The Lodge of the Lynx Short Guide

The Lodge of the Lynx by Katherine Kurtz

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Contents

Characters

The three main characters of The Lodge of the Lynx are all welldrawn, but distinct from each other. Sir Adam Sinclair is a man of many roles: medical doctor and psychiatrist, scion of a noble house, patron of the arts, and Adept. As the latter, he reports to higher powers on a mystical plane.

Physically, he is a man of middle age with dark hair and eyes and a lean but fit physique; he rides, and appreciates good food and fast sports cars.

The reader follows him on many daily rounds, which may take him from hospitals to country estates to civic meetings. In pursuit of clues he also goes to such locales as antiquarian book shops and museums. Despite a rather detailed immersion in Adam's schedule, the narrative reveals little about what makes him tick. Nowhere do we learn about his childhood, his inner fears, or even whether he ever had a serious romantic relationship in his past. Perhaps this fits an accomplished man of mystery: the focus is on his present work and life. Yet while it makes him interesting it does not necessarily make him warm; the reader is more likely to watch him with fascination than to identify with him.

However, as the series goes on we do learn more about Adam. In The Lodge of the Lynx his mother appears for the first time. Philippa Sinclair is now in her mid-seventies, but she still runs a psychiatric practice in New Hampshire and is a lively and imperious presence wherever she goes. She inducted Adam into her own occult interests, although there is also more than a hint that he performed Adept's duties in his previous incarnations.

The second triad member is Noel McLeod of the Lothian and Borders Police. His appearance and manner is very like one might imagine of a Scottish police inspector: He is gruff, given to wearing wire-rimmed aviator's glasses, with blue eyes and a bristling, sandy mustache. His wife Jane is always trying to find a quiet evening that they can spend together. Yet they have a good, solid marriage despite Noel's many obligations. Noel has some hobbies outside his multiple roles. He makes origami, learned from a Japanese colleague, and paints decoy ducks. In his capacity as police spokesman, he also tries to offer rational explanations for disasters actually caused by occult forces. When confronted by grisly crime scenes, McLeod is still capable of shock and horror, but quickly pushes his outward reactions aside in order to perform his duties.

The third main character is Peregrine Lovat. When first met in the preceding novel, The Adept (1991), he is already a success with his art. Some of his paintings hang in the Scottish National Gallery, and he receives commissions from wealthy patrons. Yet he is a most unhappy young man. Unwelcome visions intrude on his work. When he draws, he often sees his subjects' past lives or their future. The strain and confusion are almost more than he can bear. Only Adam recognizes his problem as one of uncontrolled psychic powers rather than personal adjustment. Under the Adept's tutelage, Peregrine

learns to stretch his psychic wings. This releases his abilities. He becomes able to draw past events and their perpetrators when looking at the site of a crime. Obviously this ability is valuable to the Hunting Lodge. Peregrine is equally eager to join them, and in The Lodge of the Lynx he passes a series of tests which admit him to full membership.

Of all the characters, Lovat develops the most in the course of this novel. He is also the one whose emotions and sensitivities are closest to the surface.

Because of his youth, slight build, and reserved manner, some who know him slightly assume that he is either gay or socially inept. Neither is true in Lovat's case. The assumptions illustrate the hazards of jumping to conclusions.

Peregrine Lovat also shows that not all human problems can be sorted into neat psychological slots. Crises of the soul are just as valid and wrenching as those of identity or social adjustment.

Other characters in the lives of these three are also well presented. Adam's mother Dr. Philippa Sinclair is one of the most vivid and admirable older women to appear in contemporary fantasy. Readers may also want to see more of Dr. Ximena Lockhart, a jaunty American physician who sews up Adam's injuries after a car crash. She later spends a romantic night with him, but serious involvement has to be postponed while both deal with more pressing duties.

The members of the Lodge of the Lynx, in contrast, are not very distinct characters. Perhaps dealing with dark forces has blanched their personalities.

