

# Killashandra Short Guide

## Killashandra by Anne McCaffrey

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# Characters

Killashandra is one of McCaffrey's most complex characters. She is a selfpossessed, gutsy, intelligent woman with a light sense of humor. She is also capable of tremendous antagonism in order to get what she wants, is sometimes compassionate, and is rather obsessive in all her relationships—whether crystalline or masculine. While McCaffrey has been praised for her "subconscious" feminist agenda (she does not admit to being a feminist), some critical studies of Killashandra note an interesting paradox.

While she is admittedly strong and selfwilled, her greatest pleasures are found through submission: first, to the Ballybran symbiote, then to the seductive danger of singing crystal and crystal-thrall, and finally to the men in her life.

While Killashandra is demanding and manipulative, she is also unable to see how easily she is manipulated by men.

Lanzecki, Guild Master in *Crystal Singer* (1982), places the Guild first in his life.

He pushes Killashandra into finding black crystal soon after her startling Milekey transition, which puts her in great danger.

As Lanzecki describes it, her finding crystal is demanded by the Guild and by himself; anything else she gives him (stimulating conversation, food, or sexual pleasure) is a gift, to be enjoyed only for the moment, which he decides.

Lars Dahl is equally manipulative. He kidnaps Killashandra to try to gain her sympathy with his group, which seeks to overthrow the government of Ophtheria.

Fortunately for her, she was assigned to repair the Ophtherian organ and investigate complaints made by this very group.

Their ensuing intimate relationship has powerful effects on Killashandra; but after many love scenes between Lars Dahl and Killashandra, a reader must wonder how much of the relationship is political and sexual, and how much is honest love and commitment—by both parties.

Perhaps Killashandra's greatest appeal is that, in her complexity, readers can find their own strengths, weaknesses, and concerns reflected in her.

## Social Concerns

When critics discuss Anne McCaffrey's startling female characters, Killashandra Ree is a prime example. McCaffrey created Killashandra of the Heptite Guild of Ballybran in reaction to macho space operas, as well as in response to her own extensive knowledge of the opera world and its vocal standards. McCaffrey's female character has it all—a fulfilling career with extravagant perks and privileges, good looks, male attention, long life, and respect for her intelligence and power. But McCaffrey is also a foresighted reactionary. This maverick author (who admits to many similarities to Killashandra) honestly illustrates the drawbacks of this "success": the paradox of working hard to get away from crystal but being inextricably drawn back; and suffering infertility, debilitating memory loss, and alienation from other humans.

The Heptite Guild requires that applicants have "perfect and absolute pitch."

With this strange and stringent requirement, it is no surprise that Killashandra and other guild members have extensive musical training. Here, McCaffrey explores the physical and psychological power of music. First, music serves a very practical purpose, as perfect pitch is needed to be able to identify the dominant notes of the crystal being cut and to tune the cutter to that note or harmonic variants. A strong sense of pitch and harmony is needed to identify and repair malfunctions of engines with crystal drives. Also, musical talent is used as a means of manipulating others. First, Killashandra uses her knowledge of opera characters such as Lucia, Lady Macbeth, or Isolde to cope with her own problems and to perform her own scenes of bluff and dazzle for officious agents and audiences. At a more extreme level, music on Ophtheria's organs illegally controls the emotions of the populace through subliminal undertones and neural stimulation.



## Techniques/Literary Precedents

Killashandra's plot puts McCaffrey's hero through a series of adventures in order to discover the secrets hidden by the placid Opthirian rulers. Frequently, McCaffrey breaks off the chapter at a cliff-hanging moment, which helps the novel maintain a rapid pace. Killashandra also assumes a series of disguises: as a guileless music student for Corish (another spy for the FSP), a lusty island wench for Lars Dahl before she reveals her identity to him, and a demanding, masterful Heptite Guild member for the Opthirian Council. Frequently, Lars Dahl wonders which woman he loves. This woman of many disguises and roles performs, as her training would imply, like a fine opera diva.

In spite of the warmth generated by Killashandra's relationships with her beloved Lars Dahl and the annoying Optheria Council, Killashandra herself comes from a rather cold and distant world. Her home world of Fuerte lives by the FSP right of Privacy—no intrusion is allowed in one's private life, nor is one even required to share space with anyone else. Ballybran is a harsh world, beaten by violent and deadly storms, and socially isolated by a Code 4 listing— a dangerous and restricted planet. With this background in *Crystal Singer*, putting Killashandra on a balmy, happy-go-lucky island world gives a new view to her character.

