

Some recommendations [was Re: Witches, Daemons, Bears, Democrats]

The Urth list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 27 Apr 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2608>

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Adam Stephanides — 27 Apr 2001, 11:44

on 4/27/01 8:21 AM, David Lebling at dlebling at ucentric.com wrote:
Yes, but the bears were my absolute favorite. I think I've read only one other story where bears have a civilization (as opposed to stories where bears are intelligent -- even Tolkien did that, and I don't count "When Bears Discover Fire"). I _think_ it was a Poul Anderson story, but I can't recall the title. I just remember the bears were very bearish, rather than just big humans in fur coats.

Ha! A chance to plug one of my favorite, and totally obscure, books: The Crimson Bears and A Hundred Doors: The Crimson Bears, Part II, by Tom LaFarge, published by Sun & Moon Press. Fascinating, inventive and very well-written: the second book includes a chapter in the form of a scholarly discussion of a play based upon the events of the chapter. One of the books' covers compares them to Tolkien, but they're nothing like Tolkien. I have to admit that the bears aren't particularly bearish, but there are also intelligent cats, who are fairly cat-like (and two other intelligent species, all with cultures of their own). Alas, I recently saw a copy of the first book on a remainder table.

I'll also recommend another wonderful, completely unknown book from the same publisher: The Secret Service by Wendy Walker. This is a fantasy, but not a genre fantasy. It takes place in our world, or something very close to it, and all the characters are human; there are only a couple of fantastic elements (something like Lady into Fox, if you're familiar with that). It's superbly written; its prose is a pleasure to read for the rhythm alone. There is a long, self-contained dream section which, standing alone, would be one of the finest fantasy novellas I've ever read.

While I'm on a roll, I'll also recommend The Venetian Glass Nephew by Elinor Wylie, better known as a poet. It was first published in the first half of the 20th century (I don't have my copy to hand), though it's been reprinted. It's this-worldly fantasy, like The Secret Service; the title is self-explanatory. It's a jeu d'esprit, but with a somber undercurrent.

--Adam

eli+ — 27 Apr 2001, 19:25 · follows Adam Stephanides

Adam Stephanides wrote:
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I read this recently, but Didn't Get It. It felt fairy-talish -- distanced, and people fell in love without provocation -- which maybe I wasn't in the mood for. There were some nice ideas and writing, but the I couldn't get excited about the package. Aesthetic mismatch, or maybe if I were better informed? The cover blurb was all that let me know that the magician fellow was Casanova, for example.

Around that publication date, how about Hope Mirrlees' Lud-in-the-mist?

First you notice the writing, charming coiling discursive writing, sharply observed. It outlines and colors the characters, sets them to life, and draws back, but it is always present.

The people of Lud live not far from the Debatable Hills on the border of Faerie, but they determinedly do not believe in Faerie. The corrupting, mind-bending fairy-fruit that comes downstream? Its trafficking is prosecuted as the smuggling of silk.

These burghers are just the sort of people who in fantasy get their eyes opened for the better. But fairy fruit and fairy influence turn out to be, though not the enemy they thought, not a friend, either. The Mayor's son has eaten fairy fruit, and the daughters of the town are spirited away, and the Mayor has to rescue them -- from /what/ is not so clear. Some characters' history and motives become so involuted, and the nature of Faerie so hard to untangle, that I have no idea whether (or not?) the ending, Little, Big inside out, is happy or sad. I do know that the book is wonderful fun to read.

Spoiler, technically -- for page 10 or so:

Which is the land you don't return from, and who are the immortal ones? Death, and the Dead. It's so sensible, now that she points it out. Surely this has been used somewhere else.

Eli Brandt | eli+ at cs.cmu.edu | <http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~eli/>

Adam Stephanides — 27 Apr 2001, 19:30 · follows eli+

on 4/27/01 6:25 PM, eli+ at gs211.sp.cs.cmu.edu at eli+ at gs211.sp.cs.cmu.edu wrote:

Adam Stephanides wrote:

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To be honest, I bought The Sea-Rabbit several years before coming across The Secret Service, and started to read it, but didn't get it at all (whereas I fell in love with The Secret Service almost immediately). I should give it a go, if I can ever dig my copy up.

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I suspect an aesthetic mismatch; to me the fairy-tale aspects you mention were part of its charm.

--Adam