

Future soldiers in contemporary science fiction: the victory of complete harmony of body and mind on the example of Gordon r. Dickson's Mercenaries – Dorsai

Żołnierze przyszłości we współczesnej literaturze science fiction: triumf całkowitej harmonii ciała i umysłu na przykładzie Najemników Gordona r. Dicksona – Dorsai

*Warfare is a great matter to a nation; It is the ground of death and of life;
It is the way of survival and of destruction, and must be examined.
Sun-Tzu¹*

Summary:

Military Science Fiction as a sub-genre of SF literature has gained a major acclaim throughout the years, especially after the II World War. It mainly deals with predictions such as: how modern warfare will look like in the future, what body upgrading systems, weapons and armour will it involve etc. Gordon r. Dickson – a silent giant of this sub-genre, unappreciated during his lifetime – proposed in his works a different vision of future warfare – innovative but traditional at the same time, intelligent and cunning. This article aims at presenting Dickson's vision of future warfare and how innovative and different his ideas were in comparison to other military SF writers.

Keywords: Science Fiction, military SF, warfare, Splinter Cultures, Tactics of Mistake, Strategy of Indirection, Sun Tzu, Sparta.

Streszczenie:

Gatunek literacki military Science Fiction został doceniony i zyskał sławę głównie po II Wojnie Światowej. Zajmuje się on przewidywaniem jak w przyszłości wyglądać będzie sposób prowadzenia wojen, jak zostanie ulepszone ludzkie ciało, broń czy jakie rodzaje zbroi czy kombinezonów będą w użyciu etc. Gordon r. Dickson – niedoceniony za życia wielki autor military SF – pokazał w swoich utworach zupełnie inny styl prowadzenia konfliktów zbrojnych – innowacyjny ale i tradycyjny zarazem, oparty na inteligencji i przebiegłości. Ten artykuł ma na celu przedstawienie jego pomysłów na to jak będą w przyszłości wyglądać konflikty zbrojne i różnic między nim a innymi pisarzami military SF.

Słowa kluczowe: Science Fiction, military SF, działania wojenne, Kultury Cząstkowe, Taktyka Błędu, Strategia Pośredniości, Sun Tzu, Sparta.

¹ Sun-Tzu, *The Principles of Warfare* "The Art of War", www.sonshi.com/sun1.html, [last viewed: 5.05.2012].

Military science fiction is a sub-genre of science fiction. It mainly deals with an interstellar or interplanetary conflict and its solution – war, which comprises the main setting of the story. The first works of military science fiction began to appear in the early 1950s. H. Beam Piper is considered to be the precursor of the sub-genre. His *Uller Uprising* published in 1952, which was based on the events that took place during the Sepoy Mutiny, is considered to be the first military science fiction novel. However, another author is responsible for the success of the military genre. Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* published in 1959 and his other writings were mostly responsible for the popularisation of the convention.

In the 1970s military science fiction was slowly beginning to be recognized, and with the publication of the anthology *Combat SF* edited by Gordon r. Dickson its existence was becoming more and more noticeable. Stories chosen for that collection, for the first time, dealt specifically with war as a subject matter. The publication of G. Pournelle's *The Mercenary* in 1977 established military science fiction as a market category.

The subject matter of military science fiction books can vary considerably, on the one hand it can examine difficult ethic and moral questions concerning ethics of violence, individual versus collective and the relationship between the society and the military – like in Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*. However, when military SF focuses only on wanton killing, bloodshed and gory scenes then we have to talk of useless carnography – pornography of violence – which bears little, if any literary value.

In many military SF works the conflict resulting in war is shown as inevitable but at the same time pointless, as in David Drake's *Counting the Cost*, and Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War*. Very often military ideals such as discipline, courage and honour are most often highlighted and the actions taken are rendered from the point of view of a soldier or an officer, *Starship Troopers* by Robert A. Heinlein being the best example here. What is more, technology and its development are most often depicted in detail, like in Richard K. Morgan's *Broken Angels*. In such books technological changes are crucial to the plot development, nevertheless, there are works in which war is not subordinated to the progress of technology, like *Tactics of Mistake* by Gordon r. Dickson, where battles are won by determination and military virtues. Some books can also use actual battles or conflicts as models for fictional situations, because SF as a literary genre sets its works in the world similar to ours only interfused with *novum* – new inventions that the author predicts may appear in our world within several years, centuries, eons.

On the following pages of this article I would like to examine the concept of a future soldier in Gordon r. Dickson's *Dorsai!*, *The Spirit of Dorsai*, *Tactics of Mistake* – of the Childe Cycle. I would like to show how, in a very innovative way, different from other military SF writers, this author envisaged an ideal soldier and his or her equipment stressing such aspects as: how the soldiers are portrayed in those books, what are their major features and characteristics, what type of weapons they can use, what kind of upgrading makes them more effective and what customs are characteristic of their outfit.

