

The Doomsday Conspiracy Short Guide

The Doomsday Conspiracy by Sidney Sheldon

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Contents

The Doomsday Conspiracy Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Characters.....	3
Social Concerns.....	4
Techniques.....	5
Themes.....	7
Adaptations.....	8
Key Questions.....	9
Literary Precedents.....	11
Related Titles.....	12
Copyright Information.....	13



Characters

The Doomsday Conspiracy Sheldon Incontinues his practice of making most of his characters stereotypes. His hero Commander Robert Bellamy is a young officer who is shot down himself and is severely wounded, after shooting down a record number of enemy jets in Vietnam. His future wife, Head Nurse Susan Ward, nurses him back to health. He goes on to become one of the best intelligence agents in the National Security Agency. Fluent in six languages, he proves himself to be invaluable on many European assignments. The work constantly bothers his conscience and also breaks up his marriage, and he plans to resign after he has completed his current assignment.

Susan Ward first sees Bellamy in a hospital ward in Vietnam, and makes him a special object of dedication. This beautiful blonde is as determined and heroic in her profession as Bellamy is as a naval flyer. She marries him, and their love life seems a thing of perfection until the demands of his work force them apart.

After a space craft crashes near Uetendorf, Switzerland, only a beautiful white female survives. She has lost part of her communicator and cannot contact the mothership. While investigating the crash, Bellamy finds the missing part without being able to identify it.

Admiral Ralph Whittaker is the person whom Bellamy considers his best friend, his mentor during most of his career. The Admiral's son had been killed when Bellamy had been shot down in Vietnam, and the old veteran had looked upon Robert almost as a second son. The Admiral had been director of the Office of Naval Intelligence, but was replaced by Dustin Thorton, Bellamy's chief enemy, a strictly go-by-the-book intelligence officer who detests Bellamy's integrity and frequently unorthodox methods.

He is the son-in-law of Willard Stone, a billionaire man of mystery with sinister connections all over the world.

The director of Bellamy's final mission is General Mark Hilliard, who as a steely-eyed ramrod is a familiar military type. Bellamy is to make his reports exclusively to him as he searches for witnesses to the UFO crash. The General contacts Janus, the leader of a secret society whose chief mission is the suppression of all the information that might leak out to the public on extraterrestrials. The society consists of a multinational group each of whose members is a stereotype of the nation he represents: "The German. Aristocratic. Ruthless; The Japanese. Polite.

Sly; The Englishman. Snobbish. Dangerous/' and so on.

Susan Ward's second husband Monte Banks is an unscrupulous industrialist who has already polluted many of his own country's lakes and streams and who is planning to buy thousands of acres of Amazon rain forest, where he will continue his usual practices. He is also involved in the Doomsday Conspiracy. Susan only belatedly becomes aware of how murderous and greedy her current husband is.

Social Concerns

In *The Doomsday Conspiracy* Sheldon exposes the failure of the military and other governmental organizations to tell the truth about certain events that they would prefer not to explain. The rationale is usually: Why alarm the public unnecessarily about phenomena they cannot understand? Since the authorities themselves are basically ignorant about extraterrestrial beings, they, rather than making any attempt to meet them and learn their purposes, automatically classify their appearances as enemy action.

Robert Bellamy is hoping to end his career in espionage soon. He has worked for years with organizations that violate almost every standard of decency. He has decided that the benefits derived from espionage do not outweigh the lies, manipulations, and broken promises that have characterized his world over the years. Dehumanization is the price paid by all too many of those people who protect our national security.



Techniques

The Doomsday Conspiracy is a hybrid piece of writing that employs the methods of romance, mystery, and science fiction stories. An ideal couple at the outset of their love affair, Robert Bellamy and Susan Ward enter a marriage which ends in divorce because his frequent absences and the secrecy and dangers of his work cause tensions that she cannot endure. Sheldon must arrange his plot so that despite her second marriage this pair can be reunited.

Certain elements of the standard soap opera can be seen here.

A tour bus has stopped where the UFO, apparently a kind of shuttle craft, has crashed. Bellamy on what he is determined to make his last assignment, has been ordered to find all of the passengers who were on the tour that day and report their names and addresses to General Mark Hilliard.

Each tourist meets what is made to appear an accidental death. The conspirators murder a number of people who live in various parts of North America and Europe. One of Sheldon's favorite techniques is to take his readers to many parts of the world. The Northwest Territories, Canada, Texas, London, Budapest, and Italy are part of the itinerary this time. Having fulfilled his assignment, Bellamy learns the fates of the people he has hunted down. He realizes that he also is to be eliminated by the organization headed by the mysterious Janus. Readers of Sheldon's other novels may guess that Janus is the person whom Bellamy trusts the most, Admiral Ralph Whittaker.

