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Brautigan comes up with a winner

Richard Brautigan, author of *Trout Fishing in America*, has come up with another winner—*The Hawkline Monster: A Gothic Western*.

Just as the former was not really about trout fishing, *The Hawkline Monster* is not really a western. And it is not a classic, as *Trout Fishing* is. But it is still a good book and deserves to be read.

The action takes place in the summer of 1902 in the "Dead Hills" of eastern Oregon. The twin Hawkline sisters, who live in a huge house, isolated in desolate surroundings, are having problems with a monster they think lives in the ice caves beneath their house.

These same ice caves make the house considerably colder than its environment—in the middle of summer, snow is piled up around the house and the sisters keep warm only by using tons of coal in their three fireplaces.

The monster in the ice caves was accidentally created by the sisters' father, who was engaged in a series of experiments—intended to solve "the ultimate problem facing mankind"—in the basement laboratory, just above the ice caves. Things got out of hand and the resulting monster apparently lured the old man into the caves and did him in.

This troubles the sisters. They are even more disturbed by the possibility that the monster might escape from the ice caves and get into the house. So they hire two professional killers to get rid of this thing that is making a bit of a nuisance of itself.

The two gunmen are ready to kill the creature, but the sisters' 7 ft. 2 in. 300 lb. butler suddenly dies mysteriously. Before they bury him, the four rush off to make love, just one of the many strange things they do during the course of the novel. They finally decide the butler must be buried, but when they return to his body, they find he has shrunk until he is only 31 inches.

They are more than slightly relieved, because now they can bury him in a suitcase, instead of having to build a huge coffin for him. Unfortunately, after he is buried, the dwarfed butler returns to his normal size and awakens, not altogether happy at discovering he is buried in a suitcase. But this is digression.

It is enough to say that the monster, through some wily tricks by the two gunmen, is finally destroyed in a scene that is reminiscent of the final, pyromaniacal sequences from ancient Frankenstein movies.

That's the story. But the reader's enjoyment will not be spoiled by the plot revelations here. One expects, when he reads a book of this sort, that the monster will be defeated, and in the end, justice will prevail. The joy of this book is not only in the plot—it is in the numerous detours and incidents that occur on the road to the tale's completion.

But don't overlook the meaning the book can have for the thinking reader. On first reading, there is a tendency to accept the story for what it appears to be—another crazy Brautigan tale. But there has never been a Brautigan work that has not meant something and *The Hawkline Monster* is no exception. There are too many oppositions (sex/death, heat/cold, light/dark, etc.) to consider. And there's the ending—do the characters live happily ever after?

Read this book once, and enjoy it. Then read it again, and think about it.

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