Although a prolific writer who had been twice nominated for and twice awarded with Hugo Award², and who received Nebula Award³ and E. E. Smith Memorial Award for imaginative fiction, Gordon r. Dickson had received little critical attention both throughout his career and after his death in 2001. For Brian Aldiss Dickson is merely an “ambitious and productive writer”⁴. Raymond H. Thompson, on the other hand, at the beginning of his article “*Shai Dorsai! A Study of the Hero Figure in Gordon r. Dickson's Dorsai*” states: “I have always been surprised at the lack of critical attention to the writings of Gordon r. Dickson.”⁵ Strangely enough Dickson seems to have been forgotten by most critics. However, his magnum opus – the Childe Cycle, often erroneously called the Dorsai Cycle – received the worldwide acclaim from many critics and readers and earned him the classification of a war writer.

The three books of the Childe Cycle, *Tactics of Mistake* (1971), *The Spirit of Dorsai* (1979), and *Dorsai!* (1976), feature a new race of evolving warriors – the Dorsai. *Tactics of Mistake* begins with a quotation from the lessons of an anonymous teacher:

*Trouble rather the tiger in his lair than the sage amongst his books. For to you Kingdoms and their armies are things mighty and enduring, but to him they are but toys of the moment, to be overturned by the flicking of a finger*⁶.

The book is divided into twenty-six chapters, which tell the story of a military genius Lt. Colonel Cletus Grahame, of Earth's Western Alliance Military Academy. The book begins when Cletus, pretending to be drunk invites him-

² The Science Fiction Achievement Award TM, also known as the Hugo Award [®], is given annually by the World Science Fiction Society [®] (WSFS [®])

³ The Nebula Awards are presented by the Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA) to acknowledge excellence in science fiction writing.

⁴ B. Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree*, London 1975, p. 299.

⁵ R. H. Thompson, *Shai Dorsai! A Study of the Hero Figure in Gordon r. Dickson's Dorsai*, “Extrapolation” Vol. 20, No. 3, p. 223.

⁶ Gordon r. Dickson, “Tactics of Mistake,” *Three to Dorsai!*, New York 1971, p. 153. All subsequent references to the book will be marked parenthetically in the text by the abbreviation TM and a page number.

self to the table of Dow deCastries. While demonstrating his tactics of mistake humiliates Dow in front of his guests and draws his attention to himself. At the table he also meets Colonel Eachan Khan and his beautiful daughter Melissa, who later on, after many problems and obstacles, will become his wife. Using intrigues, unconventional techniques and tactics during many battles he climbs to the top of military hierarchy and humiliates deCastries even more. What Cletus aims at is putting an end to Earth's Coalition Army's tyranny and at freeing newly discovered planets from Dow deCastries, who has set his sights on maintaining economic control over them. After becoming *persona non grata* for deCastries Cletus is forced to seek refuge in the developing planet of Dorsai – Eachan and Melissa's home. He discovers great potential in the Dorsai mercenaries and devises for them new training techniques to make them more powerful in battle. Cletus achieves his plans using warriors from the planet and triumphs over deCastries.

The Spirit of Dorsai is divided into two parts "Amanda Morgan" and "Brothers." The plot of the former describes the events that took place in *Tactics of Mistake* when Cletus left the planet Dorsai to be protected by women, the elderly and children under the command of his theoretician and field general; it places itself somewhere between chapters 25 and 26 in the *Tactics of Mistake*. It is a recollection of the events of the Third Amanda to Hal Mayne. The Third Amanda tells the story of the First Amanda who was the founder of the Dorsai culture. She relates how her predecessor came to the planet Dorsai, how she managed to free Dorsai people from outlaws and how she helped Cletus Grahame to gain victory over Dow deCastries. This part gives an insight into the origin of Dorsai.

"Brothers" deals with the story of the Dorsai twin brothers Ian and Kensie. After the assassination of Commander Kensie on the planet of Ste. Marie, Commander Ian is trying to avenge his brother, but to achieve this he must find his brother's murderers. He refuses to let his Dorsai mercenaries do the search inside the town of Blauvain as it would result in unnecessary losses among the civilians. His soldiers vote against his order and decide that after certain time they will do the search within the city. Ian has little time to prevent his men from doing so. However, he patiently waits until his hunter team reconstructs events that took place before, during and after Kensie's assassination, hunts his brother's murderers just in time to stop his men from attacking Blouvain and kills assassins in revenge for his brother. This part puts emphasis on the Dorsai customs, history and how they operate.

