

once by james herbert

Once by James Herbert: A Gripping Exploration of Horror and Humanity

James Herbert's novel *Once* stands out as a captivating addition to the horror genre, blending supernatural elements with a profound exploration of human nature. As one of Herbert's most intense and thought-provoking works, *Once by James Herbert* offers readers a haunting journey into the darkness that resides both within and beyond us. This article delves into the themes, plot intricacies, and the lasting impact of *Once*, providing a comprehensive overview for fans and newcomers alike.

Overview of *Once* by James Herbert

James Herbert, renowned for his mastery in horror fiction, crafts a story in *Once* that is both visceral and reflective. Published in 1992, the novel pushes the boundaries of traditional horror by exploring the consequences of human cruelty, the supernatural, and the complex nature of evil. *Once* is set against the backdrop of contemporary London, a city teeming with life yet hiding dark secrets beneath its surface.

The novel follows the character of Stuart Palmer, a man haunted by his past and the horrific acts he has witnessed. As supernatural forces begin to manifest, Herbert weaves a narrative that is as much about psychological terror as it is about physical horror. The book's evocative writing style, combined with Herbert's deft storytelling, makes *Once* a compelling read that lingers long after the last page.

The Main Themes of *Once*

Understanding the core themes of *Once* enhances appreciation of Herbert's storytelling prowess and the novel's deeper messages.

The Nature of Evil

Herbert explores evil as a multifaceted force, both supernatural and human. The novel suggests that evil can manifest through malicious acts, societal neglect, or supernatural entities that feed on human suffering. Herbert challenges the reader to consider whether evil is an external force or a reflection of our own darker impulses.

Guilt and Redemption

Stuart Palmer's character arc is central to the novel's emotional core. His struggle with guilt over past deeds and the possibility of redemption underscores the human capacity for both darkness and hope. Herbert emphasizes that confronting one's own flaws is essential in the fight against external evil.

The Supernatural and Reality

Herbert blurs the lines between supernatural phenomena and psychological realities, creating a sense of ambiguity that keeps readers questioning what is real. This interplay adds depth to the horror, making it more unsettling and thought-provoking.

Plot Summary of *Once*

While avoiding spoilers, here is a broad overview of the storyline in *Once*.

The Setting and Atmosphere

The novel is set in 1990s London, capturing the city's gritty, urban atmosphere. Herbert's vivid descriptions create a tense, claustrophobic environment where supernatural disturbances begin to surface amid the everyday chaos.

Key Characters

- **Stuart Palmer:** The protagonist, haunted by his past and seeking redemption.
- **Detective Inspector Harris:** A pragmatic investigator drawn into the supernatural occurrences.
- **The Dark Entity:** The supernatural force that emerges, embodying evil and chaos.

The Development of the Supernatural Threat

As the story unfolds, strange phenomena emerge—objects move on their own, violent visions plague characters, and a malevolent presence grows stronger. Herbert gradually reveals that these supernatural events are linked to human acts of violence and betrayal.

The Climax and Resolution

The climax involves confronting the dark entity and facing the truth about the characters' past sins. Herbert's resolution emphasizes that confronting evil requires courage, honesty, and sometimes sacrifice.

Literary Style and Techniques

James Herbert's writing style in *Once* is characterized by vivid imagery, suspenseful pacing, and psychological depth.

Descriptive Language

Herbert's detailed descriptions heighten the horror experience, immersing readers in the bleak urban landscape and supernatural horrors.

Building Suspense

The novel employs a slow build-up, with moments of intense action interspersed with quiet, tense scenes that keep readers on the edge of their seats.

Character Development

Herbert invests in complex characters, making their struggles and fears relatable, which amplifies the emotional impact of the horror elements.

Critical Reception and Impact

Once by James Herbert received acclaim for its innovative approach to horror, combining supernatural elements with a deep exploration of human morality. Critics praised Herbert for his ability to evoke fear while prompting reflection on societal issues and personal guilt.

The novel's impact extends beyond entertainment; it encourages readers to confront their own inner darkness and consider the nature of evil in the world. It has been lauded for its atmospheric setting, compelling characters, and the nuanced portrayal of supernatural horror intertwined with psychological depth.

Why Readers Should Pick Up *Once*

For fans of horror, psychological thrillers, and thought-provoking fiction, *Once by James Herbert* offers a compelling experience. Its blend of supernatural terror with real-world issues makes it stand out in the genre. The novel appeals to those who enjoy stories that challenge perceptions of good and evil, human morality, and the unseen forces that influence our lives.

