

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT JEFF VANDERMEER'S CREATION,

AMBERGRIS

WHAT IS AMBERGRIS?

Once upon a time, on the banks of the River Moth, a mighty city sprang up like no other in or out of history. Founded on the blood of the original inhabitants, the stealthy and inhuman gray caps, and shaped for centuries by the aftermath of that struggle, Ambergris has long been a center of trade and the arts—and of empire. But now, a hundred years after the events set out in prior books, Ambergris is crumbling under the rule of the gray caps, who have risen up and taken over the city, imposing martial law. Using addictive mushroom drugs, camp internments, and random acts of terror, the gray caps maintain control while building two towers that may change the fate of the city forever. The remnants of a rebel force are demoralized and dispersed. Partials, human traitors transformed by the gray caps, walk the streets brutalizing its inhabitants.

HOW DOES *FINCH* RELATE TO THE TWO OTHER AMBERGRIS NOVELS?

Although each of the Ambergris novels stands alone, together they form the complete “Ambergris Cycle,” a vast 1,700-page story involving many of the same characters and themes, with *Finch* answering questions first posed in *City of Saints & Madmen* about the gray caps, and about the nature of the city itself.

HOW DO YOU PRONOUNCE THE WORD “AMBERGRIS”?

Like the word “amber” and the word “gristle,” leaving off “tle.” Like amber and like gristle, Ambergris is a unique combination of the beautiful and the horrible.

HOW DID JEFF VANDERMEER COME UP WITH THE IDEA?

“I woke up one night from a vivid dream and the city was there in my head. I immediately ran to the computer and typed the first several pages of the first story set in Ambergris. Strangely enough, those first two or three thousand words didn’t need much revision. From there, I soon had this entire fantastical city opening up in my mind. I wrote stories in the setting that eventually became part of *City of Saints & Madmen*, and by 1998 I had conceived of the general outlines of the entire Ambergris Cycle. It took another ten years to finish all three novels. I never realized that that one moment of inspiration would lead to becoming a full-time fiction writer, or that it would consume so much of my life. I’ve been humbled, too, by the reaction of reviewers, readers, and fans.”

WHAT’S THE RECEPTION BEEN FOR THE PREVIOUS NOVELS?

Ambergris has become an iconic fantasy setting, with *City of Saints & Madmen* and *Shriek: An Afterword* translated into fifteen languages, making dozens of year’s best lists, winning various awards, including the World Fantasy Award and awards in Finland and France. The books have resulted in musical and film collaborations with, among others, *The Church and Murder by Death*. In 2006, VanderMeer went on a five-week European book tour that covered seven countries, in support of the foreign editions of these books. Along with novels like Mark Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* and China Mieville’s *Perdido Street Station*, VanderMeer’s Ambergris books redefined the possibilities of fantastical literature.

ARE THERE ANY ONLINE RESOURCES?

Yes, in particular <http://www.shriekthenovel.com>, which includes video and audio features, and the enigmatic <http://www.ambergris.org>, which uses Scott Eagle’s amazing artwork from the original edition of *City of Saints & Madmen* as a backdrop.