According to David Drake *Dorsai!*, the third of the books, together with Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* form "the standard against which the sub genre of military SF must be judged."⁷ This book draws attention to Cletus Graeme's great-grandson Donal Graeme. It is divided into twenty parts, each of which depicts a new achievement and dignity in Donal Graeme's military career both in its title and within its content. After graduating from Dorsai Military Academy young Donal begins his military career. While he is heading for his first military posting, at the space ship he meets the Select of Kultis – Anaea Marlivana who is trying to free herself from the service of Prince William of Ceta. After the meeting with Anaea Donal sets his aims at preventing William of Ceta from provoking the war between the worlds. Additionally, his success would also mean freedom for Anaea. Donal gains victory after victory aborting William's military plans on many different worlds. Graeme's military genius does not remain unnoticed by William of Ceta, who begins to perceive Donal as a threat to his plans. After successful and unconventional victories Donal saves the universe from unnecessary bloodshed and marries Anaea.

Dickson's idea behind the Childe Cycle was evolution. In the interview with Clifford Murray for *Science Fiction Review* Dickson presented his vision of the evolution of human race. He envisaged three lines of the *Homo Sapiens* development: the warrior (the Dorsai), the philosopher (the Exotics of Mara and Kultis), and the faith-holder (the Friendlies of Harmony and Association). This is what he says about those three societies:

My assumption is that the Splinter Cultures⁸ have only one character-facet, instead of being full spectrum in character like you and me and the people of old Earth. Concentrated in this way, they are nonviable. If all the rest of the human race was killed off and they were left alone they would eventually die off, too, because they don't have the full spectrum of humanity in them – yet⁹.

The world portrayed by Dickson in his books is the reality of the 24th century. There are sixteen inhabited worlds in the eight stellar systems stretching from Sol to Altair. They have achieved the line of technical, intellectual, physical and philosophical development that has enabled them to specialize in particular fields, such as Newtonians in technology or Dorsai in warfare. In those stellar systems there exist the so called "tight" societies:

⁷ D. Drake, "Introduction", *Dorsai Spirit*, New York 2002, p. 7.

⁸ A term Dickson used to name the three lines of human development in his books: the warrior, the philosopher and the faith-holder.

⁹ C. McMurray, *An Interview with Gordon r. Dickson*, "Science Fiction Review", 7.07.1978, pp. 6-12.

like the technological worlds of the so-called Venus group – Venus herself, Newton and Cassida – and the fanatic worlds of harmony and Association, and Coby, which was ruled by what amounted to a criminal secret society – had always favored the piece of property view more strongly than the individual one¹⁰,

and the societies belonging to the so called “loose” group “like the republican worlds of Old Earth, and Mars, the Exotics – Mara and Kultis – and the violently individualistic society of the Dorsai” (D 186). There are also those who do not belong to either of these groups:

the middling worlds – the ones with strong central government like Freiland and New Earth, the merchandising world of Ceta, the democratic theocracy of Ste. Marie, and the pioneer, underpopulated fisher-planet of Dunnin’s World, ruled by the cooperative society known as the Corbel. (D 186)

In this article I will concentrate on this “violently individualistic society of the Dorsai” of the warrior Splinter Culture. I intend to focus on those events, characteristics and customs that have shaped their culture and society and made them the best warriors in the universe.

In the beginning, when the newly discovered planet of Dorsai was being settled it was not meant to be a warrior planet inhabited by mercenaries for everyone to hire. People of this planet “wanted [only] a world where no man could bend the destinies of another man against that second man’s will” (D 20). The planet Dorsai was lacking in arable land and natural resources, but it could supply petroleum products to other worlds. With time, the watery planet of Dorsai was becoming more and more independent as it

was formed of people who were willing to pay with their lives in others’ battles, in order to buy freedom for their homes. Not only the men who went off to fight, but those at home had that same image of freedom and were willing to live and die for it¹¹.

Three people in particular contributed to the planet’s growth and the development of their military excellence and these were Amanda Morgan, Cletus Grahame and Donal Graeme.

Amanda Morgan “was Dorsai before there was a Dorsai world.” She “was the material out of which [Dorsai] people and [...] culture [...] were made” (TD 256). She was born in Caernarvon in Wales and came to the newly discovered world of Dorsai after her second husband’s death. The planet of Dorsai was

¹⁰ Gordon r. Dickson, “Dorsai!,” *Dorsai Spirit*, New York 1988, p. 186. All subsequent references to the book will be marked parenthetically in the text by the abbreviation D and a page number.

¹¹ Gordon r. Dickson, “The Spirit of Dorsai,” *Dorsai Spirit*, New York 1979, p. 258. All subsequent references to the book will be marked parenthetically in the text by the abbreviation TD and a page number.

then a home for mercenaries, but also a place where, in the mountains, out-of-work mercenaries formed their bases during the Outlaw Years and raided the houses of Foralie district where she and the other women stayed when their husbands fought on other worlds. Amanda led the women against the outlaws from the mountains. The rage, which was later to become the inherited feature of all Dorsai mercenaries, helped her to defeat the enemy. From that moment, Dorsai became a fairly peaceful planet. Amanda's name became a talisman for the people of Foralie district. The name was passed on to two more women, who proved to be close to her reincarnations. Both heiresses proved to be as physically and mentally strong as the First Amanda. Not every girl could have inherited the name of Amanda, for the first of them believed that Fal Morgan – their family house – would stand only when “that name could stand like a pillar to which they could all anchor” (TD 263).

