



Image of the Beast

Philip José Farmer , Theodore Sturgeon (Foreword by) , Jim Burns (Illustrator)

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Private investigator Herald Childe watches a snuff movie of his partner being brutally murdered. The subsequent pursuit of his killers takes him through the LA smog and into a waking nightmare of sexual brutality and supernatural bestiality."

Image of the Beast Details

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From Reader Review Image of the Beast for online ebook

Alex Murphy says

As a first step into the world of sci-fi novels, I am not able to place the book against it's own genre. The setting is Los Angeles during heatwave and smog. It reads more like a detective thriller, mainly because the books main character is, in fact, a private detective. The majority of the book is kept in 'reality', the plot is thick with fantastic imagery (as well as some hilarious sexual puns it must be said), the story itself surprisingly turn-paging. Personally, I found that as the book reached it's inevitable climax, it ran away from itself, each page offering numerous mythical encounters across multiple settings.

Marty Ponnoch says

This was one of the most bizarre books I have ever read. I really like stories that grab you right from the beginning pages and force you to read on in abject horror combined with humor. Gave an amazing explanation for Werewolves and vampires. Could not put it down.

Trine says

3,5

Martyn Halm says

This book, and its follow up, Blown - An Exorcism: Ritual Two, are the first books I read where the author truly mixed totally different genres in a beautiful mess. While the writing is uneven in parts and not as solid as his World of Tiers and Riverworld series, I found these two surreal books more thought-provoking and interesting.

Marlène says

Wouh! Une autre lecture motivée par la critique de l'amie Zazaone, et en voilà une lecture qu'elle est loin de ce à quoi je m'attendais.

Nous voilà donc plongés dans un pastiche de hardboiled fantastico-érotique en technicolor, avec une exploitation de la clique de stéréotypes mythologiques habituelle (vampires, loups-garous, femmes-porcs et j'en passe et des meilleures!) à la fois drôle et originale.

Bon, la traduction française (impossible de trouver la V.O. neuve, en rupture, ou d'occase à prix raisonnable) est assez désuète mais en fin de compte, ça colle parfaitement au cadre.

Bref, je suis sûre que Farmer avait tout un tas de choses intéressantes à transmettre dans ce roman, mais personnellement, j'ai passé un excellent moment entre rire et horreur à suivre les aventures érotiques d'un détective privé parachuté au beau milieu d'un incroyable "snuff movie", dans les brumes toxiques d'une Los Angeles en bout de course.

Cina says

This was suggested to me by a friend, I was basically warned the book is very weird. It wasn't told what it was about just that it's the strangest book ever.

That it was but I enjoyed it.

Let's see if I can summarize this:

The setting: LA in the torment of a hazy fog that is bogging down the entire city.

Plot: Harold Childe is a half breed, a human and an alien. Except he doesn't know this. A former cop turned P.I. is now on the case of who or what happened to his soon to be ex-business partner. After the delivery of a video tape showing his partner being murdered during sex that is a bit beyond S&M, Childe starts following his instinct and leads. Where it leads him is on to a path filled with sexual encounters with a band of aliens. After several graphically imaginative sexual situations Childe finds out his alien birth rite and not only solves the case but saves the day.

The book is certainly strange because of the alien themed sexual situations and the pure amount of sexual situations that occurs in the book. It really is more of an erotic sci-fi novel because every instance of the book is tied to sex. Strange sex at it but if you can put that aside and read beyond that you have a very friendly character in Harold Childe.

I found myself interested in his relationship with his wife, who did actually murder his partner and what was really up with the Baron, was he or was he not a vampire. As the truth behind Childe, the Baron and his guest and how they related to child unfolded I was honestly turning pages to read. You really have to look at the sex scenes as interludes, they are quirky enough to read them. You may even find yourself chuckling at some of his encounters.

This was my first book by Farmer and I am not sure if I would read another one because it came across that he tends to lose himself in his erotic writing opposed to letting more of the story develop.

