



The Sound of His Horn

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Alan Querdilion, a young naval lieutenant, is captured by the Germans and wakes up in a hospital bed - more than 100 years later. The Germans have won the war, and the Third Reich stretches from the Urals to the Atlantic. Non Aryans are bred as slaves. Deprived of speech and intelligence by the surgeon's knife, they serve their masters with their bodies. Count Hans von Hackelnberg, master of the Reich's forests, rules his domain with the iron fist of a feudal lord. His passion is hunting. At night the sound of his horn echoes eerily through the moonlit forest as the pack closes in on its prey. A pack of half-naked cat-girls, their hands sheathed in iron claws and their bellies starved of fresh meat. And their quarry, as Alan discovers too late, is ... himself.

The Sound of His Horn Details

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Author : Sarban (Pseudonym) , John William Wall

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Mark says

Well this was strange. Another of the books hoovered up as I walked from bookshop to bookshop in Hay a few weeks ago. I picked it up for three disconnected reasons. Firstly the name of the author which had a mystery about it, I always find those single name writers normally either brilliant, like Saki or Bram, or horrendously up their own bottoms like, well that would be telling.

Sarban seemed to buck the trend...he was just weird.

Second reason it was the sub-title 'If the Nazis had won the war', this was a fantasy written in 1960 so just 15 years after the end of the War and that would have meant the horror was still fresh and an open wound in some people's lives. The aplomb it took to write this I felt should be acknowledged with an 'explore' and thirdly then, the book itself. It was everything that I flee from in a second hand book shop normally, it was yellowing with that discoloured decay and falling apart, the pages were coming loose and to top it all it had a smell but not that lovely musty smell of old, loved, used books but something singularly unattractive. So why on God's earth I bought it I have no idea but i did and as it was only 125 pages long it was a quick read as i travelled up the country over a few days heading for Cumbria.

The story itself is unsettling and gross. The hero tells a friend over an evening's drinking of his experience when, as he escaped from a prisoner of War camp in Germany, he loses his way in the forest and ends up crashing through some sort of fence which renders him unconscious. When he comes round he finds himself, by gradual realization, in a parallel Universe in which the Nazis won the 'War of German Rights' and 100 years of the Third Reich has passed.

Worse is yet to come. He finds that he is the prisoner of a sadistic aristocrat who holds an important position in the regime but who sneers at all things modern and has reconstructed his own Grand Duchy of Dark Age-like viciousness and barbarity. The story is of the hero's quest to escape and get away from the horrendous death which awaits him at the hands or rather simulated paws of the creatures which follow and respond to 'The sound of his Horn', 'his' being Count von Hackelnberg, the Master Forester of the Reich.

These creatures are in fact young women bred and produced to act as his hounds in their pursuit of 'normal game' but also, from time to time, in pursuit of human beings used as bait for the hunt. It is here that the story takes this weird uncomfortable sexual turn. These 'cats', as they are called, hunt naked. Others of their type act as candle bearers in the banqueting hall into which huge serving dishes are brought where we see, trussed like chicken, other young women who for various crimes in the German State are sent to von Hackelnberg and used as prey hunted whilst dressed like birds by bare chested muscular young men who act as 'beaters' for the Nazi top brass who come to hunt. Their reward is seemingly to be able to rape the 'birds' they catch.

The whole thing is bizarre and horrible and chilling. Sarban's writing and conjuring up fear and degradation and shock is clever but his mind, perhaps, was a little on the odd side. To be fair this is all I have read of his work. I am not sure if I will be searching out the rest anytime soon.

I didn't put a rating just because its one of those weird situations where i loathed the overall thrust, if you'll pardon the double entendre, of the book but the writing was oddly impressive if prone to OTT.

Describing the castle

'Their overhangs and nooks, odd windows and recessed doorways, seemed to have writhed in and out of the forest trees of their own accord, to have sought the shade and privacy of the groves like woodland beasts'

or the Count

'From time to time he snatched up the Drinking Horn in front of him, drained it and returned it to its rest again with a fiercely controlled force, as if his arm, once raised, could scarcely be restrained from sweeping down of its own accord to strike and destroy'

And Kit, the love interest

'In this forest of Hackelnberg she was like one of the fair trees themselves that all the Master Forester's mad ingenuity could not force to grow false to its own nature'

The very opening line of the story draws you in cleverly.

'It's the terror that's unspeakable'.