Cletus Grahame appeared on Dorsai when the first Amanda was ninety-two years old and was still able to lead Dorsai of the Foralie district to rescue him from Dow de Castries' soldiers. Cletus was another important figure for the Dorsai people because he turned them into unique and more powerful soldiers, better than any soldier that could have been trained at any world. His methods of training, which will be discussed later, and unique tactics enabled him to turn Dorsai into very efficient and effective units and made them famous among the stars. Tactics used by Cletus – the tactics of mistake

refer [...] to the method of warfare based on the Taoist-derived philosophy central to Eastern martial arts such as judo: any action likely to succeed is in accord with the unfolding way of things in the universe at large; the successful combatant makes use of the opponent's misdirected force¹².

Such tactics can also be used in fencing; in this example Cletus explains it in the book:

the fencing tactics is to launch a series of attacks, each inviting ripostes, so that there's a pattern of engages and disengages of your blade with your opponent's. Your purpose, however, isn't to strike home with any of these preliminary attacks, but to carry your opponent's blade a little more out of the line with each disengage so gradually he doesn't notice you're doing it. Then, following the final engage, when his blade has been drawn completely out of the line, you thrust home against an essentially unguarded man. (TM 162)

¹² *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 8: Twentieth-Century American Science-Fiction writers*, edited by David Cowart, University of South Carolina 1981, pp. 141-147. Citations based on e-version, Gale Group.

In order to be able to use such tactics a person needs not only empathy for both friends and opponents but also intuition. Not being able to understand your enemies and friends may lead to erroneous conclusions and incorrect decisions. What Cletus also achieved using his tactics was what his officer Swahili termed as “[taking] all the life out of war” (TM 333) – that is combat. Grahame managed to manoeuvre his troops in such a way that Dorsai had little engagement with enemy, incurring little or no casualties among mercenaries.

Donal Graeme, Cletus’ great-grandson, introduced a slightly different version of tactics. What he used was the Strategy of Indirection, the term coined by a supreme strategist – Basil H. Liddell-Hart. Liddell-Hart’s theories originated after the First World War as a response to wanton killing and brute force techniques used throughout the conflict. Liddell-Hart developed his unusual strategy after examining the campaigns of Hannibal, the Byzantine general Belisarius and Sherman¹³. His ideas were as follows:

To defeat an entrenched enemy, manoeuvre around him and force him to leave his fortifications in order to protect his rear areas. Instead of attacking an enemy, destroy his supplies so that he has to retreat. Move into a position that the enemy must take (ideally for reasons of perceived honor rather than pragmatic need) and let him waste his strength against your fortifications – until you move out and leave him with a useless shell¹⁴.

This was the pattern according to which Donal Graeme fought his campaigns. Instead of overwhelming his enemy with force he used manoeuvres, which forced his opponent to attack, or by forcing him to move into checkmated position defeated him without a battle. According to William A. Cohen Strategy of Indirection can be applied not only in military operations but also in every mind-to-mind confrontation, such as business, trade, romance and many more¹⁵.

Donal’s way of fighting reveals traces of Sun-Tzu in Dorsai’s combat. In Sun-Tzu’s opinion “general is wisdom, credibility, benevolence, courage, and discipline”¹⁶ – these appear to be Donal’s main traits. To begin with, Graeme is courageous and disciplined like every Dorsai. What is more, he is certain of his knowledge and therefore credible. He is also capable of self-composure in every situation due to his partially Maran ancestry. Sun-Tzu also states: “Therefore, to gain a hundred victories in a hundred battles is not the highest excellence; to sub-

¹³ Drake, 8.

¹⁴ Drake, 8.

¹⁵ W. A. Cohen, *Take the Indirect Route to Your Objective*, ”The Art of the Strategist” www.amanet.org/books/catalog/081440782X_ch.htm [last viewed: 6.06.2006].

