

## Minor characters and interesting byways

I don't know why the people and events and settings of [Splintegrate](#) are so intensely alive to me. There is, of course, the fact that I feel that I "go there", living in that space and piggy-backing on the consciousness of the locals for a time, in order to see events unfold and get the story down. But I do this with all of my books. Yes, they are all pretty vivid to me, but this one seems even more so.

It's like there is a certain intensity, an aliveness I am getting, with even the smallest of events and most incidental of encounters. For instance:

There is a street vendor selling snack food from a cart in Old Town. He sells a kind of fritter made of breis (a genetically modified rice-type grain, a common staple food found on human-inhabited worlds) and diced prawns harvested from the rich biosoup of the Dolos Ocean. Packed into a ball, they're rolled in a spice mix, savory, salty, with a bit of heat to it, and deep-fried quickly in hot oil just til golden brown. Scooped out, drained, tossed in a fiberboard go-box with a container of something that looks like a cross between thousand-island dressing and garlic aioli for dipping, but spicier. It's a local food speciality; I can almost but not quite hear the name (though if it continues to niggle I will have to meditate and go listen and come back with the word).

Just incidental snack food bought along the way - may not even make it through the final cut - but don't you just want to go there and stop and have some? I do.

Or this:

Here and there in the cityscape, in some plazas and greenways or in quiet inner courtyards, are little chusto shrines scattered about Port Oswin. Chusto is a nature deity religion of the Sa'adani that coexists along with their more philosophical state beliefs; none of this is native to Lyndir and its Cassian heritage, but has been imported since annexation by the Empire a century and a half ago. Here inside the domes, various chusto deities have growing followings, though serious philosophers and religionists look at this almost as a fad, saying this is due to urban man's yearning for greater connection to nature, exacerbated by the survival imperative of contained living within domes on this planet.

But in the backstreets - especially the exterior warrens outside the domes, where the very poor still live exposed to the native environment as did the earliest settlers - there, the chusto religion has taken full root and is in fact spawning some radical sects not yet registering on the radar of the urban authorities.

Is this any surprise in a place where oppressive heat, air, and killer jungle make physical survival outdoors such a challenge? Who would not want the protection of, say, the great jungle forest spirit, when living near or hunting within that toxic expanse? I see shrines, ritual practices, medallions blessed and worn; the pale shadow of these practices within the city, and an increasingly vibrant and earnest chusto practice outside the domes. And I hear rumblings

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from some evangelist believers and their priests who are driving the proselytization of chusto in the backstreets, boding political problems for later, perhaps.

Or again, this:

There, offshore, you can glimpse the skimmer platforms that work the thick soupy waters of the Dolos, looking like gigantic catamarans, towing plankton and prawn nets. There is a boy who is lookout on one, high atop the mainmast, keeping an eye out for the submerged bulk of the plankton-grazing water behemoth called the dolophant...

These things and more are calling to me to be explored. They don't suggest a book to me, but they do suggest short stories - or perhaps an anthology of shorts? - that let us look into the lives of these people and their experiences, and see what is to be seen.

It's a little distracting, frankly, to be picking up on such storythreads so consistently while I must follow the mainline (haha) of Splintegrate so tenaciously instead, right now. At least I am taking notes, as you see from the above. Later, I hope to make some time to see where some of those smaller tales may go.

They're so insistant, I may have to do that sooner, rather than later.