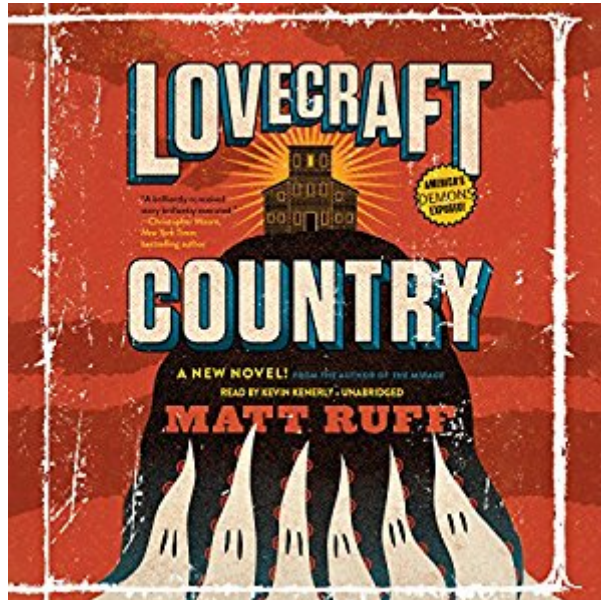




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Lovecraft Country: A Novel



Synopsis

Critically acclaimed cult novelist Matt Ruff makes visceral the terrors of life in Jim Crow America and its lingering effects in this brilliant and wondrous work of the imagination that melds historical fiction, pulp noir, and Lovecraftian horror and fantasy. Chicago, 1954. When his father, Montrose, goes missing, 22-year-old army veteran Atticus Turner embarks on a road trip to New England to find him, accompanied by his uncle George - publisher of The Safe Negro Travel Guide - and his childhood friend, Letitia. On their journey to the manor of Mr. Braithwhite - heir to the estate that owned one of Atticus' ancestors - they encounter both mundane terrors of white America and malevolent spirits that seem straight out of the weird tales George devours. At the manor, Atticus discovers his father in chains, held prisoner by a secret cabal named the Order of the Ancient Dawn - led by Samuel Braithwhite and his son, Caleb - which has gathered to orchestrate a ritual that shockingly centers on Atticus. And his one hope of salvation may be the seed of his clan's destruction. A chimerical blend of magic, power, hope, and freedom that stretches across time, touching diverse members of two black families, Lovecraft Country is a devastating kaleidoscopic portrait of racism - the terrifying specter that continues to haunt us today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Being a fan of H.P. Lovecraft's fiction means also having to face the uncomfortable truth that Lovecraft the man was an unabashed racist and xenophobe. Needless to say, I was thrilled to come across Lovecraft Country, which promised to confront this head on, employing

Lovecraftian tropes as a vehicle for examining race and racism in 1950s

America. It's such an exciting premise, but it just didn't deliver in quite the way that I had hoped. The story follows 22-year-old Atticus Turner and his family, who discover that they are inextricably linked to a secret organization that harnesses occult powers. Unfortunately, I had a hard time ever finding a rhythm. The book hops around to different narratives without enough focus on character development, which left me feeling disconnected and uninvested. Rather than fully exploring the many moral complexities at his disposal, Ruff instead delivers a convoluted plot that's arguably more of an homage to Scooby Doo or The DaVinci Code than Lovecraft. I loved his idea of applying the cosmic existential dread at the heart of Lovecraft's stories to the terror of being black in Jim Crow America, but the story lacked the awe and atmospheric tension that one would expect from a Lovecraft tribute. If I'm being honest, there really wasn't any narrative tension at all. Such a great concept, but such lackluster execution. If I were rating it purely on the premise alone (and for that AMAZING cover art), it would be a 5-star book, but alas, a stellar premise does not make a great book.

I really enjoyed this novel. I came in expecting more of the Cthulhu-style cosmic horror à la the title's namesake, but Ruff has built something so much more impressive in Lovecraft Country. While certain creatures and shoggoths do make brief appearances, the horror here is very much manmade and driven by Jim Crow and race-obsessions. The past weighs heavy in the book, which takes place in pre-civil rights America, as a series of sorcerous cults circle a closeknit group of black friends and family in the Chicago area. The novel is really more of a novel in stories, featuring successive sections that take horror tropes and turn them on their heads. I thought I wanted more existential dread and terror from this book, but the confidence exuded by our protagonists in the face of unknown horrors is perfectly drawn and justified - how terrifying can a tentacle-beast be when you've grown up in a world where your life is threatened because of your skin color?

Not bad but not really Lovecraftian horror. On the other hand it does a great job of pointing out the unfortunately reality for African-American citizens both during the Jim Crow era but even still today. It works well on that level. I didn't even know there was a specific travel guide for African-Americans pointing out spots at which they will be welcome. Evidently there was a similar guide for Jewish American. Sad that there was (is??) a need for such tomes.

This is one of the scariest novels I have ever read. Not for the lovecraftian monsters- I am inured to their presence throughout our culture. Rather, the first few chapters detailed the careful and ever-so-delicate preparations the black main characters must take to cross pre-Civil Rights era America and survive. Cautious route planning to avoid known danger areas, risking assaults and murder by unreconstructed police officers, only staying in inns pre-vetted that they will not allow racist goons to lynch you in the night for being in their neighborhood or town. I am an upper-class white guy who went to Berkeley and has a white collar job in a largely white-dominated industry. I have never even been given a traffic ticket, let alone subjected to police harassment. I have read quite a bit of non-fiction on this era in the past, but this brought home that fear more than the non-fiction ever could. And that fear has not receded in the present day. Even if you aren't a fan of the Lovecraftian trope set, pick this up to read the first few chapters. It is worth your time.

This is about, not only a family that is caught in a warlock war, but also an African American family that has to deal with 1950's racism as well. I had mixed emotions while reading this: A pleasure concerning the lovecraftian themes and has nothing to do with Cthulhu... As well as anger for the way the world is when it comes to ethnicity and the frustration of it not needing to be this way. Loved the book!!!

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