



Orphans of Chaos

John C. Wright

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What if your teachers taught you everything—except who you really are?

For Amelia and her friends, the strict English boarding school she lives in is all she has ever known. The sprawling estate, bordered by unknown territory on all four sides, is both orphanage, academy, and prison. The school has a large staff, but only five students, none of whom know what their real names are, or even how old they are.

Precocious and rebellious, all five teenagers are more than just prodigies. Amelia can see in four dimensions. Victor can control the molecular arrangement of matter. Vanity can find secret passageways where none existed before. Colin is a psychic. Quentin is a warlock.

And, as time goes by, they're starting to suspect that none of them are entirely human . . .

John C. Wright previous fantasy novels, the Epic Chronicles of Everness, were lavishly praised by both readers and reviewers. Now he embarks on an ambitious new saga that explores the overlapping boundaries of science, mythology, and the imagination.

Orphans of Chaos Details

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From Reader Review Orphans of Chaos for online ebook

Zachary says

Okay, I pursued obtaining this book (and not only this book, but the entire trilogy) after finishing Wright's Golden Age trilogy and loving just about every second of it. Wright combines truly visionary creativity with compelling characters set in rather peculiar but completely intriguing situations. All these elements come together for books that are not only intricate in their complexity, but also unrelenting in their character development, the pace of the narrative, and the utilization of very abstract concepts to add layers of complexity to the already inherent tensions and conflicts of the story.

That previous paragraph describes every book of his I've read. This book, in particular, launches yet another visionary and truly creative trilogy. Five orphans of an orphanage begin to discover that they are not, in fact, normal in any sense of the word. Four of them realize abilities of four opposing paradigms of power/perception/reality, while the fifth's powers and abilities lie as far from and against the powers of the others as theirs do against each other's. This only begins to explain why the teachers of this orphanage outnumber the students - and these teachers are all mythological demigods. In the end they are not orphans at all, but rather captives - not only from their homes and families, but from who they truly are and the powers and abilities which come with that identity.

Some readers might be disturbed by a specific "spanking" scene, as another reviewer has noted. Cultural differences could probably be designated as the root of this discomfort. That said, the scene did not seem to me to be inconsistent with either the characters involved or the cultural and sociological context of the narrative.

An advanced understanding of fourth dimensional physics as well as a thorough grasp of mythology would probably complement any reading of this book, as Wright never shirks from diving headfirst into rather deep scientific or mythological explorations - but such learning isn't essential to enjoy and partake of the story in general. But be forewarned, sometimes the intellectual waters can get deep rather quickly, so be ready to drink in and digest some rather abstract and intellectual concepts.

So if you are in any way a fan of science fiction and/or fantasy, don't hesitate to pick up this book. I'd just advise trying to get my hands on all of 'em first - Wright truly can't write a novel-size story (I think his creative vision is just too big), so his publishers break his stories down. If you only have this book, you are going to be extremely frustrated when you reach the last page - the story doesn't end or conclude, it just stops. It stops at a logical break in the storyline, mind you, so there is some level of resolution, but only on a minor level which only drives the narrative forward even more.

Overall, an incredible book written by an amazing author. I really do not hesitate to recommend this book/trilogy.

Danielle says

I was pretty excited and anticipatory of a new, favorite author when I first started this book. But then I hit the **first** time the main female character had her initial taste of bondage, and got all 'excited'. Uh... Maybe there was a reason, and it had something to do with the plot. I kept going.

I realized after a few chapters that it **did** have something to do with the plot; or rather, the sci-fi plotline was a thin excuse for this porn-hound of an author to revel in his rape fantasies.

If Mr. Wright is so obsessed with his rape-fantasy porn that he can no longer tell a difference between the women being paid to act out a scuzzy little script from a real-life flesh and blood woman, than I suggest he obtain a good psychiatrist. "Schizophrenic" = someone can no longer differentiate fantasy from reality. "It's ok, Mr. Wright! We won't judge you - but you can be **helped!** There may not be a cure, but at least we can *warn the women who are unexpectedly exposed to you so they have a head-start!*"

But maybe I'm giving him too much credit; my bad. Maybe, rather than a mental illness, it's just *pure stupidity*. If that's the case, then let me help out, Mr. Wright; this'll just *kill* you that you bought all that tripe from your porn collection! The big-secret-that's-not-so-secret is: Women do not get off on being raped. It doesn't excite us; it only excites you. Which is why you need that psychiatrist. Please get the best one money can buy. And join the real world where women are trying very hard to **end** rape, rather than glorify it.

Felicia says

I wanted it to be better than this :(Very offensive stuff against girls.