They are planted in various professions, but they fail to stand out even in these settings. They also live in fear of making mistakes; the Head-Master to whom they report is grim and unforgiving. Indeed, it is hard to imagine why Napier, the policeman, or Wymess, the emergency room doctor, work for the Lynx. The only reward seems to be the promise of power.

Kurtz and Harris have not exactly used these characters to make a statement about the banality of evil. But their unhappy lives run counter to the fictional images of evil as glamorous. In this book, the good guys are the ones with a touch of glamor in their lives.

Considering the dangers they survive, they richly deserve it.

Social Concerns

At first glance The Lodge of the Lynx seems not very concerned with social issues. It tells of a struggle between good and evil, fought with such weapons as lightning bolts and ancient tores. The main characters live in present day Scotland, but they engage the dark forces largely with psychic energies and on other levels of reality. And, although most of the novel's action takes place in the everyday world, the Scotland that Sir Adam Sinclair, the Adept, inhabits is quite exotic by middle-American standards. His Strathmourne House is an ancestral manor complete with butler, a stable of expensive cars, and another stable of real horses. Ancient castles and snow- blanketed Highland forests weave a spell of timelessness around the story events.

On second look, we see that the author touches on several current social concerns within this psychic thriller. The first is the issue of community.

Modern urban life is often said to be bereft of a sense of community, causing many of our late-twentieth-century social ills. Traditional ties like those of the neighborhood and the church are falling apart, and even family ties are disintegrating. Kurtz takes up this motif not by examining the causes of such disintegration, but by showing us a place where community still works in the modern urban world.

Adam Sinclair lives and moves within overlapping circles of community.

There are the medical groups which know him through his work as a psychiatrist; the titled nobility whom he has known since birth; and other circles to which he belongs out of cultural interests, such as the Scottish National Opera. Strongest of all are the primary group ties: those of family, revealed in this novel because of Adam's mother's participation in the psychic battles; and those of the Hunting Lodge, the group he leads to defend the innocent against random attacks.

Likewise, Inspector Noel McLeod, Adam's second-in-command in the Hunting Lodge, belongs to circles of community. Besides his wife Jane, their grown children, and their gray tabby cat, he finds a certain brotherhood within the police force. He retains his clan affiliation. (His identity as a McLeod figured in the previous novel, The Adept, when he was the only one who could handle the Fairy Flag of the McLeods and restore it to the rightful custody of the Clan Chief.) McLeod is an active Master Mason. And he shares the bonds and the responsibilities of leadership in the Hunting Lodge.

The importance of community is best exemplified, though, by the third member of the psychic crime-fighting triad, Peregrine Lovat. At the series' opening, he led a virtually isolated life. Although a talented artist, Lovat was himself the very picture of a bundle of nerves. In fact, he was close to suicide, due to his blocked psychic gift. But he could not even realize this, much less start to deal with it, without the support of knowledgeable and caring people. As he is drawn into Adam's circle, his loneliness ebbs. In gaining control of his unusual gifts, he also gains confidence and a new joy in living.

The overall focus on shared community also takes another turn in this novel's plot. The evil Lodge of the Lynx carries out a sequence of attacks on Masons. After killing individual Masons, they blow up a Masonic Lodge and plan to disrupt a memorial Mason's Walk. Meanwhile, the media draw on anti-Masonic prejudice to imply a link between the order's oaths and the grisly deaths. Trying to uncover the Lynx's members and purpose, Adam Sinclair meets with the Masonic Grand Lodge of Scotland. They design a master plan which includes the Hunting Lodge, the Masons, and aerial support from the RAF, in a concerted assault on the Lynx's castle stronghold.

With the novel's Masonic element, Kurtz touches on a more specific concern. Voluntary social organizations (secret "brotherhood" groups like the Masons as well as less esoteric ones like women's literary societies) have not fared well in recent years: in the United States, they have shown declining membership and participation. The direct reasons are probably those behind the larger decline in community as well. Two-career couples have few leisure hours; TV and computer networks and commercial recreation compete for what time is left; people seek out occupational or hobby networks rather than local groups. The Masons have always drawn suspicion because of their secrecy and supposed web of influence. Today their image of stodginess and irrelevance may endanger the Masons more than renewed hostility from some quarters.