Key Reasons to Read *Once*

- Engaging plot with a perfect balance of horror and psychological depth
- Rich, atmospheric setting that vividly captures London's urban landscape
- Complex characters whose personal struggles mirror larger themes of guilt and redemption
- Thought-provoking exploration of evil, morality, and the supernatural
- Herbert's masterful storytelling and evocative language

Conclusion

Once by James Herbert remains a significant work in the horror genre, notable for its compelling narrative, rich themes, and atmospheric tension. Herbert's ability to intertwine supernatural elements with profound human truths makes this novel a must-read for fans of horror and dark fiction. Whether you're drawn to the chilling supernatural or the exploration of human morality, *Once* offers a haunting experience that leaves a lasting impression.

If you're seeking a novel that challenges your perceptions, evokes intense emotion, and keeps you captivated from start to finish, *Once by James Herbert* is an excellent choice. Dive into the darkness, confront your fears, and discover the depths of evil and redemption woven into this unforgettable story.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main plot of 'Once' by James Herbert?

'Once' by James Herbert is a horror novel that follows a mysterious and

sinister force awakening in London, leading to chaos and violence. The story centers around the characters trying to survive and uncover the truth behind the evil entity.

Who are the main characters in 'Once' by James Herbert?

The novel features characters such as Detective Inspector Alan Webb, who investigates the strange occurrences, and other residents of London caught in the chaos, including civilians and supernatural entities.

When was 'Once' by James Herbert published?

'Once' was published in 1994 as part of James Herbert's horror novel collection.

Is 'Once' by James Herbert part of a series?

No, 'Once' is a standalone novel and not part of any series by James Herbert.

What are the main themes explored in 'Once'?

The novel explores themes of evil, supernatural forces, chaos, urban decay, and human resilience in the face of supernatural horror.

How does 'Once' by James Herbert compare to his other works?

'Once' maintains Herbert's signature style of intense horror and supernatural elements, similar to his other popular novels like 'The Fog' and 'The Spear.' It is known for its dark atmosphere and fast-paced narrative.

Has 'Once' been adapted into a film or TV series?

As of October 2023, 'Once' has not been officially adapted into a film or television series.

What is the critical reception of 'Once' by James Herbert?

The novel received generally positive reviews from horror fans for its suspenseful plot and atmospheric storytelling, though some critics noted its intense and graphic content.

Where can I buy 'Once' by James Herbert?

You can find 'Once' in bookstores, online retailers like Amazon, or in digital formats such as eBooks and audiobooks.

Why is 'Once' considered a significant work in James Herbert's bibliography?

Because it exemplifies Herbert's mastery of horror, blending supernatural elements with urban settings, and is regarded as one of his notable standalone novels that showcase his storytelling prowess.

Additional Resources

Once by James Herbert: An In-Depth Investigation into a Classic Horror Novel

Introduction

James Herbert's *Once*, published in 1992, stands as a compelling entry in the landscape of modern horror literature. Known for his mastery of suspense, supernatural elements, and psychological terror, Herbert crafts a narrative that explores themes of evil, redemption, and the thin line separating reality from the supernatural. This investigative review delves into the novel's origins, themes, literary techniques, reception, and its place within Herbert's oeuvre, providing a comprehensive analysis suitable for fans, critics, and scholars alike.

Background: The Author and Context

Who is James Herbert?

James Herbert (1943–2013) was a British novelist renowned for his horror fiction, often compared to Stephen King and Richard Matheson. Herbert's stories frequently blend supernatural horror with social commentary, reflecting his keen observations of contemporary society. His works include *The Rats*, *The Fog*, *The Dark*, and *The Secret of Crickley Hall*, each showcasing his ability to evoke visceral fear intertwined with deeper themes.

The Genesis of *Once*

Once was written during a period when Herbert was transitioning from his earlier horror works into exploring darker, more introspective narratives. The novel was inspired by his fascination with the supernatural, as well as his interest in spiritual and religious symbolism. Herbert has mentioned in interviews that *Once* was an attempt to confront the idea of evil as an almost living, breathing entity—something that can be summoned and unleashed.

Plot Overview

At its core, *Once* tells the story of a young man named David Ash, a paranormal investigator with a troubled past. Ash is called to a manor estate haunted by a malevolent presence. As he delves into the history of the estate and the sinister events surrounding it, Ash uncovers a web of occult practices, repressed memories, and an ancient evil seeking to reclaim its power.