B. Zedan says

I'm a terrible addict and the combination godly mythos (heavy emphasis on Greek and Roman), Titans, math, science, time, dimensions, magic, smart but stupid (in a normal, not movie-stupid) characters, no clear black and white, and that the damn book ends a third of the way along an epic story line made me go buy the next two books.

Well paced and almost amazing. Really pretty much an opiate for reading addicts.

Barbara Gordon says

I loved the setup for this book. Mysterious amnesiac orphans in a remote mansion that's a combination school and prison, hints that everyone is more than they seem, discovery of strange powers, secret passages, hypnotic messages, and so on. But as more of the backstory was revealed, and every character acquired a minimum of three names/identities, as well as a tendency to explain the politics of the pantheon for paragraphs and even pages... It got less interesting instead of more.

Also I thought Wright set himself too much of a challenge writing from the pov of a (supposedly) adolescent girl, even one raised under unusual conditions. The disturbing sexual subplot, where our feisty young heroine discovers that she wants to be dominated and spanked (yes, there's a plot reason, but still) by authoritative males, read like preaching rather than characterisation. Sometimes Amelia was quite believable as a bright, unsocialised young woman struggling to understand the world and her place in it. Other times she was clearly a middle-aged man's fantasy.

It didn't help when I discovered that Wright's own Amazon reviews include 1)a contradiction of someone reviewing his book; b)a generally positive review of a Gor book, going into detail about Gor novels as romances.

Mary Catelli says

This book is not a novel, because it's the opening of a trilogy that's really a novel chopped in three, not three novels in a sequence, ending with cliffhangers and all. And it opens that long novel in a boarding school. Five children kept prisoner and raised there. They know there is something odd about themselves. And not just because when they manage to talk to children outside the school, they learn that they are being given a very unusual education, and not just because they do not know and can not figure out anything about their families and where they came from. For one thing, odd things happen about them, like being able to find a secret passageway some of the time. For another, they do not know how old they are, and the staff of the school are quite careful to keep them from finding out.

For a third, once Amelia found a box of papers telling of stories, but when she looked at them later, she realized they were in her handwriting. Except that she had not been able to write that well when she found them. And they told the story of something the five children did that none of them could remember.

When, however, the Board of Directors meets, and Amelia and Quentin get free to sneak about and spy, they learn quite a bit more about who is keeping them there. And that they are hostages. And from that they work, through many setbacks, toward escape.

An allusive work. I don't think I got all the Greek mythology references, and I know quite a bit of Greek mythology. And Norse mythology, and Beowulf -- and Mother Goose. Among others.

Ryon says

Currently, I'm not liking this very much. The idea is creative, the implementation lackluster.

About 33% into the book, it has taken a turn for the fucking bizarre, and not in a good way. I'm also irritated at the pseudo-profound, pretentious, pathos-ridden speech the children have in this book. I am always irritated when child characters speak with a wisdom beyond their years, like Haley Joel Osment in "Pay it Forward". From the mouths of babes comes total drek.

50% through the book the author takes a nosedive with a backflip and a double-gainer off the fucking deep end. The Hungarian judge gives it a 9.5! This book is completely unreadable. I give up on it.

Wealththeow says

Amelia, Vanity, Colin, Quintus and Victor are the only students at a strict English boarding school. Slowly, they discover that they have secret powers and abilities--and that their teachers are much more than they

seem. The adventures, and the tangled Greek mythologies that provide the backdrop, are a great deal of fun and quite exciting. Unfortunately, the author is a little too excited by the prospect of tying up Amelia and putting her at the mercy of lecherous old men. Her heaving bosom and "oh no I think I like this" thoughts are described in rather prurient detail. I liked Amelia-the-squid-princess-from-the-4th-dimension; I hated Amelia-the-bondage-fantasy.

ETA: The author is a vicious and vile homophobe.

Bruce says

5 stars? Well, maybe that's too much. But after giving four stars to *Well of Stars* and *Ghost Brigades*, this is clearly a 5. Really, what we need is a 10 point system, or perhaps one that allows decimals.

And perhaps 5 stars is unjustified because this is not really a complete book. Like Wright's *Golden Age* trilogy and the *Everness* duology, this is really one giant book spread over three titles.

So.... what is cool about this book? First, it's nice to read something where the tone or prose doesn't occasionally make me cringe, like the abovementioned two books. It's also nice to start something with a simple well-worn premise (Zelazny style godlike powerful people imprisoned and with amnesia) and have it get complicated and interesting-- the relationships between the captors and the prisoners are quite complicated by the end of the book. Finally, the different paradigms of magic are rather erudite, and supply some tasty science-like chewability in a contemporary/fantasy setting.

