

Ghastly Gorm

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 29 Jun 2001

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 29 Jun 2001, 08:38

William Ansley, quotha:

I did enjoy the Gormenghast books immensely. Well, the first two, but I even enjoyed `_Titus Alone_`, just not as much. (That ending!)

Well, it isn't really supposed to be an ending, nor was the "trilogy" intended to be three books long. Peake was dying (in great pain) when he wrote `_Titus Alone_`, which explains at least `_some_` of its infelicities*; he tried to get on with the fourth book but didn't get very far.

* The greatest "infelicity," the fact that the story does not take place in Gormenghast, is not in fact an infelicity except by accident. The longish series was intended to be the story of Titus, not of the castle; the castle was such an overwhelming presence that it became, in effect, the main character of the first two volumes of the projected series. If the whole had been completed (and if Peake had been at his full powers in writing it), I gather, Titus would have been more clearly the center of the whole thing and the castle more clearly a setting.

For all the rest of you who did enjoy the Gormenghast trilogy, there is a novella about Titus as a young boy called "Boy in Darkness" which is, in my opinion, as good as the best bits of the novels. It actually takes place away from Gormenghast, for the most part.

Ummmm... no, I don't think so. Just in one of the odder quarters of G., where you can forget you're in a castle. Think of the place where the christening is held, that sort of place. Titus doesn't actually `_leave_` Gormenghast until well into the second volume, and "Boy" seems to take place between TA and G.

--Dan'l

William Ansley — 30 Jun 2001, 00:53 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

My, we are an argumentative bunch, aren't we? (Myself included.)

At 8:38 AM -0700 6/29/01, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

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Actually I knew that *_Titus Alone_* was unfinished and that Peake intended to have Titus return to Gormenghast eventually. But, the book was published the way it was, with the ending it had. I don't see how I can judge it as what it might have been but wasn't, rather than what it is, a book with a (to me at least) quite unsatisfactory ending.

The fact that TA didn't take place in Gormenghast didn't bother me particularly, in fact I rather liked the weird, science-fictional, somewhat Kafkaesque world in which Titus found himself.

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This assertion surprised me so much that I had to re-read the story. Having done so, I stand by my assertion: Titus did leave Gormenghast.

I will quote from *_Peake's Progress_*, in which "Boy in Darkness" runs from p. 179 to 233.

First of all we have in introductory paragraph written at the beginning of the story on page 179.

This story was commissioned in 1955 and published by Eyre & Spottiswoode in 1956 together with two other stories, by William Golding and John Wyndham, under the title *_Sometime Never: Three Tales of Imagination_*. The boy in the story is Titus Groan, and the strange experience he undergoes is an imaginative exercise of an event which *_might_* have happened to him, when he escapes from his ritual laden home of Gormenghast.

OK, the events in the story didn't happen at all apparently (the whole episode is so dreamlike that this seems probable) but, assuming they did, one of the events is Titus leaving Gormenghast.

On p. 187. after Titus has been traveling for a while:

By now he was several miles from the castle itself and deep into less obvious territory

He moves on and on, until he is past the last landmark he recognizes, then he crosses a river he has never seen before and is then carried for miles farther and brought into the depths of an enormous mine.

After he escapes, on page 233:

The Boy was lost for a long while but, walking in a kind of dream, came eventually to the banks of a wide river ... He boarded a little boat and was pushed across the water ... by the time the boat touched ground on the far side his adventures had melted from his mind.
It was not long before one of a host of searchers found him lost and weary in a crumbling courtyard and carried him back to his immemorial home.

William Ansley