



The Gumshoe, the Witch, and the Virtual Corpse

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Welcome to 21st century Atlanta. During your stay, depending on your tastes, you can cruise gay midtown (I hear that the Inquisition Health Club has introduced manacles and chains to the aerobics class) or check out the Reverend-Senator Stonewall's headquarters at Freedom Plaza (watch out for the Christian Militia guarding it, though) or attend a sky-clad Wiccan sabbat (by invitation only). Avoid the courthouse, where the Cherokee have turned out in full war-paint to renegotiate a nineteenth-century land deal. Also stay away from all cemeteries, at least until the police find out why someone is disinterring and crucifying corpses.

As you can tell, this is a lively novel, full of intricate plotting and engaging off-beat characters. Among the latter are a gay detective, a Wiccan family, an ambitious televangelist with an eye on the White House, an artist whose medium is flesh and blood, a Cherokee drag queen--and then there's poor Benji, who would just like to make it to his fifteenth birthday, assuming the MIBS don't get him first or his Baptist parents don't ground him for life because his new girlfriend is a witch.

Picked as one of the eight best mysteries of 1999 by The Drood Review of Mysteries. Winner of Two Spectrum Awards ("Best Novel" and "People's Choice") Nominated for Two Lambda Awards ("Best Science Fiction / Fantasy Book" and "Best Men's Mystery.")

The Gumshoe, the Witch, and the Virtual Corpse Details

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Author : Keith Hartman

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From Reader Review The Gumshoe, the Witch, and the Virtual Corpse for online ebook

Anne says

Mystery set in a future conceived in the 90's. So far, 8 different first person narrators and counting. Possible time travelers have appeared. You wouldn't think it would work at all, but it did, all the way through. Finished in one fabulous afternoon. I totally enjoyed this. Not for anyone who takes their Moral Majority, New Age witchcraft or gay private eyes seriously, and there were no time travelers after all, just psychics. I figured out at last that it was like a comic book in prose, that's why all the different first person narrators, to get the reader into the frame. Five stars for making me a happy lowbrow reader.

Paul Wooller says

Batshit crazy! If you broke this book down you'd go mental. Far too many grammatical errors and at one point the years and ages don't add up. Also, due to the large amount of narrators in the book, its tough even for the sharpest of memories to remember what happened a particular characters in their previous chapters 100 pages back. BUT, if you go with the flow and just enjoy the slightly fantastical/futuristic murder mystery then you'll have a blast!

Ryan Hamilton says

Cleverly written, with characters I cared about.

Ryan says

In the year 2033, in this near future mystery with elements of both Sci-Fi and Fantasy, the various cultures and subcultures in America are so divided, the country is ready to erupt into civil war. Religion has found a strong foothold in politics. Wiccan has achieved a level equal with Christianity. Abortion is legal. The gay gene has been found. And since Catholicism is the last major religion to believe abortion is wrong, most young gays are Catholic. It's a world that feels like it's on the brink of falling into chaos, as we follow a dozen or so POV characters trying to stop it from going over the edge.

I have made a point, for some time, of avoiding "queer" fiction. I'm gay, but romance novels just aren't my thing. I got tired of shifting through "Fantasy" novels with covers plastered with shirtless men, or listed in "Fantasy" but with a romance plotline synopsis. I wanted queer people having adventures, not brooding over infatuations.

And with this novel, I totally got what I was looking for: a gay P.I. whose romantic considerations, while present in the novel, came last after the action and mystery aspects of his character arc.

For me, this book only has two strikes against it.

1. The backend of the book was not as thoroughly edited as the frontend. After about the 60% mark, there were obvious errors that really should not have made it into the published novel.
2. The book dragged after about the 75% mark. I managed to put most of the pieces together around the 3/4 mark, and as such I felt like the novel dragged on unnecessarily for the last quarter. That said, there were a couple of small surprises that I enjoyed near the ending.