Jonathan Rimorin says

I read this as a kid. If I remember correctly, Farmer cast his good friend, Forrest J. Ackerman, as the hero in a bunch of X-rated occult private dick fantasies (one of them being -- again, if I'm not just making this up [and I doubt I have the imagination to do so] -- a woman with a steel cobra emanating from her nethers who turn out to be Joan of Arc and Gille de Rais in some kind of kinky symbiosis); it's sort of amusing if you belonged to SF fandom, and knew that Forry Ackerman was basically the super-fan, super-collector and rah-rah supporter of all things science-fiction. So basically "Image of the Beast" is a kind of affectionate inside joke, made for those teens and others with a juvenile bent who would come up with shocking imagery and transgression for its own sake: it has its place, but it's nothing "classic."

Roddy Williams says

‘Herald Childe has just seen a home movie in which his partner was brutally murdered, his life-fluids drained by a lady with razor-sharp dentures.

Childe is a private dick. He’s accustomed to sticking his nose into other people’s business, and it’s usually dirty. But he’s not prepared for the gut-churning horrors which await him as he wades through the L.A. smog following up a lead in the most disgusting case of his career.

He is plunged into a waking nightmare of sexual brutality and supernatural bestiality; he becomes entangled with a snake-woman; he is seduced by a filthy human sow; and he lays a ghost, only to realise that he’s the one getting laid – by a woman working off the frustrations of over a century in ectoplasmic exile.

But what can he do? he can hardly tell the police that he’s discovered a crowd of sex-mad vampires and werewolves from another universe...’

Blurb from the 1975 Quartet paperback edition

Private Detective Herald Childe is called to Police Headquarters who have received a film in the post showing Matthew Colben (Childe’s partner) tied to a table being seduced, tortured and finally castrated by the bite of what appears to be a vampire.

This rather odd novel is no doubt Farmer’s contribution to the New Wave movement which – sometimes achieving its effect through shock and the use of taboo subject matter – intended to revive and reinvent Science Fiction. Like the Punk movement in music of the Nineteen Seventies, it injected some much-needed adrenaline into the genre and extended the boundaries of what readers wanted and accepted as Science Fiction.

Herald follows a trail to the home of a man reputed to be a vampire and discovers a peculiar community of vampires and were-creatures, visitors from a parallel dimension.

The novel is littered with graphic scenes of pseudo-bestial sado-masochistic sex, which would be less of a problem if they were adding something to the plot. As it is, most of these scenes read like some vague and bizarre pornographic story.

There’s a plethora of weird names floating about. Hamlet Jeremiah is some kind of guru and provides an introduction to Woolston Heepish, a collector of arcane genre items. This in turn leads to the sinister house of Baron Igescu where the majority of the novel takes place.

The problem one has with the novel is that there is no real reason why the creatures Herald discovers should be so sexually obsessed. He is seduced by a snake-woman, a pig-woman and – for even less good reason – the resident ghost of Igescu’s mansion, Delores Del Osorgo. These bestial (and ectoplasmic) acts are described in interminable detail.

Other authors such as JG Ballard – who has written his own share of graphic sexual acts – and Brian Aldiss have at least set this theme within some sort of context.

Farmer does not even have the excuse of this being soft-porn masquerading as Science Fiction or even Horror, since the sex is neither soft, erotic or particularly horrific, and it’s puzzling as to whom the target audience of this book might have been.

Had the sexual elements been less blatant and less numerous, and the emphasis been on the style of the detective novel that this is attempting to emulate then this might have been a better work. It’s a book which cannot decide what it wants to be. There is interesting characterisation, and – as in many private eye stories – Herald has a problematic relationship with his ex-wife and strained relationships with everyone else. The setting is a Los Angeles shrouded in smog and a cast of eccentric grotesques. It seems like a sadly wasted opportunity to produce some interesting work.

Wol-vriey says

Ah so . . . to put it simply: some cases are better left uninvestigated.

A one-of-a-kind paranormal detective thriller, with all the sex, gore, and craziness you'll ever require.

Charles says

I'm torn about this book. Elements of it were pretty good, but for a book that was basically pornographic for the time (Late 1960s) it is amazingly non-erotic. My rating is actually between 2 and 3 stars. It's worth a read but very dated. I actually don't remember much in the way of details about it.

