

Author's website: www.mercedeslackey.com

- She writes her characters to appeal to a wide audience because she focuses on inclusivity
- She tries to make her characters so they aren't flat representations of basic moralities, ie no direct presentations of evil or good, she tries to make things seem more neutral.

Literary analysis:

Hunter, by Mercedes Lackey, is a high magic, high fantasy, monster slaying adventure novel that follows the life of a young Hunter named Joyeaux Charmand, nicknamed Joy. She is special because she is a Hunter, which is the title that is given to people with the ability to summon magical Hounds from an alternate dimension which she uses to protect everyone else that cannot use magic. The story is set in the not too distant future where the advent of a magical catastrophe called the "Diseray" caused tears to rip open between our dimension and an alien dimension called the "Otherside" from which monsters from our mythologies surged to invade our world, all with an innate hunger for human flesh. These monsters included things like the Cyclops from Greek mythology and the Kraken from Scandinavian traditions. At the same time, this event triggered an awakening of magical powers within human beings which allowed them to weave magical spells and protect themselves from the monsters that would surely devour them.

The world fell quickly into disarray and a fight for the survival of the human race ensued. Factions formed and religious extremists rose. During this period of upheaval, Christian based fundamentalists known as "Chrusters" detonated nuclear warheads and triggered a nuclear holocaust which consumed most of what wasn't already destroyed by the monsters in an effort to kickstart the Apocalypse as foretold in the *Book of Revelations* in the *Bible*. The powers that survived this barrage of horrible events needed to act fast and therefore consolidated all their efforts into building the first true city in the wake of the Diseray, Apex City. It was built mainly by the efforts of elements of the surviving United States military and knowledgeable civilians. Combining magic and technology, they were able to build magical barriers that were designed to keep monsters from passing through. These barriers were the first step to restoring what could pass for a normal life in a world full of bloodthirsty monsters.

The setting is complicated but it needed to be fleshed out for the people listening.

Joy grew up in the mountainous wilderness far away from the luxuries and protection of Apex City and is therefore accustomed to living a mean life full of lean times and hardship. She is also a Hunter and can summon a total of seven hounds, which makes her somewhat of a prodigy. She is humble at heart and fights to protect the people who cannot protect themselves. She is selfless and strong. She ends up being summoned to Apex City so that she can train to be a true Hunter in the employ of the city itself. As a Hunter in the city, she has access to a greater arsenal of weaponry as well as the best equipped facilities available to anyone in the world.

With these resources she can make a bigger difference and be more effective as a Hunter, so she is excited for the opportunity but unsure of what to expect.

The first thing Joy notices is the astronomical wealth gap between the 1% and the rest of the population. Living in a small village in the mountains is a far more egalitarian arrangement that she is used to and the culture shock she experiences when first being thrust into the city staggers her. She is unable to fathom how she is afforded so many luxuries while the rest of her fellow citizens are left with so little. Even more so, she remarks on how a single one of her hunter outfits could buy literal years worth of rations for those in need. And while the citizens of the city may eke out a meager existence, the people who have no skills to offer are left to suffer in the wastelands outside the city limits where they are easy prey for the monsters that live there.

Joy's arrival in the city has an unintended consequence of shaking up the status quo. There is a popular ranking system that ranks all Hunters based on their popularity. They are a lot like modern athletes in that an unreasonable amount of money and capital goes into them. Hunters are a product that the elite of the city sell to the less fortunate as a way to placate them and distract them from their less than satisfactory lives with flashy shows dedicated to their favorite hunters. The advent of Joy onto the scene as a hot new hunter with amazing abilities shifts the status quo in a way that some elite do not care for and they retaliate by attempting to assassinate her on multiple occasions. The story concludes with Joy determining that the only way to be truly safe from harm would be to become an indispensable Elite Hunter, who are so tightly knit and powerful that they are basically untouchable. She applies and passes the tests with flying colors. During one of the tests her nemesis and opponent for the round attempts to assassinate her point blank and fails.