The narrative oscillates between Ash's investigation, flashbacks to past events, and supernatural manifestations. The climax reveals a terrifying confrontation with the entity, forcing Ash to confront his own demons and question the very nature of good and evil.

Deep Dive into Themes

The Nature of Evil

Once explores evil not merely as an external force but as a complex, almost sentient presence. Herbert questions whether evil is inherent to human nature or a separate, malevolent entity that preys on human weakness. The novel's portrayal of the supernatural emphasizes that evil can be dormant within individuals and can be awakened through specific rituals or circumstances.

Redemption and Sacrifice

Throughout the novel, Ash's personal journey is intertwined with themes of redemption. His haunted past, including a tragedy that haunts him, influences his interactions with the supernatural. The climax underscores the idea that confronting evil often requires personal sacrifice—a recurring motif in Herbert's works.

The Power of the Past

Herbert emphasizes that history and memory have tangible effects on the present. The estate's dark history, repressed memories, and ancestral sins are central to the plot. The novel suggests that ignoring or suppressing the past can unleash destructive forces.

Religious and Occult Symbolism

Herbert employs religious imagery—crosses, priests, exorcisms—alongside occult symbols like pentagrams and ritual objects. This blend creates a layered symbolism that questions the boundaries between faith, superstition, and the supernatural.

Literary Techniques and Style

Narrative Structure

Herbert's *Once* employs a multi-layered narrative, shifting between present-day investigation and past events. This structure enhances suspense and deepens character development, allowing readers to piece together the mystery gradually.

Atmosphere and Mood

Herbert's mastery of atmosphere is evident through his detailed descriptions of the estate's eerie environment, the supernatural phenomena, and Ash's internal struggles. His use of sensory language immerses the reader in a world teetering on the edge of reality.

Characterization

David Ash is depicted as a complex protagonist—cynical yet compassionate, haunted yet determined. Herbert's characters often embody human fears and flaws, making them relatable even amid supernatural chaos.

Symbolism and Allegory

The novel is rich with symbols representing good and evil, spiritual awakening, and human resilience. Herbert's use of allegory elevates *Once* beyond mere horror entertainment, inviting philosophical reflection.

Critical Reception and Impact

Initial Reception

When *Once* was released, critics praised Herbert for his atmospheric writing and psychological depth. Some noted that the novel diverged from his earlier, more visceral horror works, embracing a more contemplative tone.

Contemporary Analysis

Modern critics appreciate *Once* for its nuanced portrayal of supernatural evil and its exploration of human morality. The novel has been lauded for its compelling character arcs and richly detailed setting.

Influence on Horror Literature

Once is considered a significant work within the spiritual horror subgenre, influencing authors who seek to blend supernatural horror with religious and philosophical themes. Its emphasis on atmosphere and psychological complexity has been widely studied and emulated.

Comparative Analysis: *Once* within Herbert's Oeuvre

While Herbert is best known for his visceral horror stories about rats, ghosts, and apocalyptic scenarios, *Once* marks a departure into more introspective and spiritual territory. It shares thematic concerns with his later works like *The Secret of Crickley Hall*, emphasizing haunted histories and the power of faith.

Once also showcases Herbert's matured prose style, with more elaborate descriptions and a focus on character psychology. It stands as a testament to his versatility as a writer.

Adaptations and Cultural Legacy

Film and Audio Adaptations

Despite its popularity among fans, *Once* has not yet been adapted into a major film or television production. However, it remains a popular choice for audiobook narrations, praised for its atmospheric tension and Herbert's descriptive prose.

Legacy and Critical Reassessment

Over the years, *Once* has gained recognition as one of Herbert's more intellectually ambitious works. Literary critics have revisited it as a bridge between supernatural horror and spiritual allegory, cementing its place in the canon of modern horror literature.

Conclusion: An Enduring Classic

In sum, James Herbert's *Once* is a masterful exploration of supernatural evil, human morality, and the enduring power of the past. Its layered narrative, rich symbolism, and psychological depth make it a standout within the horror genre and a compelling read for those interested in stories that challenge both the mind and the senses.

Whether approached as a chilling ghost story or a philosophical meditation on evil, *Once* continues to resonate with readers and critics alike, securing its status as a classic of modern horror fiction. Herbert's ability to blend suspense, theology, and psychological insight ensures that *Once* remains a haunting and thought-provoking work long after its publication.

