

# **The Heirs of Hammerfell Short Guide**

## **The Heirs of Hammerfell by Marion Zimmer Bradley**

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# Characters

Erminie, a leronis with psi powers in the tradition of Bradley's wise women, is a traditional mother figure solicitous of her children. She is blind, however, to the spoiled nature of her son Alistair. As the plot develops, Alistair encounters his own heritage in the form of his brother Conn. The two brothers are opposites. Alistair is urbane and arrogant, while Conn is steeped in the sturdy and egalitarian traditional culture. Alistair, possessed of all the civilized advantages, is yet denied the special power of laran, which Conn possesses. The patriarchal tradition, however, decrees the firstborn will rule Hammerfell.

The conflict between the brothers is reconciled through romance, as Conn is inescapably drawn to the accomplished Floria, his brother's fiancée, and Alistair, called to join forces with Storn to uphold the oldest tradition of fire fighting, falls victim to the charms of Storn's grandniece Lenisa. The two women are also complementary, one a pampered and petted social butterfly, the other a sturdy and forthright country girl.



## Social Concerns/Themes

Turning from historical romance to more traditional roots in science fiction and fantasy, Bradley goes back to the early days of Darkover as the setting for *The Heirs of Hammerfell*.

Those unfamiliar with the history of Darkover are brought up to date in a brief preface. From the time a stray Terran starship landed on the planet, Darkover passed through the Age of Chaos into the Age of the Hundred Kingdoms, a feudal period dominated by the House of Hastur. Hastur is ruled by a hereditary aristocracy called the Comyn, which emerges to consolidate its rule in the Seven Domains.

Ultimately, the technologically advanced Terran Empire rediscovers and reestablishes contact with Darkover.

Prominent in the Darkover fantasyscape are the priestesses of Avarra and the warriors of the Sisterhood of the Sword, who preserve a tradition of wise warrior women in the restrictive world of patriarchal Darkover. Also prominent are the matrix technologies which evolve in the Comyn clan to embrace various psi powers, including laran, a telepathic ability to enter other's minds and thoughts, and clingfire, a terrible mental weapon.

*The Heirs of Hammerfell* is set in the earlier part of Darkover history when the Hastur lords are establishing their hegemony over outlying domains.

Among these are the wild and remote Hellers, whose mountains separate the Seven Domains from the Scathfell lands beyond the Comyn Compact. Two of the Heller clans, Hammerfell and Storn, are locked in a blood feud, which appears to take a decisive turn when Storn destroys Hammerfell castle and its Duke Rascard. Erminie, the young Queen of Hammerfell, and Alistair, the elder of her twin sons, find refuge in the bustling, wealthy capital city of Thendara. Alistair's younger twin, Conn, is separated from his mother and brother during the flight and raised in secret by a loyal retainer.

Once they are reunited in Thendara, the brothers return to the Hellers to confront Lord Storn. After a raging forest fire and some romantic mix-ups, the clans of Hammerfell and Storn are united through the marriage of Alistair to Lenisa, the grandniece of old Lord Storn.



## Techniques/Literary Precedents

The desire of self and society to transform and restore itself has always been the staple of romantic comedy, as have been the lost twin, the quick reversal of romantic objects, and the signatory marriage ending, complete with lutes and song. In this most recent novel in the Darkover series, Bradley continues to emphasize the mythic and archetypal roots of fantasy.

Reminiscent of Shakespearean romantic fantasy, *The Heirs of Hammerfell* uses many traditional devices — parallel journeys from country to city, the encounter of civilization with nature and artifice with artlessness, the quick reversal and reconciliation between brothers and lovers, and the last minute conversion, as in the case of the warlike Lord Storn, who renounces the feud and allows the marriage/reconciliation to take place. Topics are also familiar from Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). Darkover is in transition from its feudal beginnings into a sort of Renaissance, wherein the glittering Hastur dynasty establishes its sway, and the freer, more unrestrained old ways disappear. The transition involves the enclosure of common lands familiar from More's dialogue, and a controversy between true and false nobility, and heroic and humane values. Characters are transformed by their experience of the Hellers and emerge with a less rigid, more celebratory senses of themselves and others.



## Key Questions

This charming fantasy romance, with its good share of action and a picturesque setting, would be a good read for young adults, even middle-schoolers.

Other readers, especially Darkover fans, will appreciate its clear and simple presentation of the key dichotomies which govern the Darkover series.

1. How do the two brothers, Conn and Alistair, act as foils for one another? How do the different circumstances in which they are raised contribute to their character? How are they finally reunited to reclaim their heritage and unite Hammerfell and Storn?

What special qualities does each bring to their common quest?

2. How are the two young women they choose in marriage, Floria and Lenisa, a perfect match for each of the brothers? How does their influence contribute to the reconciliation which ends the novel?

## Related Titles

The Heirs of Hammerfell is part of the early history of Darkover, part of the feudal period known as the Age of the Hundred Kingdoms. The Darkover novels number more than twenty, with Hammerfell the first since *The City of Sorcery*, published in 1984.



# Copyright Information

## Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

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