This is spoken by the hero, Alan Querdilion, to his dinner guests who are, we later discover, discussing the various points of view of going fox hunting. He then proceeds to relate the story to his friend. It is this unspeakable horror of blind terrorized pursuit that Sarban seeks to enable us to experience through the terrified flight of our hero and I think he succeeds. It is a horrible book but that, presumably, was his whole intention. He is reminding his listeners, if reminding they needed, of the corruption and perverse cruelty that the world escaped by defeating the Nazis. His imagination took full flight and though it might have shone a light on Sarban's own weirdness it is a powerful reminder of how the whole 'untermensch' mentality of the Nazis would have continued to wreak more and more monstrous havoc.

The 'cat-girls' and 'dog-boys', hunters bred and created for bestial display, for the powerful to vicariously enjoy savagery whilst quaffing fine wine, were hideously real. Sarban creates a world which is the nightmare seen from the corner of your eye, when you wake up disorientated and confused.

'It's the terror that's unspeakable' begins this novel. The cleverness of Sarban is he doesn't finish the novel with an equivalent of Conrad's **'Oh the horror, the horror'** but rather with a weird 'sang-froid' stiff upper lip remark from the hero. Earlier he had related his pure terror from the vicious cat/women and now he remarks on the absence of his domestic animal

'Cats are a damn nuisance, whether you let them out or try to keep them in'

This inane comment chills in a way that a more histrionic sentence may not have done.

Marie-Therese says

2.5 stars

This brief riff on the "what if the Nazis won?" theme features a strong first half but narrative interest fades as Sarban's particular sexual obsessions come into play.

Sarban is always at his most intriguing and effective when he's at his least explicit (as in the stunning 'Ringstones', where a long, deliberately vague set-up and quasi-idyllic middle leads to a genuinely disturbing close that gives me the shivers every time I think of it); when he openly indulges his worst instincts (racism, sadism, fetishising of a certain sort of upper middle-class Englishman), he becomes too obvious for suspension of disbelief and his fantasy world collapses. 'The Sound of His Horn' isn't Sarban's worst work, but it's not his best either and its primary value is as a piece of alternate history rather than dark fantasy or horror.

Olethros says

-Joya inquietante y poco conocida.-

Género. Ciencia-Ficción.

Lo que nos cuenta. Alan Querdilion vuelve a Inglaterra tras ser liberado de los campos de prisioneros alemanes al final de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, pero ha vuelto cambiado y su familia lo nota. Y es que Alan escapó de un Oflag en 1943 y, tras un agotador deambular a través de bosques oscuros e inacabables, recuerda que atravesó una extraña luminosidad que le llevó a una realidad en la que Alemania no perdió la guerra y en la que Reichsjägermeister Von Hacklenberg tiene aficiones muy crueles.

¿Quiere saber más de este libro, sin spoilers? Visite:

<http://librosdeolethros.blogspot.com/...>

Cosimo says

La barriera oltre il bosco

Leggendo l'approfondita e intrigante postfazione di Matteo Codignola, si viene a sapere che questo racconto di genere horror ed erudito-fantastico, un vero incubo materializzato in una ucronia visionaria fondata su ossessione, odio e violenza, venne pubblicato dalla casa editrice di Peter Llewelyn Davies, figlio adottivo di J.M. Barrie, il quale morì in disgrazia sotto un treno, non prima di aver reso brevemente famoso, grazie anche alla cura di Kingsley Amis, l'autore de Il richiamo del corno, il diplomatico di carriera John William Wall. Conoscitore dell'arabo e della filologia orientale, l'appartato e discreto scrittore inglese ha creato una fiaba esoterica sulle possibilità del male, un testo inattendibile, misterioso e perturbante, che anticipa in tematiche e linguaggio quel cosmo abitato da un allucinante terrore presente in tanta science fiction e romanzi distopici. Un ufficiale della Marina britannica in fuga da un campo di prigionia si perde in una foresta e, prima di essere catturato di nuovo, si ritrova recluso in un universo di tenebra parallelo e capovolto, nel quale il nazismo da un secolo ha trionfato e regna una sorta di germanesimo incentrato su cannibalismo e paganesimo, zoomorfismo e teriantropia: un inferno di regressione morale, nel quale una società medioevale di sadici e mostri guidati da un malvagio sovrano agisce come una bestia feroce e si dedica al rituale della caccia, dove le prede sono altri esseri umani, schiavi da sacrificare in una dimensione di animalità

sanguinaria e spietata crudeltà. Un libro che ha il pregio di aggirare ogni lettura univoca, nascondendo abilmente in una struttura onirica e immaginaria quell'intima e spaventosa esitazione tra allucinazione e realtà propria della creazione letteraria.

Fabio says

Die Wilde Jagd?

