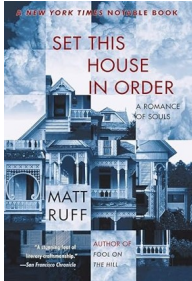




Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



Set This House In Order
By Matt Ruff
Discussed January 2007

Characters

Andy Gage (Body - Samantha Andrea Gage) aged 32	Penny Driver - Mouse	Others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aaron - the father • Andrew - called from the lake by Aaron, created to run the body - aged 2 or 28 depending • Adam - 15/16 year old and Gideon's son • Jake - 5 years old...since 1973 • Aunt Sam - a painter • Gideon - exiled to the island • Seferis - strength and safety • Xavier Reyes - called from the lake by Gideon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malefica - bad deeds • Maledicta - bad language • Thread – programmer • The English Society of International Correspondents • The Navigator • Loins • Duncan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Danielle Grey • Mrs. Winslow • Althea Gage – mother • Silas Gage - father that drowned • Horace Rollins – stepfather • Julie Sevik - Reality Factory entrepreneur • Chief Bradley • Warren Lodge • Officer Cahill - Aunt Sam's boyfriend • Irwin Mancipole - soft spoken younger brother/hardware specialist • Dennis Mancipole - loud, nudist, overweight/software specialist • Julie's Uncle (never appears)

The House

- Lodge with pulpit
- Lake
- Coventry
- Woods
- Pumpkin Patch
- Column of Light

- Mist

Discussion Questions

1. There are a lot of characters in this book! A typical complaint is that "there are too many characters" for the story/plot/whatever, and most writers advise on working with the bare minimum to tell the story. Is this the bare minimum? Did you have a hard time figuring out who was who and keeping the characters separated?
2. How does the environment of a virtual reality startup fit with this story? Does it make sense? Does the name mean anything?
3. In what year does this story take place? What is the discrepancy between the body's age and Andrew's age?
4. The author tells us from the first page "that a good storyteller only reveals important information a little at a time, to keep the audience interested." Did he succeed? Did the story or the characters keep you interested? Was one stronger than the other?
5. "Part of knowing who I am is knowing why I am, and I've always known who I am, from the first moment" (page 2). Andrew's ease with his disorder changes drastically when he falls into the lake giving up control of the body. By the end of the novel, does he return to his earlier confidence? Or is his security forever shaken?
6. Discuss any hidden meanings in the characters' names in the novel: Andy Gage, Penny Driver, Gideon, Thread, Maledicta, Malefica, Xavier, and Seferis. And Eidolon.
7. What does Andy tell us is "an inevitable side effect of multiplicity"? What is the difference between information and experience?
8. In many ways, this is another book on the topic of child abuse. How is it introduced and then played out through the book. What are the lessons to take away from the book? How would you compare / contrast to *Mysterious Skin* by Scott Heim (read: January 2006)?
9. What are the coping mechanisms for the characters in this story? Namely: Andrew, Penny, Mrs. Winslow, Julie, Chief Bradley
10. In Andy Gage's mind, his "father controlled the weather inside the geography. He did not control the mist" (page 97). Why do you think that is?
11. "Unlike many of the other souls in the house, I was never raped or molested" (p 118). Do you think Andrew's distance from his abuse makes him a good narrator?
12. "There were other souls in the house who had had sexual or romantic relationships... but ... they guarded those memories closely." (p 118) Who had relationships, and what were they like?
13. Adam says to Andrew, "Julie's not interested in fucking you." (p 119) Is this statement a hint as to what comes later?
14. How did Penny keep her mother from reading her letters from the "Society"?
15. Mrs. Winslow, Andy's landlord, and Julie Sivik, Andy's boss, offer him stability and security. But how are the women different from each other? Are they each other's foils?
16. Discuss the two cellar doors -- the one from Penny's Trash Town, and the one in Andy's mind under the stairs -- and what is hidden behind them.
17. Why is it that Aaron, Andrew's father, doesn't want to talk to Dr. Grey?
18. How is the storyline of Warren Lodge crucial to this novel? Why does Mrs. Winslow wait for the mail everyday?

19. What event sends Andrew into the lake allowing Gideon to take control of the body?
20. What alliances -- between Andrew's personalities and Penny's personalities -- are formed?
21. "Here I sleep but for a while until I am called up again into my Father's house" (page 357) epitaph on Horace Rollins' grave. Discuss the layers of irony here and the revelation of horror that follows.
22. What is Gideon afraid of and why?
23. Why does Chief Bradley want to buy Andy's house?
24. There's a reason why this was a Tiptree award winner. Was the revelation about Andy Gage's body's sex midway in the book (p 237) a surprise? Did it change how you processed the information in the novel? Does it make the rapes by the stepfather more horrific?
25. "Does it really matter so much? I mean it's still me ... " (p 238). What does the scene with Julie say about Andrew? What does her reaction say about acceptance? About sexual preference?
26. All of Penny's souls are female while most of Andy's are male. Is Andy Gage collectively a bisexual? Or is this partitioning simply an embodiment of the Kinsey spectrum; in other words, are the souls fragments of desire/orientation?
27. What drives Xavier/Gideon to want to go to Michigan? Why doesn't Andrew intervene? What about the others in the house? What is the significance of Billy Milligan to Andrew and the other souls?
28. Many of Andy's souls have particular talents. Adam's talent seems to be the most useful to Andrew and to the reader, do you agree? Is Adam's talent the most useful? What are the other's contributions to the story? Lastly, what does this description of MPD say about the limits of the mind?
29. How do the souls react when they find out that their mother didn't die when they were young? Is the mother a believable character? How did this affect the level of abuse?
30. Discuss the differences of psychological abuse versus sexual abuse. How did the fallout effect the characters? Is Ruff saying something about the degree of harm with the numbers of souls generated?
31. What was the importance of the bar scene where a father was verbally abusing his daughter? What happened? What did it do to the characters? How did you feel about Andrew's actions? What would you have done, and would you do anything differently now that you have read the book?
32. Are there any similarities between the interior landscape (house) and the external?

Notes

The book *THE MINDS OF BILLY MILLIGAN* was mentioned (p 336). This book is indeed real, written by Daniel Keyes, and details the case of William Stanley Milligan who, in a psychological assessment prior to a trial for raping three women at Ohio State University was diagnosed with dissociative disorder and it was determined that most of his personalities had no clue that the crime had been committed. In 2021 Apple+ released the ten part series "The Crowded Room" based on Milligan's story...and Netflix released the four part documentary series "Monsters Inside: The 24 Faces of Billy Milligan". Milligan died in 2014.