Kurtz questions this image by showing Masons as neither irrelevant nor suspect. Even the "web of influence" proves benevolent. Masons across Britain are contacted for the unique resources they can add to the fight against the Lynx group. At one point Sir Adam also explains his vision of the Masonic order's contributions. It "fills in the gaps" left by organized religion, and in doing so, adds to the "umbrella of white light" which protects the world against evil.

In this explanation, the author also makes the novel's worldview more-orless explicit. Like many contemporary readers, the characters are caught between the mental images of traditional Christianity and those of the "New Age." Ideas like reincarnation and the efficacy of magic rituals are not usually admitted to the former. Yet many people today embrace parts of both belief systems, albeit sometimes uneasily.

Kurtz's characters are not uneasy about following both. Father Christopher Houston, a member of the Hunting Lodge, is also a dedicated priest in the Scottish Episcopal Church. As Adam says elsewhere in the story, both systems are directed toward the same larger purposes; only the incidentals are different. While this framework will not appeal to everyone, it does attempt to heal the competing claims of the two religious outlooks. It is possible that in the future, occult thrillers like this novel will be most noted for the unified spiritual vision they offer.

Techniques

The novel is told from with a technique of limited omniscience. Adam Sinclair's actions are followed in the most detail, but the narrative also skips to Noel McLeod as he tracks down clues or faces various threats. Sometimes the viewpoint turns to Peregrine Lovat, especially when all three main characters are present at a crime scene.

The young artist sees clues even when he does not know what they mean.

This enables the reader to see them too.

Some meetings of the Lodge of the Lynx are also shown. These take place in isolated locales and gloom. The dialogue tells only enough to reveal the Lynxes' future plans, not anything to illuminate their motives. Thus the focus is kept on what will happen next.

Finally, the scenes of ritual murder and terrorism are described in fairly abbreviated fashion. Enough is told to make the event vivid and disturbing, but horrifying details are not spun out.

This is in marked contrast to some other recent 'occult suspense' novels. It also may come as a surprise to readers of the Kelson series, where in The King's Justice (1985), Kurtz spends over twenty pages on Father Duncan's torture. It is unclear whether the change comes from the junior author's influence, or from Kurtz having decided that such detail is not necessary to maintain suspense. In any event, the book works quite well without such horror genre staples.

There are also descriptions of mystic rites. These include rituals that Adam performs with his group, and his lone journeys to report to higher powers on the astral planes. The scenes include invocations, light and sound effects, and symbolic actions. Here again, enough detail is shown to give the texture and atmosphere of the event, but not step-by-step instructions. Less time spent describing spells, warfare, and other ritual actions make The Lodge of the Lynx a quicker read than the Deryni novels. It also allows for faster character presentation, as characters have more chance to reveal themselves in everyday activities.

In a collaboration like this, readers often speculate on how much the senior author has contributed to the novel. Happily, Katherine Kurtz has explained how she and Deborah Turner Harris work on an Adept book. They start with an outline written by Kurtz.

These run from 60 to 100 pages. Kurtz says "the more detail I can give her up front, the less work for both of us down the line." The two writers then meet several times to discuss the work, and between them they try to visit all the sites shown in the book. Deborah Harris does the actual "prosing" — putting the story into words in a polished first-draft format. She sends several of such chapters at a time to Kurtz, who then rewrites them into their final form.

In reading the novels, it is clear that most of the leading motifs are Kurtz's.

It is also likely that Harris, who lives in Scotland, has provided much of the local color. But there is no sense that one author seems to be speaking here, the other there. The style is smooth and consistent. In an age when celebrities from various fields "author" books ghostwritten by others, it is nice to find in this series a true collaboration of creative minds.