Surprisingly, the reviews on the back of the book are quite accurate if perhaps slightly gushing:

"Start of a complex mythology based series..."

"...overlapping frames of reference..."

"Formidably erudite... complex plotting... high-concept metaphysical romance."

I have been avoiding these books for a while, I wonder why. Perhaps I was waiting for that perfect moment of three days ago when I saw the complete trilogy sitting tidily together on the library shelves, waiting for me to take them home :-)

Trin says

In which a cool opening about a quintet of orphans with amnesia being held captive by their teachers in the English countryside is ruined by the author's deeply skeevey sexual politics. I knew I was in trouble the first time the—supposedly kickass and named for Amelia Earhart—female protagonist said in her narration (I'm paraphrasing but only slightly), "What woman doesn't secretly want to kiss a man who's pinned her down and won't let her go?" UM, I DON'T AND I BET THE MAJORITY OF YOUR RAPIDLY FLEEING FEMALE READERS DON'T EITHER. The skeeviness continues, with Amelia—who despite her up-for-debate actual age, is in the body of a 14-year-old—being forced by her supposed friends to dress as a slutty maid and serve them, being erotically spanked by the headmaster, being preyed upon in various ways by the

lecherous gardener, being forcibly decked out in a skanky dress and makeup and chained to a wall with a big metal collar for said gardener's pleasure... I could sadly go on. I *did* go on—out of some small hope that the book would end with Amelia SOUNDLY WHOOPING ALL THEIR ASSES, but instead it concludes with her essentially getting her mind raped too as the setup for the next book in the series. Oh boy. You can bet I'll be queuing up for *that*.

As if the author's icky underage non-con bondage fantasies weren't enough (and believe me, THEY ARE), as soon as what's actually going on is revealed, the book becomes vastly less interesting. Wright seems to be employing an "everything but the kitchen sink" take on mythology, and actually, I think he may have thrown the sink in there, too. I believe it was being carried by the God of MY NASTY KINKS AND DISTURBING ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN: LET ME SHOW YOU THEM.

Loni says

Philosophy, Mythology and Physics, Oh My!

Ok, corny, but I really enjoyed this book. The variety of ideas, his use of some obscure mythological deities and stories, his grasp of physics and his ability to construe these ideas to laymen in his book kept me thinking.

What I loved less, well, I am a little creeped out by middle aged men who write so fervently about nubile teenage girls on the cusp of their sexual awakening. I was a little taken aback by his portrayal of the Olympian caretakers/prison guards barely checked lust for the two girls until I realized that hey, if Zeus defiled a swan and Aphrodite and her brother were lovers (or some pair of siblings in that incestuous lot) why wouldn't assorted Olympians think of pseudo teenagers as fair game? Still the whole spanked and I liked it 'tee hee' is a little gross, maybe its just the American prude in me but, hello, this was still a person who thought of herself as a 16 year old kid, who as far as I could tell hadn't been spanked enough as a kid to warrant an ass whipping fetish, so, um, yuck.

That said, it was a tiny portion of a book that otherwise kept me interested and puzzling over really intriguing ideas about alternate realities, view points, ways of seeing magic and the world. As you read the entire series you will find the characters becoming more and more solid, their personalities very individualized, well fleshed out and believable. Liked it well enough to buy the next two. Probably could have just said that, but then where's the fun?

Alicia Mitsch says

I got this book as a gift, and I am grateful! It makes me wish I had more than a passing knowledge of Greek mythos, though it's not necessary to understanding the book. It is the best combination of fantasy and sci-fi I've seen in a very long time. It reminds me very much of the Incarnations of Immortality series, in the deft combination of modern science with ancient culture. There's math and physics and gods and goddesses and the mystery of not knowing who's side you're suppose to be on. This is a definite must-read!

David says

I have had this sitting on my shelf for a while and decided on a fantasy novel as my next read. What I got

was a book that comes across as a combination of the author's very poor and immature opinion of women and some version of a reality that he envisions.

I did not get far enough to rehash the plot, completing about 60 pages. In what is presented as an interesting concept, 5 orphans in a boarding school discover they have super powers, turned south very fast. The narrator is one of the two girls in the orphanage. In the sixty pages I read she was forced to ground by another and "liked it", had a secret communications system with the boys that involved the boys drilling a hole into the girls showers (ala Porky's) and told the tale of her nightly inspection that had to be in the nude. There was also a large amount of discussion of the other girl's physical shape and curves. The children do not know their ages but guess they are between 16 and 22. So all this could be about young girls. This is all in the first 60 pages.