In contrast to the Pern series, which is science fiction but is not technology dependant, the *Crystal Singer* series is conventional science fiction, sporting the hardware of sleds, identification bracelets, crystal cutters, and intergalactic travel.

The potential cosmology is as extensive as Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series, while her adventure intrigue and romantic explorations are much like Robert Heinlein's later novels of Lazarus Long and the Howard families.

## Themes

McCaffrey focuses on Killashandra's drive to excel as a performer and a crystal singer. Killashandra herself notes that her desires to be a Stellar-class opera diva and a crystal singer are actually the same: to be first-class. Both professions also emphasize solo performance—to be the only center of attention, in operatic productions or in dramatic crystal-mounting or repair. While Killashandra seems rather blind to her obsession, the reader soon sees the dark side to her virtuoso drive.

This professional compulsion is much like crystal-thrall, which blocks out memories of the past and thoughts of personal safety, and which inhibits compassion for others and encourages selfish elitism.

Killashandra explores the vices and virtues of excellence and ambition.

# Adaptations

Two of the Crystal Singer series novels have been adapted and abridged for audio books: *Crystal Singer*, two cassettes/three hours; published by Dove; read by Adrienne Barbeau. Reviewed as a strange mixture of Barbeau's hard tones with a light, airy tale of communion and personal triumph; and *Killashandra*, two cassettes/three hours. Also read by Adrienne Barbeau. Younger listeners will more greatly appreciate Killa's anti-authoritarian behavior and sharp tongue.

Good narration.



## Key Questions

In some advice she gave to aspiring novel writers, McCaffrey offered the piece of advice she wished she had received when she wrote her first novel.

She said she had to: "Stop trying to make myself the heroine of a highly unrealistic and, I'm sure, ridiculous gothic fantasy."

However, often there is some aspect of a character in a novel, particularly when that novel is centered on one character, that is somewhat autobiographical—a name, a talent, an attitude. And, as Killashandra Ree is one of the earliest of McCaffrey's female characters, she has more than her share of these traces of McCaffrey's personal attitudes, tastes and contradictions. Consider, then, how Killashandra is created: how much of her is romantic heroine, space jock, feminist exemplar, prima donna? And, as McCaffrey notes, how much is "not that interesting anyway" and what makes her a unique character?

1. How is the character of Killashandra Ree a reaction to the typical macho, blood-and-thunder/thud-and-blunder space opera?
2. How do allusions to classical music and music training illuminate Killashandra's talents and character?
3. What benefits and drawbacks are there to being a crystal singer? Would the life of a crystal singer appeal to you?
4. What points does McCaffrey make regarding the importance of memory and character?
5. What assumptions are made regarding the power of music to affect emotion, and to control emotion. Do you agree with these assumptions?
6. How does Killa's communion with crystal change her views? How does it affect the narrative? Does it have any symbolic meaning?
7. What narrative strategies does McCaffrey use to simulate the emotional impact of crystal-cutting? Do these emotions seem real to you?
8. Is Lanzecki a friend to Killashandra?

Is Lars Dahl?

9. The Crystal Singer trilogy is conventional hardcore science fiction, with its details of space travel and technology.

How do these details compare and contrast with the Dragonriders of Pern series?



## Related Titles

While *Crystal Singer* is the first novel about Killashandra Ree, she originally appeared in short stories, which were rewritten into the novels. One short story, "Killashandra—Coda and Finale," tells of Killashandra's eventual mental deterioration, betrayal, and murder. While her future does not seem very bright, her story has been rewritten in *Crystal Line* (1992). While not considered her best novel, it is the last novel of the *Crystal Singer* series.

McCaffrey takes pains to tie her fictions together in a single universe through various hints and allusions. In *Dragonsdawn* (1988; see separate entry), McCaffrey identifies the Pern colonists as members of the Federated Sentient Planets (FSP), the result of Earth's extraterrestrial growth. In *Killashandra*, the galactic ruling body is also the FSP. *The Ship Who Sang* (1969) introduces us to Helva, the brain of a FSP ship, with various brawns/ humans as companions. In this novel, Killashandra leaves Opheria with Samel and Chadria as the brains-and-brawn combination of her Scout ship.



# Copyright Information

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