Themes

The central theme of the Adept series is the struggle between good and evil.

It has raged from humanity's early days until the present. In The Lodge of the Lynx Kurtz hints that not only have the motives of evildoers little changed from age to age, but the same supernatural forces may continue to give them aid. The same is true of protectors of the good.

This dualism is very near the traditional Christian belief in the struggle between God and Satan, but the book does not confine itself to Christian imagery. Beings who resemble Christian saints and angels do appear on the metaphysical plane. Adam also meets entities drawn from Egyptian myth and other lore, as well as unpersonified influences of light and grace. The Lynx masters call on an ancient Pictish god, Taranis the Thunderer, to lend them power.

Power is the central drive behind the Lodge of the Lynx's actions. They do not seek it to accomplish any particular program; they merely seek self-aggrandizement and revenge. They stand in contrast to the Hunting Lodge, where power is sought and used only for protective purposes. Without their arcane responsibilities, Adam Sinclair and Noel McLeod would still have full and interesting lives. Here, then, is the core of the theme: morality is determined by the purposes and uses for which power is sought. It is a timeless theme, but The Lodge of the Lynx has clad it in fast-paced and esoteric events.

A related theme, which ties into both power and the sense of community, is the efficacy of secret, oath-sworn groups. Not all secret groups are benevolent, of course. The Lodge of the Lynx is not — but then its control, even of its own members, stems from fear and internal secrecy. But the Masons, and even more, the Hunting Lodge, voluntarily take on obligations going beyond those of ordinary good people.

In this light, Adam's musings to Peregrine on the nature of evil take on added meaning. Adam says that most of the world's evil probably stems from minor sins of omission, but that it sometimes takes on greater and tangible form. Belonging to a secret, dedicated order, he implies, makes one aware of the moral weight of actions.

In an era when all secret and selective groups are suspect, this is one of the more provocative messages in Kurtz's work.

Finally, the magic and mysticism woven through the book carry a theme of links between the material and the unseen worlds. Whether with astral travel and rituals, or the more "scientific" approaches of hypnotherapy and remembered archetypes, this story makes the case for the importance of the connections. Philippa Sinclair's having been a student of Carl Jung is no accident. Jung is the most famous psychologist to combine his science with concepts drawn from beyond the self.

Key Questions

As a tale of psychic adventure, The Lodge of the Lynx makes for suspenseful reading. Readers may be drawn to it because of this, from a previous interest in Kurtz's other books, or for diverse reasons such as chance or an interest in the occult. Novels set in present-day Scotland are not plentiful in the U.S., so the setting could also attract some attention.

The book projects a black-and-white view of good and evil. Evil exists; it has to be fought on various levels; attempts to explain it away as caused by a bad environment or the workings of coincidence merely delay the inevitable showdown. The theme contrasts sharply with the twentieth-century idea of all values as relative. At the same time Kurtz does not base this outlook on any specific religious creed. All men and women of goodwill are needed in the fight against evil, and most of their deities are welcome and needed, too.

This mixture of ideas promises provocative discussion. Moderators should be aware of its potential pitfalls, though, and may want to keep the discussion focused upon what Kurtz is saying rather than on readers' personal positions.

The book's characters and their lives provide another fruitful arena for discussion. Their group affiliations, and their personal interests and problems, may connect with our own. At the same time, they are unique individuals whose pursuits and traits affect each other in unexpected ways.

1. The book teases us with the possibility of a future romance between Sir Adam Sinclair and Dr. Ximena Lockhart. Could any woman, no matter how intelligent and well-meaning she may be, fit into Adam's busy life? Why or why not?

2. Peregrine Lovat does not begin to overcome his "hallucinations" and despair until Adam takes him under his wing. Would an ordinary psychiatrist have been able to help him? If so, what might have been the trade-offs?

3. Do you know of other novels in which someone can see the past (or future) from looking at the traces it has left on the present? What are they, and how are such powers used in the story?

