

Seven American Nights

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 13 Aug 1997

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Peter Cash — 13 Aug 1997, 15:05

Finished Seven American Nights last night. I've decided that for Wolfe, plot is a kind of opiate that he introduces into his stories to keep you hooked until the end--when it turns out that the plot doesn't matter at all. This story is a good instance: in the end, the possibility is raised that the entire story is a fake, written by the investigator to inveigle the boy's mother into giving him more money to carry on the "investigation". Thus, the very foundation of the story is undermined.

But if the story is counterfeit, why did the investigator write such an unpalatable one? Surely if his purpose was to extract money, he could have written something a bit more up-beat, something that the mother (and the lovely Jasmine) would want to believe.

The actress' deformity (sorry, the book is at home and I have no memory for names) was pretty much a cliché--you could see it coming. Still, it was well-handled. (One wonders--what kind of deformity is so gross as to cause our hero's drastic reaction, but cannot be discovered by touch while the two were making love?)

Marty Light — 26 Aug 1997, 12:03 · follows Peter Cash

Thanks to all for the great discussion! I've been lurking in the background, re-reading Wolfe (and Crowley and Pynchon) as quickly as I am able, and saving the group's comments for future re-readings. At the risk of appearing not up to the high standards already exhibited by the current contributors...here are a couple of points on which I'd like your collective thoughts:

1) Call me dumb, but I think I just "got it" in reference to the title "Seven American Nights" with a Middle-Eastern protagonist compared with "1001 Arabian Nights" (and they are both prime numbers ;-)...

2) One of the earlier stories in IODDAOSAOS is called "The Hero as Werewolf" (typing from memory since book is at home). While I can't pretend to understand this particular story, it references people who have been genetically altered -- perhaps by chemicals in the environment -- and have lupine characteristics. One of the characters is named Garou, which means Wolf(e) or werewolf in some language (loup garou -- mantis?). There is some talk about these mutants going to the park to put on theater productions. To me, it seems like this story is set in the same "universe", country and time-frame as "Seven American Nights". The beast tie-in might NOT then be a hallucination on Nadan's part, but a real event. (I thought I'd egg you on about this hallucination vs reality thread.) I never made the connection between these stories, which I initially read when the first paperback printing came out 16 or so years back, until the most recent reading.

3) I very much would like to subscribe to both a Wolfe-only mail list and an other-author list. Wolfe's works certainly have attracted enough of us to keep up a lively discussion. As we tackle other authors and books (e.g. Crowley, Pynchon) we could certainly spin them off if they begin to dominate the discussion. I just think it's great to get others' perspectives and insights on

things in these challenging literary works that enrich my personal experience while reading them.

I don't know if this characterizes me as a "chem" or a Hierodule, but since my real surname is Light, sign me off as...

...Photon.

PS - alga, please send me a copy of the review you mentioned last week, faulty though it may be. Thanks!