I also checked out the author's website and that is what did me in. I do not have to agree with an author to read their work. The fiction is just that. Their opinion is another. But after reading his site and then trying to get back to the book, I kept feeling like the items in the book were symbols, imagery or other crap for his political view point. It was not what I wanted and so I dropped it and won't be going back.

Charlotte says

Whether or not I'm actually going to finish this book is a question I'm going to leave unanswered. Putting aside the author being a deplorable fedora-wearing jerkoff, this book simply is not for me. The characters are uninteresting at best and unbearably pretentious at worst; the exact same analogy can be applied to the prose, which is so dense at times as to be unnavigable. Maybe somebody out there can get enjoyment out of a novel like this, which is so poorly structured as to barely even hint at a plot, but that person is not me.

Now, let's put aside the book's structural problems, its unappealing characters, and all that jazz, and focus on its other problems. That's right, I'm going to talk about John C. Wright. The thing about people like him is that they fancy "intelligent writing" to mean "throwing in lots of big words regardless of the context", and that's simply not it. The book, therefore, reads as the writing of someone who desperately wants to be intelligent, but just isn't as smart as he thinks he is. And the truth is, maybe I wouldn't be ragging on John C. Wright's intelligence so much if he weren't, as I mentioned earlier, a deplorable fedora-wearing jerkoff. Which he is.

Let's put aside the author's personal life, in which he writes rampantly homophobic articles and seems to get a real kick out of it, and focus on the book's contents. Wright truly believes LGBT people are freaks and degenerates, which is pretty hilarious when you examine *Orphans of Chaos*. It's written from the point of view of a very young teenage girl, and honest to God, this book reads more like a dirty old man's fetish fantasy than anything else I've ever read. I feel like this book would have stayed better as private fanfiction which Mr. Wright could whip out whenever he was feeling horny. The teenage protagonist Amelia (and to an arguably even greater extent the secondary character Vanity) are sexualized. Very, very sexualized. They're teenage girls who dress up in schoolgirl uniforms and are constantly ogled by old male teachers. Vanity's heaving bosom is often described. At one point, Amelia has a vivid dream about a giant dick which is described in great detail. Yes, I said a giant dick. That's exactly what happens - read the book if you don't believe me. "Ripped through the water like a periscope", that dick did. Amelia often describes being dominated by men - whether it's her schoolteachers or a male peer - and quite enjoying it, even getting erotic pleasure from it.

But the defining scene in the novel, the scene that made me put the book down and say "All right, that's enough" - is the scene in which Amelia is spanked by an old, male teacher. The scene is very erotic in nature. It reads like a scene that might come from Fifty Shades of Grey - two adults exploring their fantasies by playing "schoolgirl and schoolteacher". Only it's not two adults. It's a child and an adult. And it was very obviously written by someone who was getting quite the kick out of what he was writing.

This book is, at its core, a dirty old man's schoolgirl sexual fantasy come to life disguised as a fantasy novel. Mr. Wright may call other people degenerates left and right, but he might just be compensating for a personal issue he has which is, in my opinion, a lot more problematic than two consenting adults engaging in sexual relationships. But even if all this weren't true, the book would still be a sub-par book. And that's why I'm not giving it a star rating. It doesn't deserve one. It won't get one from me.

Heini says

The weird plot pacing bothered me more than the slight kinkiness. I can see how my fellow reviewers, who disliked it have a point, but I just took it as an indication that:

1. The character, despite appearances, isn't *actually* a young girl - or even human for that matter - so it's not so strange that she would be in some ways alien to us normal people.
2. The book takes its source-material seriously. After all it is intended as a modern take on Greek mythology. It would be sort of historical revisionism just for the sake of modern sensibilities, if the Greek gods *weren't* sexual amorality at their core.
3. Said gods have horribly dehumanising mind-powers, one of which is stated to be the direct cause for the inconsistency between the protagonist's supposed sexual preferences and her overall personality. Unfortunately, given that she's been effectively brainwashed since a young age, and given that *she's* the narrator, she can't very well summon up the self-reflection to inform us of that explicitly. The onus is on us readers to realise that she's more of a tragic victim than she's able to see. As such, while it might seem as if the kinkiness is included for the sake of deviant erotica, I saw it more as no-hands-held subtle horror.

Or perhaps I'm being too charitable to the author. As I said, I do understand those who see it differently; as an example of literary sexism or wanton author-fantasy. I'm just explaining why I didn't see it from that angle until I read these angry reviews.