¹⁶ Sun-Tzu, *The Principles of Warfare “The Art of War”*, www.sonshi.com/sun1.html [last viewed: 5.05.2012].

jugate the enemy's army without doing battle is the highest of excellence."¹⁷ That is what Donal as well as his great-grandfather achieved. They were both able to manoeuvre their troops in such a way as to engage the enemy as little as possible and even not at all. That was the way in which Donal won his campaigns on Oriente (D 111-135) and as War Chief for United Council of Churches for the worlds of Harmony and Association (D 154-165). Donal is often referred to as strange. In fact, the first sentence of *Dorsai!* is: "The boy was odd" (D 13). This oddity reveals itself in the unusual manner in which Donal is able to handle military situations, in which he leads his men and in which he gains victories. His manoeuvres are unpredictable and unconventional, like the one in the space battle where he used multiple phase shifts¹⁸ to imitate fleet's saturation bombing. And it was Sun-Tzu who accurately pointed out that "[t]hose skilled at uncommon maneuvers are as endless as the heavens and earth, and as inexhaustible as the rivers and seas."¹⁹ Such similarities suggest that Dickson, in his creation of Dorsai commanders, drew deep from Sun-Tzu's 2000 year-old text – *The Art of War*.

Training is the most crucial thing for Dorsai mercenaries. Its unique form makes them so effective and deadly in combat. Training begins in the early youth, when a child is about eight years old, with "military team exercises" (TD 292) known as "creeping and crawling" (TD 292) carried out in summer in the Dorsai mountains. It is a military preparation combined with survival training.

[Planet Dorsai] is a world where the main occupation, once you're grown, is being a mercenary soldier. [Creeping and crawling] is [...] [a] version of field trips. It's good exercise, the youngsters get some academic credit for it when they go back to school [...], and it's a chance for them to get away from adult supervision and move around on their own, camping out. (TD 292)

Children, both girls and boys, usually wear "flexible shoes, twill slacks strapped tight at the ankle and long-sleeved, tight-wristed shirts, all of neutral color" (TD 298) From the earliest youth they learn to make more use of their physical and mental abilities than of their weapons. Dorsai mercenaries are renowned for the fact that they are light-weaponed and light-armoured. In emergency there is one adult called an "Ancient" (TD 292) with each team, but most of the time they are free to decide where they are going to set up camp or what kind of games they are going to play with other teams. The very import-

¹⁷ Sun-Tzu, *The Principles of Warfare "The Art of War"*, www.sonshi.com/sun3.html [last viewed: 5.05.2012].

¹⁸ "Phase shift" was a term first used by Dickson in his Childe Cycle. It enabled a space ship to travel long stretches of light years by performing "jumps" in space. Before Donal's attempt it was believed that a space ship could perform only one phase shift in a very short time.

¹⁹ Sun-Tzu, *The Principles of Warfare "The Art of War"*, www.sonshi.com/sun5.html, [last viewed: 5.05.2012].

ant thing is that those children are not armed during exercises, and also learn not to “get wild notions about military operations. Not if they expect to stay Dorsai as adults” (TD 292).

The Dorsai way of training the youth calls to mind the way in which the Spartan society trained its youths. In Sparta at the age of seven a child was taken away from its mother and offered to the state.

A rigorous discipline and mainly military type education, the so-called Agoge, commenced, lasting twelve years. The boys enrolled in one of the many troops (the Ageles), which was under the supervision of a senior Spartan and at thirteen under the leadership of a prudent and brave youth, called Eirena, supervised by an official (Paidonomos) and were drilled in gymnastics, running, jumping, throwing of spear and discus, and also taught to endure pain and hardship, hunger, thirst, cold, fatigue and lack of sleep²⁰.

Not only Spartan boys were trained in such a way

Spartan women were taught reading, and writing, but were also expected to be able to protect themselves. A girls education was equally as brutal as the men's, and included many athletic events such as javelin, discus, foot races, and staged battles²¹.

However, there are two things that differentiate the Dorsai training from the Spartan one. Firstly, on the planet Dorsai children were not taken away from their mothers; however, if a child should lose its relatives “everyone in the town would look after [it], as long as they could” (TD 277). Secondly, Dorsai children began their military education a year later than their Spartan counterparts. Regardless of the minor differences, it seems clear that Dickson's creation of Dorsai was rooted in the Spartan military oligarchy.

Dorsai mercenaries, both men and women, graduate from Dorsai Academy. As a compulsory part of their training they gain ship experience in eighteen-month summer training cruises and attend jump courses. But the main part of training is the one devised by Cletus Grahame – the training of body and mind. The physical training is “simple, and [...] orthodox. Basically, [consists of] walking, running, swimming and climbing. It [is] the climbing that provide[s] the one unorthodox element to this routine” (TM 287) as it is carried out on the “jungle gym,” an “adult-sized [...] maze of steel pipes interconnected at different heights and angles that [is] [...] thirty feet high, twenty feet wide and more than fifty feet long” (TM 287). Trained Dorsai mercenaries often practice

²⁰ Ellen Papakyriakou, “The Training of Youth”, www.sikyon.com/Sparta/agogi_eg.html [last viewed: 5.05 2012]

²¹ “Ancient Greek Civilisations”, www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/aegean/culture/womenofsparta.html [last viewed: 26.07.2005].

work-outs consisting of arm twists, stands on a single bar, and grips-and-holds in a wrestling fashion (D 214).

