

Dinner & the Long Sun

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 03 Jun 2003

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Rex Gatch — 03 Jun 2003, 16:13

Thanks for the replies. I might have also asked what are the similarities between Harry Harrison and Gene Wolfe. When you see needlers, chems, taluses and floaters you might be tempted to think you were in a Stainless Steel Rat book. His use of 50's / 60's sf standards has always complicated my reading of the LS books.

But back to Dinner at Deviants Palace. If you haven't read the book then there will be some major spoilers here. SPOILER SPACE

It is I think the first Powers book I read. Its set in a post Apocalyptic California unlike most of his later output which is set in the present or past. It has several typical Powers themes - the hero becomes progressively injured throughout the book, it is set in California, the fantastic becomes real etc.

I'll try and summarise the plot, as best I can.

The protagonist is a professional musician who used to be a Redeemer (some one who rescues and deprogrammes members of the Jaybush Cult).

He is persuaded out of retirement in order to try and redeem the girl with which he was once in love.

The book follows his quest to find the girl during which he finds out that the Jaybush Cult is far more sinister and powerful than it seems.

The Jaybush cult is run by the Jaybush who is " a psychic vampire from outer space" .

Jaybush recruits people into the cult in two ways, firstly by preying on vulnerable people in the fashion of modern day cults and secondly through a drug called Blood.

Blood is a reddish brown powder.

The book also features Hemogoblins who are vampiric creatures who take on the characteristics of the human on whom they feed.

There are also Trash Men who are humans reduced almost to the point of death by the cult, who are then Cyborged to extend their usefulness.

So there is the summary which I'm afraid doesn't do much justice to the book. When I reread it after reading the LS books the drug Blood really leapt out at me. Its affects are not identical to Rust - it is more of a soporific than a stimulant. It turns out that Blood is made from the blood of the most degenerate members of the cult whose minds and spirit have been consumed by the Jaybush through his perverted Communion.

Rust is never really explained in the LS books. It may be that GW intended for it just to be a drug, such as Beggar's root and it has no more significance than that. However I am fairly sure that it is likened to dried blood at some point in the text though I can't find a quote here.

Thematically the books share the idea that blood is memory, and I wonder whether there is a Rust - Blood connection. They also explore in very different ways imposed religions, vampirism and mechanical/human hybrids.

This isn't conclusive and the books are very different in many ways but I certainly felt that it was possible that GW was influenced by Powers in some oblique way. I fairly sure that the above is going to sound tenuous to any one who hasn't read Dinner At Deviant's Palace but I'm hoping it might spark some connections about the role of Rust. For those of you who have read it I'll be interested to hear if it also reverberated with you or this is just my own feeling.

Ambergris

James Jordan — 03 Jun 2003, 18:27 · follows Rex Gatch

I won't bother with spoiler space. Fair warning.

Dinner presents LACity (sp?) as a new Jerusalem, with walls and gates, as in the book of Nehemiah. Also a new Eden appears, with Satan (the space vampire) at its center. Alcohol (the wine of the Lord's Supper) keeps the protagonist sane enough to deal with "satan." Also remember the Biblical prohibition on consuming blood; only the blood of Jesus is allowed, and that by means of a symbol. IIRC, once again as in so many of Powers's books, the protagonist receives wounds in all the stigmata places. He's out to redeem a "bride" (the church). Except for being out to save a woman from the clutches of evil, however, I don't see any of this in Long Sun. Viron is more like Judea as a whole than Jerusalem in particular (the ayuntamiento being the Jewish leaders; etc.).

I can't recall many details of the narrative. It does not appear to me that there is much of Dinner in Long Sun, save as you point out maybe the connexion between a character named Blood and the drug Rust, which sure looks like an allusion to dried blood to me after reading your post. Blood is red because of iron, after all. Doesn't Blood promote the use of Rust; isn't he partly a drug lord?

I think you may be right about an oblique allusion or influence. But so far, it may just be a coincidence -- they're both Catholics of sorts, and writing in the same genre about the same kinds of religious things -- or a deep memory of Powers surfacing unaware in Wolfe's writing.

Nutria

Che Monro — 05 Jun 2003, 01:37 · follows James Jordan

At 12:13 PM 3/06/2003 -0400, you wrote:

Thanks for the replies. I might have also asked what are the similarities between Harry Harrison and Gene Wolfe.

When you see needlers, chems, taluses and floaters you might be tempted to think you were in a Stainless Steel Rat book.

When you set out to burgle a manor you don't just knock on the front door. Unless you're Jim DiGriz, the Stainless Steel Rat, that is.

"Talus Repair? Hello? I'm here to fix the malfunctioning robot."

"We have no malfunction here," the steel voice replied from the other side of the gate.

"Ah, but you would think that because you're malfunctioning."

"But I'm not ma..."

That was when the bomb went off.

Che

Ché Franz Joseph Monro -- <http://www.chemonro.com>
che at chemonro.com -- flirt at technologist.com

Rex Gatch — 05 Jun 2003, 22:27 · follows Che Monro

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Yes. Nicely done.

I do wonder how what your age and what you've read before influences your reading of things. My reading started in the 70's and a lot of authors I read then had published back in the 50's. Consequently I found reading Neuromancer thrilling in a genre breaking way that I'm sure I wouldn't if I was 18 now. I've done some reading of classic books that date well before me and I've not managed to experience the thrill that their contemporaneous readers would have done. So back to my original point does Wolfe introduce certain things like Needlers to introduce a sense of familiarity, or because he has a fondness for them or because he's trying to lull us into a false sense of comprehension.

I still have major problems with Vampires who fly through space and 19th century foundries producing taluses. As we know that GW is a stickler for accuracy - does this mean that these are clues to some deeper reading of the texts or simply meant to be accepted as written. The Horn/Nettle authorship of the LS books is another issue I struggle with
Ambergris