Alte aspettative disattese, con questo breve romanzo distopic-ucronico. Giusto per chiarire, la parte più interessante della lettura è stata la nota finale con cui Matteo Codignola presenta questo pigro autore, le sue opere e le vicende editoriali (quelle sì curiose, visto che il suo editore fu nientemeno che Peter Llewelyn Davies - uno che ebbe la vita arricchita e al contempo rovinata da J.M. Barrie). Il testo vero e proprio - una non riuscitosissima miscela di [*] *Hogan's Heroes*, la peggio sci-fi ero(t)ica, uno speciale di Giacobbo sul nazismo magico o.g.m., con pure il tempo per una storia d'amore e di sacrificio della durata di una manciata di ore - mi è risultato piuttosto noioso e prevedibile. Lettura più faticosa di quanto credessi, altro che precursore di P.K. Dick.

[*citazione voluta di "prodotti culturali" successivi, lo so]

Doveroso segnalare una possibile fonte di ispirazione: la versione germanica della "Caccia Selvaggia", leggenda presente in gran parte delle culture europee. In questo caso, il cacciatore/antagonista del libro sarebbe Johann (Hans) von Hackelnberg che - se l'accoppiata wiki+translate non inganna - dovrebbe essere la guida della detta "Caccia Selvaggia", oltre che lo sfortunato cacciatore di una leggenda raccolta dai fratelli Grimm (*Il sogno di Hackelnberg*). A riconferma che ciò che sta intorno a questo libro è più interessante (per me) del testo stesso.

Se si parla di caccia e corni, non si può prescindere da Weber <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Tiuy...>

Per la "Caccia Selvaggia", invece, direi i Therion (ma Weber sarebbe andato bene lo stesso)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E94cp...>

Sara Mazzoni says

Breve romanzo pubblicato nel 1952 da un diplomatico inglese, *Il richiamo del corno* è un esperimento felicemente riuscito di letteratura avventurosa e fantastica, nella miglior tradizione anglosassone. Raccontato come un lungo sogno folle dal suo protagonista, mescola distopia e ucronia a un orrore mitologico che si fonde con il male assoluto del nazismo. Il narratore conduce il lettore nella spirale del racconto, abolendo l'onniscienza e facendogli scoprire i fatti poco alla volta. Tensione e delirio trovano il loro giusto climax in un'opera di ottimo intrattenimento. Bellissima la copertina Adelphi.

miledi says

Scritto sotto pseudonimo da un diplomatico inglese (John William Wall), più che un romanzo è un racconto lungo, coinvolgente, inquietante, da leggere tutto d'un fiato. Una ucronia oscura, angosciante: la proiezione di un futuro regredito a tempi ancestrali, dove il potere è esercitato in maniera assolutamente arbitraria.

“E’ il terrore che è indescrivibile, (...) il terrore che si prova ad essere cacciati”.

In copertina la riproduzione di un quadro di Franz von Stuck dal titolo “Caccia selvaggia” rende alla perfezione le cupe atmosfere del libro:

David says

Desconocía este libro hasta que hace poco llegó a mis manos gracias al amigo de un amigo. Pequeña joya olvidada, breve en extensión pero que te deja imágenes grabadas que probablemente te acompañarán durante muchos años. Se trata de una especie de ucronía-distopía en la que a través de un pequeño ¿campo de recreo? se percibe la degeneración y el exceso de lo que pudo ser una victoria Nazi en la Segunda Guerra Mundial. La obra fue escrita en los años 50 del pasado siglo y le da una vuelta de tuerca a algo tan inglés como las cacerías en el bosque, pero en clave "supremacía Aria". No he podido evitar comparar constantemente el relato con "la isla del doctor Moreau" y el film "Calígula". Espero que alguna editorial reedite pronto esta obra que incomprensiblemente cayó en el olvido.

Olethros says

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Umberto Rossi says

Strange, very strange. Basically it's a sort of nightmare. Is this uchronia? Is it science-fiction? Actually it's a sort of weird mix of surrealism, fantasy, sf and uchronia. To quote the Monty Python, and now something completely different. Surely not a book that one can easily forget. I don't want to get into the details of the plot; I only want to point out that there is a streak of sadomasochism in this novelette, and that the future world imagined/dreamt/hallucinated by the protagonist (or maybe actually visited?) is a sort of neo-medieval extravaganza. This said, it's one of those books that readers of fantastic fiction must read.

Jim Smith says

This is *intensely* atavistic, sylvan folk horror. After raving about Sarban's Ringstones, The Doll Maker, Calmahain and Number 14, I put this one off for a time because of the science-fiction 'alternate history' appellation in its reviews not appealing to me, but rest assured this is baroque Gothic horror and concerns deep-rooted primal human fears of being hunted in dark woods more than the pulpy science-fiction worldbuilding I expected.