Every Dorsai must take part in the extra energy training course called “relaxation”; it is this part of training that “tap[s] that extra source of energy” (TM 295) into them and makes them more durable than any other man. It takes place after the physical training and begins with a series of exercises consisting of: firstly, standing on one leg at a time to the point of exhaustion, and changing the leg after certain intervals; secondly, standing on one arm to the point of pain and changing each arm in the same fashion as legs. Next, mercenaries lie down with outstretched limbs and opened eyes looking at the sky. What they aim at achieving is to

[c]oncentrate on the feeling in [their] arms and legs, now that they've been relieved from the load of supporting [their] bodies against the force of gravity. Be conscious of the fact that now it's the ground supporting [them][...] Keep telling [themselves] that [their limbs are heavy and relaxed] and [watch] the sky. (TM 297)

Subsequently, mercenaries are trained in “autocontrol of pain and deep bodily sensations” (TM 298). As a result of this, what follows is transition from

relaxed and motionless position into movement – first getting them to achieve the floating sensation while standing upright [...] and finally under any kind of activity up to the most violent. This achieved, there remained for them only the ability to make use of the trance state in various types of autocontrol under all conditions of activity. (TM 298)

This trance enables Dorsai mercenaries to stay calm and self-composed during combat situations. They can react by instinct, quickly and precisely as their minds are not disturbed by the sounds of battle. This quality makes Dorsai warriors similar to Zen-warriors, especially the samurai of feudal Japan. Samurai had many qualities, which enabled them to be excellent warriors. The most important of them was “mind of no-mind” called “Mushin.” It was “an acquired trait that stemmed from long years of martial training, since their pre-teen years.”²² What they searched for was, like in the case of Dorsai,

blending of physical and mental [...] training. [For] Zen seeks to manifest itself in a 'mental platform of inner control'[...] The first step is the years of mental and physical preparation through daily sword and other martial arts training. Without these, the warrior has nothing to use once he enters into the Zen state. [...] Warrior Zen is designed to open up the learned techniques (kata etc) to the control of subconscious thought, so in crisis, there was no thought of techniques and their

²² Evan Heaberlin, “Ki Ken Tai Ichi”, www.kamikaze-portal.com/ftopicp-50.html, [last viewed: 22.03.2005].

application, just action through the unity of mind and training that is instinctual and not planned. This is “no-mind”²³.

That is exactly what Dorsai mercenaries did from their early youth. After they had mastered martial arts they practiced entering into trance, which could be called the state of “no-mind.” With instinct guiding their blows and calm mind to follow their orders they became unbeatable warriors and excellent soldiers.

The description of Dorsai has so far dealt with their training, what will follow next is the description of their organisation and equipment. Since Cletus, Dorsai mercenaries have become an entirely new military unit unique in its training and organisation. They were not organised into squads, platoons, companies and battalions but were more like groups of athletes. The tactics they used were devised for seemingly loose groups of autonomously acting units. Dorsai were coordinated not by military hierarchy but by familiarity with each other, resembling that of team members. As a consequence, they could predict what their teammates would do in reaction to their own actions in general situation. The insignia were also different from the ones used in the eight stellar systems. A circle of stars on each shoulder marked the highest rank in a Dorsai army – the Marshal. Other insignia consisted of a smaller number of stars i.e. one star on each shoulder marked general field commander.

Cletus also invented a new system of communication consisting of twenty three thousand code words and signals. It was created like a language with twenty three thousand words which enabled innumerable number of combinations. All mercenaries were supposed to become familiar with this code “so that the individual soldier, on hearing the general code word for the command to which he belongs, knows immediately within what limits the actions of all the groups, all the squads and his own team must be” (TM 294).

Dorsai mercenaries trained specialised groups such as runners, infiltrators, and hunter teams. The former group’s main skill was endurance and speed as they were supposed to deliver information to individual teams, as in battle situation the information or orders passed only from “known-person to known-person” (TD 283); if the word was received from somebody the commanding officer did not trust it was disregarded. The second group – infiltrators – were supposed to watch the enemy, learn everything they could about him, but stayed out of sight and got back with it safely. The last group – hunter teams – were responsible for the reconstruction of events. Such teams usually

²³ Heaberlin.

consisted of trackers. Some teams might be more efficient in certain surroundings than others i.e. in *The Spirit of Dorsai* a hunter team who worked well in interiors managed to track Kensie's assassins. Every member of the team took the track of one criminal and in re-acting his actions followed minute details such as smell, signs of certain actions, metal lubricant, hair etc. If he lost the track than a coordinator, a person who observed the reconstruction of the events performed by trackers, helped.