There is so much more to like about this book than all of the "queer" aspects. The novel overall was a fun read. Considering all the advances made in equality in the past year or so, the backdrop of the story did require a bit of a suspension of disbelief. The book contained a wonderfully diverse cast of characters - various ages, sexualities, races and genders. You will need two hands to count them all, but each chapter is reserved for one point of view and is named for the character speaking; so it's easy enough to keep track.

But for me, the main draw of the book comes back to one thing: queer adventures, without the brooding.

Mark says

I have had the Gumshoe, the Witch, and the Virtual Corpse on my "to read" list for a while now, and I'm very glad that I finally got around to reading it. The story is very inventive, the characters are fully rounded and interesting, and the multiple POV storytelling really allows the reader to truly understand the full depth of the mystery.

I think my only criticism would be that there was one POV character too many. Considering the title, I would have expected most of the tale to be seen through the eyes of the Gumshoe and the Witch, but it feels that we see more through Benji than the others. (Not that I mind too much as the character is probably the most compelling as we try to figure out the mystery.)

All in all, I enjoyed the story and am glad I finally read it. I may pick up the sequel, but it might not be for a little while as I pick through the rest of my "to read" list...

Delton says

Enjoyable dialogue and convoluted, yet somewhat witty scenarios throughout the book made up for some of the clumsy writing. However, the overall *mystery* wasn't all that intriguing or engaging and at times it was hard to believe the 'Gumshoe' was some sort of seasoned and 'skilled' undercover detective.

Although the chapters in the book tell the story from the point of view of (too) many characters, it still all felt somewhat like the same voice to me. Part Sci-Fi and part mystery, it felt lacking in both.

Also, for a book set in the year 2033, it felt surprisingly like WeHo in the early 1990's. The future was loaded up with 'Reverend' Senators, religious people obsessed with finding out who among them may be 'gay' and flirtatious men preoccupied with young, cute guys. Talk about a depressing future...

Ulysses Dietz says

Liked this a great deal. Well written, clever, fast-paced, a real nail-biter at times. There are moments of genuine darkness, and moments of profound emotion. The very complicated plot could be off-putting if you don't like that sort of thing - as could the multiple first-person POVs. But I was captivated and grew to like all the characters, except for one, who was hateful all the way through.

Set in the future, but not too far in the future, we see an America not unlike what we know today, but more frighteningly polarized and fascinatingly higher tech than now. If there is a central character, it is Drew Parker, a gay detective (whose being gay is treated incidentally, which rather disappointed me), a Wiccan mother of two; a power-hungry Baptist senator; a sleep-deprived cop; an elderly Cherokee shaman; and a skittish fourteen year old named Benji.

If you're an obsessive reader (as I can be sometimes) and try to keep every plot thread separate, you'll be frustrated or dizzy. Just go with the flow and let Hartman's smart narrative keep you on your toes. (Ignore the iffy editing and the sometime inability to use the pronouns "me" and "I" correctly, which seems to be universal now...these are but blips in a really good read.)

Res says

The one where America is so culturally divided that there are Wiccan schools as well as Baptist ones. Drew Parker is a gay private detective, and his partner, Jen, a witch, is missing, and someone digs up a corpse and does something very strange with it.

The future world is drawn in such broad, exaggerated strokes; it might work as an article-length parody, but at novel length, I don't believe it, and as a result, I don't believe most of the characters, either. It doesn't help that the book is made up of first-person narratives from a dozen characters, and the voices just aren't different enough to help me keep track of who's talking.

The powerful, amoral white Christianist male is certainly a fine reflection of something that scares people (me included), but as a villain, he's just as trite as torturing Nazis would be.

The writing is fine, but the editing is *dreadful*. There are typos, punctuation errors, and even misspellings. The tense changes at random. (This may be intentional, but if I'd been his beta, I'd have made him change it.)

In the author's world, sexual orientation is so binary that it can be tested for prenatally; obviously I have a problem with that, and also with the fact that apparently only men are gay (at least by page 130).

In summary: some interesting stuff here, but not enough to make me keep reading.

Amy Weiner says

This book kept showing up on automated "recommended" lists for me. I finally gave in and really enjoyed it.