Another eccentric masterpiece of the weird and macabre from Sarban. I wasn't expecting much and have been left stunned. Don't fall prey to the shlocky pulp sci-fi marketing and put this off as I did. This is pure uncanny dream-slipping-into nightmare oneiric horror at its finest and the astonishing quality of all four books of his I own has cemented my view of Sarban as a classic artist of the uncanny tale.

mark monday says

The sound of his horn rings through the night, freezing all who hear it with fear, safe in their beds for now - but for how long? The bestial hornblower chooses his human prey as he sees fit, and as is his right. The hornblower lives in a world quite distant from the World War II battlefields and far from our hero's safe home back in England; a world where the Nazis have won, and have held the world tight in their grip for a hundred years. Our hero has found himself in this world, inexplicably. Perhaps he has gone mad. PTSD can take many forms.

The story unfolds like a dream, a strange and hypnotic dream. Sarban tells his story calmly, as calm as our hero who wakes in this world. A dreamlike calm. How else to describe such unemotional reactions to the world he's found himself in, this elegant private clinic, the dark forest that surrounds it... the servants ready to hunt, the slaves dressed as animals, the women undressed and remade... women transformed into hunting beasts or served trussed and naked on platters, for guests to do with as they desire. If this were not some kind of terrible dream, surely any sane man would find his mind in revolt. Surely any sane man would revolt against such atrocities, rather than finding them simply *curious*. Both Sarban and his protagonist look on such things with a certain detachment, an unemotional lack of reaction. That dispassion makes the horrors all the more horrible... it is like our hero is reading about such things in a book, rather than seeing them take place before his very eyes.

A link between fascism and sexuality is made. A link between fascism and eugenics is also made, but that is easy to digest - a common enough link. The connection between fascism and sexuality is a deeper one, even more unsettling, and harder to contemplate. Power over women; women as cats and as chattel; the wearing of masks, the use of costumes to inflame the senses; the urge to place dominant men in positions of power and authority, to lead us, to use women and lesser men as they see fit, to dominate simply because they can, because they are men of the alpha class, because such dominant men are *real men*. Such fascist dreams are at the heart of so many fantasies. Simply peruse the novels of romance and erotica on this very site, and see. Simply turn on the news, and witness who is in power. Real men will blow their horns; real men will grab pussy as they see fit.

Inevitably, dream becomes nightmare; bystander becomes prey. Well I suppose he shouldn't have been such

a beta.

Mike (the Paladin) says

This book is a little odd...I mean it's not that you haven't seen anything like it. It's just that as it's put together it's a bit...unusual.

This is a short book and can be read in one sitting if you're will to read for a few hours. I'd say it's sort of like *The Time Machine*/*The Island of Doctor Moreau* meets *The Most Dangerous Game*. Our "hero" is a young man who was in a German prison camp during the war (WW2). He's home but, he's not the same. His mother has observed that, "the Germans didn't send all of him home".

We get to view a discussion that sets things up and then he goes off alone with a friend and tells the story of an attempted escape from a German prison camp and how he "seems to have" landed in an alternate future where the Nazis won the war and there are horrors unthought of.

This isn't a bad book. It's dated as the story set up is very slow and even the "horror" we find is a bit paler than you'd see today (the way it's told). Still interesting story and I'm thinking of looking up more of Sarban's (John William Wall) work.

I think I can give it a "mild" recommendation. Try it yourself maybe.

Francesco Caria says

Bel romanzo, ben corredato da una nota a fine volume che ne arricchisce e amplia il significato e tematiche. Ucronia sulla seconda guerra mondiale che anticipa di decenni il romanzo di Dick, pregevole scoperta.

Nicholas Whyte says

<https://nwhyte.livejournal.com/3107725.html>

The only thing I knew of this novel before reading it was that it has a "Hitler Wins" scenario. I hadn't realised that the framing narrative is set shortly after WW2 in our timeline, but the protagonist recounts a story of breaking out of a PoW camp in Germany and getting somehow zapped forward to a different mid-21st century where the Allies were defeated. It's a very short book, and the key point is that the future Nazis have bred genetically modified young men to hunt women through the woods for sport. This is, needless to say, a really icky set-up, and I think the best point of the novel is that it doesn't especially dwell voyeuristically on the ickiness, but on the practicalities of getting the hero and his young female ally out of immediate danger. (Defeating the system isn't an option.) Even so, there are a number of loose ends, and I can't agree with those who rate it among the greats. However, I'm glad to have read it.
