

READING GROUP GUIDE

Kings of Infinite Space

by James Hynes

ISBN: 0-312-31966-5



About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Kings of Infinite Space*, are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this novel. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Kings of Infinite Space*.

About the Book

“Unspeakably funny!” –The New York Times Book Review

Paul Trilby is having a bad day. If he were to be honest with himself, Paul Trilby would have to admit that he's having a bad life. His wife left him. Three subsequent girlfriends left him. He's fallen from a top-notch university teaching job, to a textbook publisher, to, eventually, working as a temp writer for the General Services Division of the Texas Department of General Services. And even here, in this world of carpeted partitions and cheap lighting fixtures, Paul cannot escape the curse his life has become. For it is not until he begins reach out to the offices' comely and sharp-tongued mail girl that he begins to notice things are truly wrong. There are sounds coming from the air conditioning vents, bulges in the ceiling, and a corpse in the next cube. There are the strange men lurking about town, wearing thick glasses and skinny black ties.

Never has the battle for one's soul been so funny, scabrous, and entertaining! *Kings of Infinite Space* certifies Hynes's place as one of the English language's most “devastating”, “full blown” and “brilliant” satirists. It is a hilarious and macabre spoof on our everyday lives, and finally gives true voice to the old adage, “Work is Hell.”

Acclaim for **KINGS OF INFINITE SPACE**

“This macabre, funny, and very twisted satire of office life displays James Hynes as a wonderfully eccentric and entirely original writer.”

—Adrienne Miller, *Esquire*

“Immensely witty...thoroughly entertaining...Hynes nails it...*Kings of Infinite Space* is Wells updated for the 21st century.”

—Jonathan Yardley, *The Washington Post Book World*

“Hynes must moonlight as a fisherman for he has mastered the art of luring, hooking and reeling readers in with his salty style and quick wit.”

—*USA Today*

“*Kings of Infinite Space* is social satire that slides smoothly into horror.”

—*Time*

"Unspeakably funny...Scariest--and more ambitious--than **THE LECTURER'S TALE** and **PUBLISH & PERISH**.... You needn't have read Wells to enjoy this novel."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

“Very few novels can manage to be both hilarious and creepy, but this one does. Fewer still can show off their smarts without slowing down the plot, but this one does that, too.”

—Laura Miller, *Salon.com*

“[A] brilliantly twisted new satire...Jump aboard this ingenious wild ride.”

—*Time Out New York*

"People really do laugh out loud when reading Hynes novels.... Funny, frightening, smart, and sexy! It is absolutely unlike anything you have ever read."

—*Ann Arbor Observer*

"By turns ominous, hilarious, and genuinely scary: Hynes offers a highly original send-up of the most unnatural activity ever conceived by the human mind -- work."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"**KINGS OF INFINITE SPACE** is at turns frightening and laugh out loud funny. Hynes has captured many of the realities of office work while contorting them to nightmarish fantasies. From office politics to bloodthirsty zombies, from classic literary references to a steamy love affair, Hynes erases lines between genres...You will never look at the ceiling tiles above your desk the same way again."

—*Bookreporter.com*

"A whack job of narrative collating that mixes the black comedy of an office satire with a hot love story with a crazy and gruesome horror tale. That Hynes can blend this all together and come up with a novel touching, sexy, scary, and funny is proof of his wizardry."

—John Griesemer, author of **SIGNAL & NOISE**

About the Author

James Hynes is the author of **PUBLISH & PERISH**, **THE LECTURER'S TALE**, and **THE WILD COLONIAL BOY** (all New York Times Notable Books of the Year). A native of Michigan, he lives in Austin, Texas.

Discussion Questions

1. *Kings of Infinite Space* can be read as both satire and horror. Are any of the scary scenes funny, and vice versa? What techniques of genre horror and literary fiction does the author use in writing a novel that's both scary and funny?
2. Do you know someone like Paul at work? Do you find him charming and intriguing, or is he just a pain in the ass? Are *you* like Paul? What does that say about you?
3. What pop cultural allusions did you notice? Which literary ones? Do they add to the book or detract from it? Do you think the author watches way, way too much TV? Or not nearly enough?
4. Does the author indeed "mess with Texas" in this book? Do you think he knows that it's legal for Texans to carry concealed firearms? Do you think he should have taken that into account before making snarky jokes at their expense?
5. Do you think that spunky, sexy Oklahoma girls are likely to be flattered by the book's portrayal of sexy, spunky Oklahoma girls? Do you think the author has a shot at any of them?
6. Does Paul's office feel familiar to you? Do you have coworkers like Paul's? Is that depressing or what? Do you hate your boss? Does your boss hate you? Do you hide in the bathroom? Does your boss hide in the bathroom?
7. Do zombies live in the suspended ceilings or inside the walls where you work? How do you feel about that? How do you feel about zombies in general?
8. Have you ever wondered what's at the bottom of the aluminum can recycling box at work? Kinda creepy to think about it, isn't it?
9. Would you be willing to loan the author, oh, say, a hundred bucks until his next royalty statement? It would really help a lot.
10. Three zombies board a train which then travels west at 70 mph. Zombie #1 begins to eat passengers' brains at a rate of 6 brains per mile (or bpm). Zombie #2 eats brains at 1.5 times the rate of Zombie #1. Zombie #3 eats brains at .75 times the rate of Zombie #2. After 3 hours, how many brains has each zombie eaten? Which zombie has eaten the most brains? Which zombie has eaten the least? Show your work.
11. Seriously, if you can't spare a hundred, seventy-five would be nice. The author has a money order coming from New Zealand and can pay you right back.
12. Discuss the allegorical uses of cats in horror fiction, with particular reference to the works of Edgar Allan Poe and Stephen King. Kinda creepy, aren't they, cats? Do you like cats? More importantly, do cats like you? Because trust me, you're in big trouble if they don't.
13. Fifty? Twenty-five? Could you at least buy him lunch?

14. Charlotte haunts Paul to punish him for what he did to her. So why does she save him and Callie at the end? Oops, if you haven't actually read the book yet, you probably should have skipped this question. Sorry.

15. There is no question fifteen (special extra joke for Monty Python fans).

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