4. Inspector McLeod gives reporters the most logical "natural causes" explanations he can think of, after major disasters wrought by the Lodge of the Lynx. In another age or society, this would not have been necessary. Might we be on the brink of a "change in consciousness" that once again allows for the public recognition of occult influences or tangible evil? Are books such as The Lodge of the Lynx an early signal, or are they merely written for entertainment?

5. Would Sir Adam Sinclair have been just a "playboy doctor" without his mother's influence? Or would he have found other means of connection to the mystic levels?

6. Adam and Noel live in a modern, urban world. How is it that they have so many separate communities in their lives?

7. In most of Kurtz's Deryni novels, nearly all the major actors are men.

This is sometimes attributed to the setting, a quasi-medieval world. All the main actors in The Lodge of the Lynx are also men, but this novel is set in today's world. Why would Kurtz, a female author, set things up this way?

8. Adam Sinclair, like Kurtz's Deryni characters, sometimes hypnotizes others into healing sleep. He does not use other Deryni practices, such as forcefully reading people's minds, or imposing memory loss. Is this merely because he is a different character with different powers, in a separate fictional world? Or might he have some of these abilities, but not use them for ethical reasons?

9. The Lodge of the Lynx uses sympathetic magic with the Lynx image for certain attacks, such as that on McLeod in his office. Other times, they use ordinary physical means, as when Napier plants a bomb in Adam's car. Is there any difference between the occasions when they use one or the other?

Or is it just a matter of "whatever works"?

10. Scotland's Highlands hold castles, mists, and much ancient lore.

Adam and Peregrine discover the two centers of Lynx activity, in the Highlands, by a form of dowsing, with maps and scraps of paper. Could this work as just a form of concentrated thought, like hypnotism? Or to unleash intuition? Or is it another example of mystical or supernatural powers?

Literary Precedents

Kurtz says she thinks of Sir Adam Sinclair, the Adept, as the spiritual heir of Dion Fortune's Doctor Taverner. The work falls within a small but growing subgenre of occult detective novels.

Other fantasy novelists have recently developed series that fit this general category. In addition to the Adept series there is the Diana Tregarde series by Mercedes Lackey and the fourbook "Blood" series by Tanya Huff with Toronto P.I. Vicky Nelson and vampire Henry Fitzroy.

The trio of Sir Adam Sinclair, Inspector Noel McLeod, and Peregrine Lovat also draws on the appeal of "buddy" shows, among the most popular and long-lasting form of television action-adventure dramas. Two buddies are interesting, but three allow many more twists to be played out with dialogue, unique talents, and mutual support. It is not too far-fetched to say that Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, and Dr. McCoy of Star Trek fame may be among this series' other spiritual forebears.

Related Titles

The Lodge of the Lynx begins just a few days after the first book of the series, The Adept, ends. Events in The Adept provide a springboard to the plotting by the Lynx Lodge in this novel. At the end of The Lodge of the Lynx, at least one major villain escapes, to work his vengeance in subsequent books. The Hunting Lodge group is poised for more occult detective work, which occurs in The Templar Treasure (1993), Dagger Magic (1995), and presumably, additional books to come.

There is also a direct link with Kurtz's novel of World War II, Lammas Night (1983). In that book, Rudolf Hess not only flies to Britain, but he brings Hitler's book of spells with him. This leads to the main event, in which a British prince accepts the role of sacrificial king and dies in a plane crash, thus saving the country from invasion.

In The Lodge of the Lynx, clues surface that the Head-Master of the Lynx Lodge is none other than Hess, who has escaped execution by using a double. He is ancient and enormously malevolent by now — and he still has Hitler's book of spells.

Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults
Includes bibliographical references.
Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.
Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.
1. Young adults□Books and reading. 2.Young adult literature□History and criticism. 3. Young adult literature□Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography□Bio-bibliography.
[1. Literature□History and criticism. 2. Literature□Bio-bibliography]
I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952
Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994