Xolrax says

4.2

Mark Hodder says

Porno sci-fi horror and about as explicit as it's possible to get on the written page. There are no holds barred here, and if you're easily shocked or disgusted, this probably isn't the novel for you. I rather enjoyed it, especially the moments of dark scatological humour. The transgressive has always appealed to me, and Farmer employs it here to great effect, creating a hot mess that adds up to considerably more than the sum of its sticky parts.

Garry says

An effective introduction to Farmer's work for the uninitiated in terms of his humour, subversiveness, experimentalism and his fondness of multi crossing genres. However it soon becomes apparent he had aimed Image of the Beast at a fairly narrow readership, originally for the publishers of pornography Essex House, so potentially interesting attempts at introducing transgressive themes and ideas degenerate into cynical and gratuitous smut. Suits me as I love explicit sex scenes and Farmer treats them with surprising (if uncalled for) realism, but other readers attracted by his reputation are likely to be unmoved, if not totally repelled by this brief stab at sci-fi sexploitation. However if you approach this from an appreciation for irreverent pastiches (in this case private dick pulp thrillers) and artifacts from the more frivolous areas of the counter-culture you may well be beguiled by Farmer's expansive and mischievous imagination.

Tim Pendry says

Shall we start with a warning for those of a tender mental disposition? This has substantial sections of pretty hard core pornography, much of it of a very Sadean quality. So that's that!

The crime that starts the tale is of exceptional nastiness and will have any male squirming in their chairs ... and the tantric covertings of alien creatures leave nothing to the imagination.

But it is also a rather curious quasi-satire, mostly well written, on the American imagination. Put the sex to one side (hard though that is to do) and it might be seen as an unusual literary experiment in pulp.

The book is divided into two broadly equal halves - two novellae - which mirror each other in multiple ways. As so often with Farmer, the cultural references come as thick and fast as his hero's 'jism'.

The second half is weaker with some of Farmer's failings too obvious - dull autistic accounts of sets of events that do not need such detail - but it does continue the ironic theme and should be persevered with.

What he is doing is pulling the pulp world of his literary peers into line as a science fiction story (though this is not clear until the second half) with a myth of sexual energy as space travel.

The first half plays with motifs from Chandleresque private eye literature (the 'private dick'), Lovecraftian horror and the cult of the monster as envisaged by Universal Studios.

In fact, Farmer has worked hard to make his universe, where vampires, werewolves, ghosts and warring aliens are real, as plausible as could be possible and does surprisingly well.

The second half weaves in a science fiction fantasy of the Golden Age ... as if Gersback and Campbell were no longer sexually neutered nerds but had allowed sexual transgression into their repertoire.

There is also a mirrored apocalyptic strand that speaks indirectly to the sociological SF of the period in which the book was written (1968) - polluted fog rules part one and floods and mud slides part 2.

Do we take this book of sexual violence and perversion seriously? Half so. It was written for cash for a porn publisher but Farmer was too intense not to try to give the work some high camp meaning.

Theodore Sturgeon rightly produced a quizzical short introduction and urges it not be dismissed for what it appears to be and perhaps he is right.

The work stands as an unusual contribution to SF (and to pornography) but it does raise an interesting issue - the ability of science fiction and the horror genre to avoid sexuality at every turn.

This is, of course, derivative of both the era (from the 1930s to 1950s) and of the audience, mostly young adolescents, but it is also a response to the Californian and maturing SF audience of the day.

Farmer is about 50 when he writes this - observing the new sexual freedom as someone probably too late to benefit from it yet open-minded enough to deal with it.

He had broken the taboo on sex in sex fiction in his mid-30s with the 'The Lovers' and influenced Heinlein. He was part of a maturing of the literary form that we now take for granted.

Farmer picks up on the sexual theme and then adds an interesting twist by linking sex and violence to the 'energetics' of the physics of space opera and horror, not entirely successfully but suggestively.

I suspect most readers would find this book too much to take - I can detach myself from literary horrors