Although Dorsai mercenaries were renowned for the fact that they were lightly-weaponed and lightly-armoured, there was a whole array of weapons they could use. A dally gun was an "unofficial designation of 'dial-a-gun.' [...] With proper adjustment it could deliver anything from a single .29 caliber pellet slug to an eight-ounce, seek-type canister shell" (TM 171). Another weapon was a cone rifle which shot

tiny, self-propelled cones, leaving the muzzle of the rifle at relatively low velocity but accelerating as they went, [...] until their passage was concluded by the dull [...] thud of the impact explosion [...] A man not in body armor [...] could be torn in half by one of those explosions. (TM 207)

The next type were energy weapons, which left burned, self-cauterising wounds but were of no use in damp conditions as "[a]t the first touch of the fierce beams from the weapons, the shallow water exploded into clouds of steam." (TM 269) There were also pellet shotguns with wide shot pattern.

So far the Dorsai training and equipment have been described. The following paragraphs will be devoted to the special features and traditions of Dorsai. Dorsai mercenaries were normally larger than people from other worlds. They were distinguished by dark complexion that was typical of those from their world and straight, a little coarse black hair. Dorsai were characterised by utter stillness at rest and swiftness in motion. There was a saying that "[b]lood and ice water, half-and-half in [...] veins, is what makes a Dorsai" (TD 363). They possessed courage, brilliant reflexes, self-control and sensibility, and they were not governed by hate or wanton killing. Dorsai were professional soldiers, mercenaries to be hired on any planet. Their dun-coloured battle dresses soon began to be the symbol of proficiency and the highest excellence in warfare. Every mercenary had a contract detailing his or hers whole military record. If an employer wanted to hire the Dorsai mercenary he had to buy his or her contract for a certain period of time. For the time of service a contract would remain with an employer. After the service had finished an employer returned the contract to the mercenary and a new entry was added to his or her record.

Being a mercenary involved observing certain code. According to it any mercenary had the right to question Staff decisions. What is more, according to Article Four of the Mercenaries Code a mercenary could not neglect his command while in the enemy territory and in the field – for such an action he was tried on the spot and executed (D 87). Furthermore, Article Three of Professional Soldier's Covenant stated that when soldiers refused to obey an order, their officers could open fire on those refusing to follow it. What was also very important was the fact that enlisted Dorsai mercenaries were

entitled to know the aim and purpose of any general orders for military action they were given. By a ninety-six per cent vote among the enlisted men concerned, they could refuse to obey the order. In fact, by a hundred per cent vote, they could force their officers to use them in an action they themselves demanded. (TD 373)

There is one more thing which made Dorsai mercenaries so deadly – their inherited rages. These were “cold, sudden, utterly murderous” (D 14) states in which Dorsai’s “limbs were cold, he [or she] saw everything with [a crystal] clarity, and [the] mind ticked away like some detached machine in the far depths of [...] being” (D141). Carried by such a rage they turned into highly efficient killing machines.

However, Dorsai mercenaries were not only feared because of their rages. When they were mistreated or unfairly accused, they could turn against their employer for they believed in “the tradition of honor and courage and truth” (TM 280). This tradition went back to the time when the Dorsai were just beginning to be recognized among stellar systems. A New Earth city hired a small Dorsai force with the intention of using them against a fairly superior enemy troops, which were supposed to defeat mercenaries. In this way the city would not have to pay Dorsai for their service and at the same time they would have done considerable damage to the enemy. The Dorsai had won and the city authorities faced the necessity of paying them. To avoid this they accused the Dorsai commanding officer of dealing with the enemy and offering a bribe for a battle never fought. The officer – Jacques Chrétien – was hanged. The following night a small force of Dorsai destroyed the whole city in revenge for their colonel. After those events a song entered the Dorsai culture:

“ They little knew of brotherhood [...]
“... The faith of fighting men –
“Who once to prove their lie was good
“Hanged Colonel Jacques Chrétien [...]

...One fourth of Rochmont's fighting strength –
One battalion of Dorsai –
Were sent by Rochmont forth alone,
To bleed Helmuth, and die.

But look, look down from Rochmont's heights
Upon the Helmuth plain.
At all of Helmuth's armoured force
By Dorsai checked, or slain.

Look down, look down, on Rochmont's shame
To hide the wrong she'd done,
Made claim Helmuth had bribed Dorsai –
No battle had been won.

To prove that lie, the Rochmont Lords
Arrested Jacques Chrétien,
On charge he dealt with Helmuth's Chiefs
For payment to his men.

Commandant Arp Van Din sent word:
"You may not judge Dorsai,
"Return our Colonel by the dawn,
"Or Rochmont town will die."

Strong-held behind her walls, Rochmont
Scorned to answer them,
Condemned, and at the daybreak, hanged,
Young Colonel Jacques Chrétien.