It is physically large, and it takes a little work to get into. The entire novel is told in first-person perspective, but who that person is changes from chapter to chapter. The stories really do cross each other, you just have to hang in there. Among the narrators of this future-Atlanta whodunnit are a police detective, a gay private detective, a Wiccan mom with a husband and two daughters, and a teenaged boy (and there are others). Quite a wild ride.

Sineala says

A reasonably intriguing gay SF mystery set in the near future, in which the US is basically Baptists versus Wiccans and there are some grotesque murders going on. Not my favorite thing ever -- I think it has a few too many POV characters -- but the execution is really well done. Hey, I might even read the sequel someday.

Tepintzin says

I read this a good 15 years ago, and felt like reading it again. It's kind of a novel-length political cartoon, and very prescient in how possible it is to live in an echo chamber. There are actual Wiccan neighbourhoods and private schools, and these exist for other religions, and sects of same. Like ethnic neighbourhoods, only here it's deliberately constructed subdivisions. It was amusing seeing references to the Microsoft Network, which of course now absolutely exists. So some things are dated but overall, a believable vision.

Mark Boltz-Robinson says

OMG. Best first novel, ever. Hartman comes out with a leading book that at first seems disjointed. Each chapter is set in a slightly-future Atlanta, told from the point of view of the character archetype: The Gumshoe, The Witch, The Artist, etc. And slowly about 8 or so distinct characters and viewpoints are twisted together, with increasing rapidity to a singular moment of "Holy Fuck. Plot twist!" that I found brilliant. Re-read it again recently and it just reconfirmed how awesome it was.

Korgon says

Oh, I adore this book. It's such glorious fun, written with love and conviction and sharp, dorky humour. Perfect for curling up with to reread when the world outside is getting me down.

Set in a thoroughly balkanised 2024 America, it follows its much put-upon characters through a week of serial killers, riots, court cases and, of course, embarrassing crushes.

Clearly a first novel, but I find the rough edges charming; they make the earnestness that occasionally bursts through a lot easier to enjoy.

Hops from genre to genre with glee and love, and has a special place in my heart for being one of the first unabashedly queer novels I ever read.

Lori S. says

Just how did the author keep them all straight? I bet he had a wall chart or something, with cross indexing. I'm impressed.

This book is full of interesting characters. We get first person perspectives from the Gumshoe Drew Parker, his partner, Jen late into the book, the Chosen Benji, his girlfriend Summer, her mother the Witch (whose name escapes me), the Reverend Senator Zacharia Stonewall, the Artist, the Singer, the Cherokee Shaman, the Police ... you get the picture. Each has his or her own character, distinguishable in tone and voice and you could almost read the book just by each character's part. Almost, but each story interweaves with the others in a nice flow which is surprisingly clear and easy to follow, though the mystery at the heart of the story is plenty twisty enough you don't find out exactly who did what.

To top it all off, we get criss-crossing of genre boundaries in free fall. I wish more authors would do this: there's a little bit of science fiction (it's set in the near future of 2025, artificial wombs, cloning and bio-shaping are the norm), fantasy/New Age (Wiccans who can do magic), a police procedural/detective fiction, social/religious commentary, politics, shamanism (I want to know what my totem is now) ... you name it, this book has it all, even a bit of espionage.

Brandon says

"The Gumshoe, the Witch, and the Virtual Corpse" by Keith Hartman gives a fun look into the near future, where cultural differences have created a segregated society that is sitting on a powder keg.

Keith Hartman has created a colorful cast of characters, and it's fun to see how their various stories come together. I was a little disappointed at how little Drew Parker had to do with the actual story, and I was sad to see a certain character die so suddenly. The story has LGBT characters and themes, but at the core of it is a heterosexual romance. Still, the mystery was strong enough to keep me guessing and the book was hard to put down. By far the best part is the world that Keith Hartman created. Its a wacky future that still feels plausible. Its a really interesting setting that feels like a real place.

Overall I enjoyed this book a lot and immediately picked up the sequel. I recommend it highly, but people expecting more gay content might be disappointed.