Young adults should read this book because it takes all the awesome elements from high fantasy and combines that with sci-fi elements and applies that combination to a dystopian setting. It has a little of something for everyone. Personally, I really enjoyed the world building aspects of the story. The author uses language shifting due to the passage of time as a literary device to convey how people would forget the meanings of words as they became less utilized in the common vernacular. The term "Diseray" is a bastardization of the Latin phrase "*Dies Irae*" meaning "wrath of God" (Lackey, 124). This term was used by fantastical elements of the Christian faith in this setting to explain why an apocalypse happened without the faithful being raptured away by God. The Christians believed that the advent of the monsters and the calamity that followed is a just punishment for the sins of humanity. The author mentions the "Diseray" multiple times to the point that I'm frustrated at wondering why the word "Disarray" is misspelled. The payoff of the discovery of the origin and the reason why the phrase shifted was completely unexpected and incredibly satisfying because it rewards the reader for being smart and recognizing things from our world in the novel. I experienced many other moments like that, the author is very clever in how she weaves in things that the reader can recognize from our world that has been recontextualized in theirs.

Overall, the text is not too complex and does not come off as arrogant or didactic. There are points where I wished for more complexity and nuance but I had to accept that this was meant for a younger audience. Despite this initial appraisal, I ended up enjoying the read of this novel immensely and found that it was incredibly easy to dive into. The themes are apparent and easy to retain throughout the course of the story and the characters are easily distinguishable based on their actions and they each have their own unique motivations and backstories.

3 quotes and their significance:

- If you don't look after your fellow man, if you think that what you want is always more important than what anyone else wants or needs, you're not human, and that's that. There is no virtue in selfishness, not one bit.
(Lackey, Mercedes. Hunter: 1 (A Hunter Novel) (p. 43). Little, Brown Books for Young Readers. Kindle Edition.)

Very early on we learn what kind of moral stance that Joy has and how she views her fellow human being. It also sheds light on the setting that we find ourselves in where there may be a possibility of humans colluding with the monsters. She shows disdain for anyone who wouldn't give everything they had to help those around them. It also foreshadows her mistrust of the systems that are in place to control the populace of Apex City. Compared to the mountain home she is accustomed to, Apex city is constrained and highly monitored. Whatever freedom the people think they have is merely a privilege that can be taken away from them at a whim of someone superior to them. As a Hunter, Joy is afforded more luxuries than the average citizen so that she may stay in the best physical shape possible. Despite this, she is constantly monitored by both public and private camera feeds that record her every action that is constantly being censored before being displayed to the public. As a Hunter, she is as much an indentured servant of the city as the lowest and most menial of laborers.

- Be careful when someone repeats something too often; things that are repeated often enough can start to seem to be true, even when they are not.
(Lackey, Mercedes. Hunter: 1 (A Hunter Novel) (p. 118). Little, Brown Books for Young Readers. Kindle Edition.)

The nature of Apex City is very dystopian. Everything is tightly controlled and monitored to the point where privacy is unimaginable. The people of Apex city live in a bubble that is kept from bursting only by the constant vigilance of the Hunters who patrol the outskirts of the city to prevent monsters from tunneling under or flying over the massive magical barrier that separates the city from the wilderness. The normal citizens have heard how safe they are behind the barriers repeated ad nauseam. This is a fabrication because at multiple points in the story do monsters show their ability to pass through the barrier as if it were nothing. Even in her personal interactions with other people does Joy realize that people have their own hidden agendas and

that she couldn't be as free with her words and actions as she was when she lived in the wilderness.

- Freedom is just a cage where the bars are farther away than you care to fly.
(Lackey, Mercedes. Hunter: 1 (A Hunter Novel) (p. 294). Little, Brown Books for Young Readers. Kindle Edition.)

Towards the end of the novel, Joy has finally come to the realization that as a Hunter she is the most indentured out of all the citizens that live in Apex City. Not only is she a warrior that protects the city from terrifying monsters that normal people could not hope to contend with, she also serves as the elites main method of controlling their citizenry by being their bread and circus. Much like the gladiatorial arenas of the Roman Empire of old, the Hunters of Apex City were the main distraction for the people. Flying drone cameras followed the hunts and documented their every detail. These recordings were first watched by a censoring committee (to ensure that they were appropriate for viewing) before being broadcasted to a wide audience. Every Hunter had their own specific channel which detailed their daily lives down to the most personal of information. The culture of Apex City is centered around the adoration of these Hunters, for without them the city would surely fall. Or at least that's what they're told. The Hunters may be the most free, but without the resources that the City elite provide for them, they don't own much and have no real voice of their own since the censoring committee would cut their live feed or censor out anything undesirable.