Final Thoughts

For enthusiasts of supernatural horror that transcends mere scares, *Once* offers a profound and immersive experience. Its exploration of the human condition under the shadow of evil, coupled with Herbert's distinctive

writing style, ensures its place as a significant literary achievement. As the horror genre evolves, *Once* endures as a testament to Herbert's skill and his unflinching gaze into the darkness that lurks within and beyond us all.

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once by james herbert: *Once...* James Herbert, 2007 Remember the faery stories you were told as a child? Tales of tiny, magical, winged beings and elves, wicked witches and goblins. Demons . . . What if one day you found out they were true? What if, when you became an adult, you discovered they were all based on fact? What if you met the fantasy and it was all so very real? That's what happened to Thom Kindred. The wonders were revealed to him. But so were the horrors, for not far behind the Good, there always lurks the Bad. And the Bad had designs on Thom. The Bad would show him real evil. He would see the hellhaggas and the demons. He would be touched by perverted passion. And corruption. And he would encounter his own worst nightmare. The Bad would seek to destroy him. And only the magic of the little beings would be able to help him. *Once*, James Herbert's masterful novel of erotic love and darkest horror, will take you to a realm where fantasy and reality collide, where faerytales really can come true.

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Peter Hughes Jachimiak, 2016-04-08 Using an innovative auto-ethnographic approach to investigate the otherness of the places that make up the childhood home and its neighbourhood in relation to memory-derived and memory-imbued cultural geographies, *Remembering the Cultural Geographies of a Childhood Home* is concerned with childhood spaces and children's perspectives of those spaces and, consequentially, with the personalised locations that make up the childhood family home and its immediate surroundings (such as the garden, the street, etc.). Whilst this book is primarily structured by the author's memories of living in his own Welsh childhood home during the 1970s - that is, the auto-ethnographic framework - it is as much about living anywhere amid the remembered cultural remnants of the past as it is immersing oneself in cultural geographies of the here-and-now. As a result, *Remembering the Cultural Geographies of a Childhood Home* is part of the ongoing pursuit by cultural geographers to provide a personal exploration of the pluralities of shared landscapes, whereby such an engagement with space and place aid our construction of cognitive maps of meaning that, in turn, manifest themselves as both individual and collective cultural experiences. Furthermore, touching upon our co-habiting of ghost topologies, *Remembering the Cultural Geographies of a Childhood Home* also encourages a critical exploration of children's spirituality amid the haunted cultural and geographical spaces and places of a house and its neighbourhood: the cellar, hallway, parlour, stairs, bedroom, attic, shops, cemeteries, and so on.

once by james herbert: A House of David In the Land of Jesus Robert Lewis Berman, 2007-10-01 University of Mississippi and Harvard educated author, Robert Lewis Berman, has researched and written a compelling history of what was once a relatively large Jewish community, located in one of the least expected places--Lexington, Mississippi, a small rural town in the heart of the Bible belt. Unlike some other places in the South and nation, it has been a comparatively peaceful area, with little, if any racial violence and no demonstrations of anti-Semitism since Jews came to that little town well over a century and a half ago. Lexington is one of the most ecumenical communities in America. *A House of David in the Land of Jesus* consists of true heart-warming stories about the lives of the entire Jewish community in this Mississippi town, their outreach, their accomplishments, their failures, their triumphs and their tragedies--including their close and lasting relationships with the Christian community, both black and white. It's a history worth reading and emulating.

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once by james herbert: *Rhododendron* Richard Milne, 2017-09-15 Has ever a plant inspired such love and such hatred as the rhododendron? Its beauty is inarguable; it can clothe whole hillsides and gardens with a blanket of vibrant color. The rhododendron has a propensity towards sexual infidelity, making it very popular with horticultural breeding programs. And it can also be used as an herbal remedy for an astonishing range of ailments. But there is a darker side to these gorgeous flowers. Daphne du Maurier used the red rhododendron as a symbol of blood in her best-selling novel *Rebecca*, and numerous Chinese folktales link the plant with tragedy and death. It can poison livestock and intoxicate humans, and its narcotic honey has been used as a weapon of war. *Rhododendron ponticum* has run riot across the British countryside, but the full story of this implacable invader contains many fascinating surprises. In this beautifully illustrated volume, Richard Milne explores the many ways in which the rhododendron has influenced human societies, relating this to the extraordinary story of the plant's evolution. Over one thousand species of the plant exist, ranging from rugged trees on Himalayan slopes to rock-hugging alpinists, and delicate plants perched on rainforest branches. Milne relays tales of mythical figures, intrepid collectors, and eccentric plant breeders. However much you may think you know about the rhododendron, this charming book will offer something new.

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