

THE SEVENTH EQUINOX by Matthew Warner Reading & Resource Guide

Introduction

The Earth is out of time—or so says the handsome stranger a young woman discovers hiding in her new house. The Virginia city of Augusta may seem idyllic, but it harbors a terrible secret that threatens the whole world. And only the two of them, working together, can stop it.

In his fifth novel, Virginia author Matthew Warner sidesteps from his usual horror genre fare into urban fantasy. *The Seventh Equinox* is set in a small Shenandoah Valley city that is based on his home of Staunton.

In the book, readers will find many of the things that make the area special: its small-town charm—everything from antiques stores to greasy spoon restaurants to solicitous neighbors—to its unique geography, such as its vast underground caverns and the fabled Skyline Drive.

There's also a touch of mountain magic and legend. What ancient colossus slumbers beneath Mari Bell Mountain?

About the Author

Matthew Warner moved to Staunton, VA, in 2005, when he and his wife, Deena, decided to escape the hustle and bustle of the Washington, DC, area where he grew up. In 2007, they opened a print and website design business, Deena Warner Design, serving book publishers in New York City. They have two sons, Owen and Thomas.

Besides *The Seventh Equinox*, his books include horror novels such as *Blood Born* and *Eyes Everywhere*, which are set in DC, a non-fiction collection, *Horror Isn't a 4-Letter Word: Essays on Writing & Appreciating the Genre*, and more than 40 short stories.

Discussion Questions

- When the story begins, Bessie is recovering from a traumatic divorce, and that experience makes her especially cautious in dealing with Robin. Do you think she was too hesitant? In her place, what would you have done—would you have gone to the police?

- For part of the story, Bessie cares for Robin as he recovers from his injuries. Could it be argued that one or both of them experienced the Florence Nightingale Syndrome? This would refer to an inappropriate attraction that can arise between two individuals, one of whom is receiving support of some kind. Then again, in this situation, was the attraction they experienced actually “inappropriate”?
- Robin explains his origins in relation to ancient pagan “Wild Man” fertility myths, which may have given rise to such modern folklore characters as Santa Claus, Robin Hood, and even the Joker in Batman. What similarities do you see between the Wild Man and other mythical characters?
- Robin’s cross-bred physicality, which he explains as a genetic mean of all humans currently on the planet, makes him extremely attractive to Bessie. What physical characteristics do you find sexually attractive, and why? Which of these characteristics are owed to cultural expectations?
- Truman’s life is, in part, defined by prejudices. As a homosexual, he’s “in the closet,” keeping his orientation a secret from hostile family members and co-workers. But as a Caucasian police officer, he struggles against his own racial biases. How do your own prejudices, if any, inform your dealings with others? What experiences have shaped your outlook?
- The author has indicated he may write a sequel. What do you think might happen in a future story?

Books/Films/ Media that Inspired the Author

- *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (TV series)
- *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* by Charlaine Harris, which inspired *True Blood* (TV series)
- *Santa Claus, Last of the Wild Men: The Origins and Evolution of Saint Nicholas, Spanning 50,000 Years* by Phyllis Siefker

Recommended Reading

- “A Midsummer’s Night Dream” by William Shakespeare

- “Weird Virginia: Your Travel Guide to Virginia's Local Legends and Best Kept Secrets” by Jeff Bahr, Troy Taylor, Loren Coleman and Mark Sceurman

Trivia

- The character names of Bessie and Robin Goodfellow derive from pagan “Wild Man” fertility myths, whose origins may trace back more than 50,000 years.
- The setting of the novel, Augusta City, in Staunton County, near the mountains of Betsy Grey and Mari Bell, is based on the author’s Virginia hometown of Staunton City, in Augusta County, near the mountains of Betsy Bell and Mari Grey.
- The character of Gordy Parkhurst was inspired in part by Julian Beck playing the evil reverend, Henry Kane, in *Poltergeist II*.
- Landmarks on the cover from Staunton, Virginia, include the Clock Tower, Betsy Bell, and Mari Grey mountains. The cavern picture, with the stalactites and stalagmites altered to look like a bear’s teeth, comes from the cover artist’s private collection of photos she took at Luray Caverns, Virginia.