most of Darkover's publishing history other than *The Shattered Chain*, the Dry Towns have been the weird frontier that does weird things without much actual background or exploration of their culture other than as honor-bound desert-dwellers who fight all the time and keep their women in chains. And it's true that in *The Children of Kings*, most of the expansion of their culture follows those lines and the only real surprise is that the Dry Towners don't have *laran*, which is odd, because in *Stormqueen!* we learned that the Ridenow had their origin in a group of Dry Towns bandits. And it's also true that the Dry Towns makes very little sense considering the rest of Darkover's climate.

But surprisingly, I didn't care that much. While I reading, I was really interested in Gareth's plot to head off to the Dry Towns and I eagerly looked forward to what he would learn about the world there. He starts off as a coddled prince who no one trusts and everyone assumes will just turn out to be another ineffectual-at-best and insane-at-worst Elhalyng king, and that drive to prove himself leads to him disguising himself as a merchant and running off. Then he hears rumors of men vanishing in blasts of light in the deep desert, realizes that it must be Federation weaponry that is the cause, and has to make a decision between his duty toward his ancestors and the Domains to keep himself safe, and his desire to neutralize a threat to the Domains as a whole and prove that he isn't just another useless blue-blood wastrel. The choice between freedom and duty always makes the best Darkover stories, and that's the case here just as much as it's true anywhere.

There's also another plot dealing with Linnea, Regis Hastur's wife, and her attempts to find Regis's lost daughter, which seems like it's from *Hastur Lord*, which I haven't read. This might have fallen a bit flat except for the involvement of the *chieri*, which are one of my favorite parts of *Darkover*. Yes, they're Space Elves and as stereotypically so as it's possible to be, but I'll give Bradley credit for coming up with most of their defining characteristics--living in true harmony with nature, immense psychic powers, being a civilization that had powerful technology but gave it up for a simpler existence, and slowly going extinct--before they all becomes codified into a popular archetype. And considering how much influence they have on *Darkover*'s history, the nonhuman species on the planet are underused. This book doesn't have enough information to remove the mystique of the *chieri*, but it has tidbits and reveals that even against the might of a starship, the *chieri* are not defenseless.

The ending is pretty cliched and leaves some questions: (view spoiler)

, but that wasn't enough to retroactively ruin the rest of the book for me. After the disappointment I found in the last few books, I'm glad that I found this one much more interesting.

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