A beautiful woman in white survives the crash of her space shuttle. Having lost the crystal that would enable her communicator to function, she is in danger of dying because she has difficulty finding the nutrients and water she requires. Bellamy goes to the scene of the crash and soon realizes that what came to earth was not a weather balloon as the authorities insist but something quite different. He finds the crystal. This part of the novel parallels the motion picture ET (1982), except that Sheldon takes his stranded alien a beautiful female. Book Two is called "The Hunted," and features Bellamy in Italy running from Janus's agents. The alien appears to him in a dream, and he senses that he must go back to Switzerland to meet her. An elusive eleventh witness had been seen by some of the people he had contacted. He finally realizes its identity. In Switzerland Bellamy meets the woman in white; in her presence he feels totally serene and he gives her the crystal. He has arranged with General Hilliard to bring Janus to Uetendorf. A helicopter brings the General, Monte Banks, Susan, and Admiral Whittaker, who is revealed to be Janus. Janus orders the capture of the woman in white and the execution of Bellamy. Whittaker had deliberately undermined Bellamy's marriage by sending him out of the country as often as possible. But the Admiral is in for a surprise. Another agent, Colonel Johnson, who had been working for him, has infiltrated Janus's organization in order to spy on its members. He arrests the Admiral and announces that all the members of his group were being rounded up. The woman in white's mothership appears and in a scene reminiscent of Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977), including the music accompanying its landing, resolves the story.

This *deus ex machina* takes Admiral Whittaker, General Hilliard, and Monte Banks, when it leaves. They must be reeducated: "When they have learned, they will be brought back here." The woman in white gives Bellamy his new lifelong mission; he must stop the devastation of planet earth. He and Susan are reunited. In this plot, Sheldon employs ideas and images likely to be familiar to his audience.

Themes

A romance and marriage that is almost idyllic ends in divorce. A young naval intelligence officer experiences the anguish of being separated from a woman he continues to love. She had found living with a person who is frequently absent and who constantly faces danger more than she could endure. This is a common theme in police dramas, military stories, spy tales, and it reflects real-life stresses on marriages.

Extraterrestrial beings of superior intelligence who become alarmed by what blundering humans are doing to their planet is also a frequent feature of science fiction. The aliens are sentient plants who communicate through mental telepathy. Sheldon takes up the cause of environmental protection in this book. Certain industrialists are afraid that these beings will stop their exploitation of the earth's resources and form a secret society to prevent this. In Chapter Ten, the topic of plant intelligence is discussed. Sheldon has researched this possibility. His Professor Rachman at the end of the chapter says: "There is no doubt about it. It's been proven over and over that living plants have intelligence."

Adaptations

Sheldon, having bought back the rights to *The Doomsday Conspiracy*, plans to write a screenplay version. To date, he has given no indication of when he will bring this play to movie or television audiences.



Key Questions

Generally Sheldon prefers giving women the chief roles in his books.

Robert Bellamy is the first male protagonist since *Stranger in the Mirror* (1976).

Several times a year he has a column in *The Writer*, in which he explains his choice of main characters: "I really enjoy writing about women. I think they are more interesting than men, more complex and more vulnerable.

Since my novels have an element of suspense and danger in them, vulnerability is important." (August 1994: 5-6.)

Of course, as in most of his novels, in *The Doomsday Conspiracy* he is using a familiar pattern: the woman in distress, victimized by brutal sadistic males.

Bellamy as a target of a murderous conspiracy is also highly vulnerable.

Sheldon would be a good ally in the cause of environmental protection. He has already shown himself to be an able fighter against censorship, defending his books against the charges of immorality. He also champions education and programs to eliminate illiteracy in America. He has spent a great deal of his fortune supplying books for libraries.

1. Who is the most interesting character in this book? Why?
2. Is Sheldon as good a writer of spy novels as others in the field, John Le Carre or Ken Follett, for example?
3. How convincing are the superior vegetable beings that Sheldon has created? Is the woman in white merely another one of his vulnerable females?
4. Unlike the attitude he displays in earlier books, Sheldon in *The Doomsday Conspiracy* criticizes certain international businessmen. Constantin Demiris in *The Other Side of Midnight* (1973) is an exception, but he is an extreme case.

How do Willard Stone and Monte Banks compare to him? How well developed are they as characters?

5. How successful is Sheldon in making foreign scenes believable to the reader? What are his methods in accomplishing this?
7. Would Sheldon be an effective writer of soap opera?
8. Has Sheldon successfully portrayed the anguish and loneliness of a divorced man in the flashbacks on that period in Robert Bellamy's life?



9. Which of the two books comprising this novel, "The Hunter" and "The Hunted," is more effective in holding the reader's interest?

10. Motion pictures based on Sheldon's books have not been notably successful. He has bought back the rights to *The Doomsday Conspiracy* and intends to make this novel into a movie. If you were planning a movie, which parts of the book would you use? Should other portions be eliminated altogether? Who would you select among today's leading stars for the leading roles?

Literary Precedents

No single work of literature seems to be the source of Sheldon's novel. He borrows freely from several of popular literary genres, the romance, mystery stories, espionage thrillers, and science fiction. He has also been influenced by cinematic techniques — quite natural for someone with many motion pictures and television shows to his credit.

Related Titles

The Doomsday Conspiracy is Sheldon's first experiment in science fiction. Most of his other books, however, involve mystery and international intrigue.

Parallels among his novels may be seen in secret organizations such as in *The Windmills of the Gods* (1987), which involves a terrorist organization that wants the Cold War to continue. *The Sands of Time* (1988) presents nuns from a Spanish convent on the run from a fascist officer who wants to kill them.

Sheldon's first novel *The Naked Face* (1970) was a highly praised murder mystery.



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