



Bimbos of the Death Sun

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Ostensibly a mystery novel complete with a murder and an array of suspects with plausible motives, *Bimbos of the Death Sun* won an Edgar Award in 1988 for Best Original Paperback Mystery. While we follow the plot eagerly, curious to know who killed famed novelist Appin Dungannon and why, the fact is that what happens in this novel is in some ways much less important than where it happens. *Bimbos of the Death Sun* is not a mystery that just so happens to also be science fiction and fantasy; it's a novel about a particular American subculture as well in which Trekkies and Dungeon Masters convene--complete with their hobbit costumes and the like--to buy and sell memorabilia.

The novel is in fact a parody of that culture and as such, it has garnered ambivalent reviews from the science fiction and fantasy community that it caricatures. The perspective of the novel is decidedly that of an outsider, a protagonist named James Owen Mega, who--under the pseudonym Jay Omega--has published a science fiction novel named *Bimbos Under the Death Sun*. Omega, however, is no science fiction fanatic, nor does he frequent conventions. He and his girlfriend, Dr. Marion Farley, are both professors at a local university, and Omega wrote the novel in his spare time as a fictionalized account of his real-life scientific research. The reader then experiences the convention's peculiarities and surprises along with other bewildered and amazed professors.

It could be said that the pair represent two different approaches to the pageantry and obsession that swirl around them. Omega, as guest author and conference V.I.P., tries to tread lightly around the customs and peculiarities of the sci-fi aficionados in an effort not to offend but also to avoid becoming too involved. Marion, the professor of comparative literature, casts a more critical eye on the proceedings, giving the touted big-shots and the aspiring authors little in the way of credibility.

McCrumb tempers the satire with her choice of protagonists; by informing us that Marion actually teaches a course on science fiction and fantasy at the local university, McCrumb is sure to acknowledge that science fiction is a legitimate literary genre in her eyes. Like any other legitimate literary genre then, it has its noteworthy practitioners (Tolkein, Asimov) as well as its charlatans (Appin, Dungannon). Her target, McCrumb wants us to know, is not the works themselves but rather the obsessive culture that springs up around the works. By making the shy, bookish Jay Omega her sympathetic protagonist, McCrumb is also making it clear that her target is not simply the socially maladroit. The whole satire is directed at those who have made these escapist fantasies a true-to-life obsession.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Award-winning novelist Sharyn McCrumb is best known for her *Ballad* novels, a series of fictionalized accounts of the history and culture of the Appalachian region of the United States. The *Ballad* novels include the works *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter*; *If I Ever Return*, *Pretty Peggy-O*; *She Walks These Hills*; and most recently *The Ballad of Frankie Silver*. In 1997, McCrumb won the Outstanding Contribution to Appalachian Literature award. *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* was a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year, as was *If I Ever Return*, *Pretty Peggy-O*.

A graduate of the University of North Carolina and Virginia Tech, McCrumb taught journalism before turning her attention to writing fiction as a full time endeavor. McCrumb has won many awards for her

mystery novels, including an Edgar for 1988's *Bimbos of the Death Sun*. In that work she satirized the science fiction and fantasy community as well as in the work's sequel, *Zombies of the Mutant Gene Pool*. Her novels have been translated into over ten languages.

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