Bright, bright, the sun that morning rose
Upon each weaponed wall.
But when the sun set in the west,
Those walls were levelled all.

Then soft and white the moon arose
On streets and roofs unstained,
But when that moon was down once more
No street nor roof remained.

No more is there a Rochmont town
No more are Rochmont's men.

But stands a Dorsai monument
To Colonel Jacques Chrétien.

So pass the word from world to world,
Alone still stands Dorsai.
But while she lives, no one of hers,
By foreign wrong shall die.

They little knew of brotherhood
–The faith of fighting men –
Who once to prove their lie was good
Hanged Colonel Jacques Chrétien! (TD 384)

Whenever a Dorsai force sang this song it was a sign that they had been mistreated and there was a danger that they might take justice in their own hands. It was a tradition that “[n]o Dorsai’s going to let other Dorsais be surrounded and cut up when he can help” (TM 255).

Dorsai customs were mostly connected with warfare. When a young man reached maturity and graduated from the Dorsai Academy the men of the household gathered in the house to welcome him into maturity. They shared with each other their knowledge about the eight stellar systems and about their best armies. A young graduate was adult now and could no longer be told what to do – the choice was his where he would go and offer his contract but he could draw conclusions about the best option from the conversation. What is more, he was also allowed for the first time to drink Dorsai whisky with his relatives. However, in certain households there was a tradition that “members of immediate family should not serve too closely together in field or garrison – in order that family feelings should not be tempted to influence military responsibilities” (D 152).

Another custom was connected with greetings. Dorsai mercenaries did not salute each other but one extended his fist in the direction of the other. The person he welcomed should take his fist into hard grip of his own hand. Yet another tradition was connected with Dorsai naming. If a Dorsai called another “*Shai Dorsai!*” (D 126) it meant that he was “true, pure, the actual” (D 127) Dorsai and it was considered to be the greatest compliment a Dorsai could receive.

Other customs concerned Dorsai reputation. It was deeply rooted in Dorsai society that their military reputation had to be untarnished and well-deserved because

[t]he Dorsai are professional soldiers [...] [who] live and survive by [their] reputation. Without that reputation none of [them] could earn [their] living. And the reputation of the Dorsai in general is that sum of the reputations of its individual men and women. [...] [R]eputation is a thing of value, to be guarded even after [...] death (TD 418).

As a consequence of this a Dorsai could only admit defeat to a person of fine reputation. After having given their parole they were released and treated in a civilised way, because a Dorsai word was something that bound him more strongly than anything else.

The last convention dealt with mourning. Whenever a Dorsai died, and especially when he or she was admired and respected person, Dorsai showed their affection in a special way. The body in uniform was laid in state for the public review in a transparent casket. Every mercenary unarmed, dressed in field uniform passed near the casket touching it or saying a few words to a dead person. Then the body was transported to the chapel where the burial service took place and where the Dorsai Hymn was played for him or her for the last time. The words of the hymn bound Dorsai people to Earth as these were the words of Kipling who wrote:

...Far called, our navies melt away,
On dune and headland sinks the fire.
Lo! All our pomp of yesterday,
Is one with Nineveh, and Tyre [...]

...For heathen heart that puts her trust
In reeking tube and iron shard,
All valiant dust, that builds on dust
And guarding, calls not thee to guard [...]

...For frantic boast and foolish word –
Thy Mercy on Thy People, Lord! (D 15)

Usually it happened that when a Dorsai died on another planet his body was not transported back to the planet Dorsai. Only, in the case of people highly respected by their men could the body be shipped back to the home planet and buried there.

Gordon r. Dickson's views on military SF were different from other writers. He was not focusing on technological development, body upgrading implants, heavy armour or genetic modifications, just the contrary, Gordon r. Dickson

presented in his books an alternative for conducting warfare. In Dorsai series he argued that a soldier's most important features were honour, courage, fitness, and control of the mind. His soldier was a brilliant tactician and strategist capable of winning a battle without engaging into a direct contact with the enemy. What is more, his soldier was fit, competent, disciplined and equipped with the inner strength of controlling his own body. What Dickson wanted to show, was that unnecessary bloodshed could be avoided during war and a soldier did not have to be a thoughtless killing machine for carrying orders but an honourable, well trained and proficient military man who did not have to be overwhelmed with state-of-the-art technology. According to him a war did not have to end up with thousands of casualties and a battle did not have to be decided in the field but by tactical manoeuvres. In his books he proved that a small force of perfectly skilled mercenaries was enough to win the battle, without the necessity of using hundreds of less skilled men. And above all, for him, a soldier did not have to be a thoughtless killing machine for carrying orders but a just, honourable and proficient military man who did not have to be overwhelmed with high technology, as his strength laid in his muscles and in his control of the mind and body. Although his writings have passed with little attention from critics he still remained a silent giant of military SF.