

# **The Demon Breed Short Guide**

## **The Demon Breed by James H. Schmitz**

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# Characters

The main character of the novel is Dr. Nile Etland, a young woman of no extraordinary powers (like "psi") but a remarkable combination of intelligence, knowledge, and nerve. A biochemist and native of the planet, Nandy-Cline, on which the novel takes place, Dr.

Etland has arranged to keep tabs on Dr. Ticos Cay, an elderly but very hale researcher into the life-forms of a "floatwood" island, searching for biochemical methods of lengthening the human life-span. It is between her monthly visits to the island a sort of huge jungle adrift on the ocean currents of Nandy-Cline, that the Parahuans, a race of sentient amphibians from an empire adjacent to the Hub, capture Dr. Cay to question him.

Dr. Etland reaches the island with Sweeting, a mutant hunting-otter who speaks, discovers the desperate scam that Dr. Ticos Cay is trying to pull on the Parahuans, and decides that she must go along with it, at her peril. She must rely on her deep knowledge from childhood, of how to hunt on the Floatwood, in order to appear to be an invincible "Tuvela" until she can smuggle out a message to warn the rest of the planet. She and Ticos are often frightened during their ordeal, but they conceal their fear from the Parahuans and press on.

The Parahuans are based on the Axis powers of World War II. Like the Fascist empires of the mid-twentieth century, the Parahuans are organized into rigid hierarchies, with a few very powerful individuals at the top and the vast majority of the population at the bottom. The "Palachs" command enormous power, wealth, and longevity, although they are not born into their social position but have risen through the ranks. The "Oganoon" are conditioned to unquestioning obedience through fear: A Palach can kill one in a fit of pique with impunity.

The humans and their nonhuman allies of the Federation are organized along more self-reliant lines. The principal characters among them have sufficient audacity, imagination, and initiative to begin immediate resistance based on their own strategy. They are not the first humans to encounter the Parahuans on Nandy-Cline, but they are the best-equipped to deal with them. Schmitz calls these types of characters "anti-predators." They are the mirror-image of the predator: They have similar aggressiveness but lack its greed and callousness. When not needed, they return to harmless pursuits.

The Federation preserves this policy by turning its population's attention toward nonbellicose events as soon as possible after the news of the Parahuan defeat on Nandy-Cline gets out.

## Social Concerns/Themes

The Demon Breed, a novel of adventure and battle set on one of the Federation's water planets, is thematically the most complex of Schmitz's novels. It explores the issue of survival in an unpredictable universe and what strategies work best for a sentient species over the long haul. The Demon Breed is an ecological novel which includes sentient species like humanity as intimate parts of ecological systems, subject to the same laws that govern the competition among lower forms of life. The crucial difference between intelligent and unintelligent life-forms in matters of competition is that intelligent forms must make choices, such as long-term implications of their strategies. In this novel Schmitz presents a confrontation between two intelligent species who have made this choice very differently.

The two societies meet on the planet of Nandy-Cline. The way they interact is the result of choices made by the invaders, the Parahuans. The Parahuans are a warrior society; they choose to interact with other species as enemies or as allies in war. They are very successful professional predators; they have succeeded before in destroying entire competing species and taking over their territory. Now against the Federation of the Hub, composed of Humans and their nonhuman allies, the Parahuans plan to expand their range again.

The Federation of the Hub is a society of trade and industry, one at peace after centuries of wars among the star systems that now compose it. It has taken on the difficult task of civilizing its inborn aggressiveness, neither eliminating it, nor allowing it to run wild.

The drives for power, wealth, longevity, predictability, and perfectibility are common among intelligent species. The reward for supremacy in Parahuan society is that they may indulge these drives without limit, at the expense of any creatures they happen upon. It is a formidable society of indiscriminate ruthlessness.

How, then, is such a highly specialized military machine to be resisted?

Schmitz's answer may be unsettling, for he puts forth in this novel what could be called a policy of defensive discriminate ruthlessness. Schmitz calls the Federation a "balanced anarchy" where complacency gets no encouragement. The Overgovernment deliberately maintains a "hands-off" policy in areas where it could be more efficient, in order to foster initiative to solve problems on the planetary level by the local citizenry. Developing initiative is not a painless process, but it does not produce the dreary regimentation of a society constantly at war, nor a stifling bureaucracy where the citizen is in danger of being either degraded or infantilized by his government.

Primarily a work of entertainment, and not a serious treatise on the arts of warfare and defense, The Demon Breed is nevertheless carefully and imaginatively thought out. The modern appreciation for the ecology of natural systems is displayed here in the detailed descriptions of Nandy-Cline's floatwood island environment. A modern appreciation for

one's adversary is also notable; the Parahuans are portrayed, not sympathetically, but with an understanding of their integrity as villains. Once they have decided on a course of action in the context of their culture, they are not diverted by anything but a strength that exceeds their own.

# Techniques

The story develops by setting representatives of the sentient species at war with each other in a microcosm: a strange floating island in an isolated sea. A quick acid test will determine the quality of each culture by seeing who will survive the next few days in the most desperate of circumstances.

At stake are not only the lives of the people immediately involved, but the survival of a planetary culture, and other similar worlds beyond.

The Parahuans, old enemies of the Federation and losers in a previous clash almost a century before, have returned secretly to certain water planets of the Hub. They plan to conquer those planets, expanding their empire and redeeming themselves for their earlier defeat. Only one factor prevents them from launching a new war of conquest: The leaders are split into two factions at odds with each other over whether a new war can be won. The two factions, called the Voice of Action and the Voice of Caution, need an important piece of information from Dr. Cay before they can resolve their differences.

The Parahuans cannot believe that such a loosely-governed, egalitarian society like the Federation has succeeded in repulsing them and similar invaders. They believe that theirs is such a perfect society that only one similar in organization could successfully oppose them. Therefore, they have hypothesized that a secret class of immortal superintelligent rulers, "Tuvelas," is actually running the Federation. Dr. Cay plays along with this theory, hoping to frighten the Parahuans into retreat before a planetary war begins.

Not surprisingly, the Parahuans' style of warfare, like that of the Axis high commands, shares the strengths and weaknesses of a hierarchy where most of the initiative is concentrated at the top ranks. Their strong suit is detailed, intelligent planning and preparation in advance, carried out in secrecy and with precision. Their weaknesses are their vulnerability to sabotage of the top levels and their lack of imagination outside military matters.

They have overspecialized.

Schmitz demonstrates his theme dramatically by creating an adversary for the Parahuans who hits them directly in their vanity. Young, female, and alone, Nile Etland should be no match for the well-armed and numerous amphibians. Yet she not only evades capture, but begins the work of "decapitating" the Parahuan organization with a combination of skill and quick thinking to capitalize on her luck.

# Copyright Information

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