

# Review: Dinnusos Rises by Tej Turner: Review by Allen Stroud

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## Review: Dinnusos Rises by Tej Turner

The sequel to Turner's debut anthology/novel *The Janus Cycle* (2016), *Dinnusos Rises* picks up where the previous work left off, following a similar set of characters from the first collection.

For those unfamiliar with Turner's work. Both *The Janus Cycle* appears to be urban fantasy anthologies, but each story is linked and builds both the characters and the plot into an ensemble finale.

*Dinnusos Rises* makes use of a similar structure, only this time, many of the characters are familiar to those of us who read the first book. The titular Janus; the nightclub setting for the much of the first anthology has been switched for the new venue, Dinnusos, run by Neal, one of the characters from the first set of stories.

Turner is using his fantasy infused canvas to explore a selection of modern social issues. The first story, *Dreamwalker*, deals with some of the aftermath of the previous anthology, as Faye, a schoolgirl, tries to help her friends and come to some sort of conclusion about her ghostly lover, Jessica, the long dead twin of Ellen, who occasionally possesses her sister, particularly when singing for their band.

There's a lot to unpack here and a difficult context to explore. The first person narration of the story certainly helps make the expositional baggage of this opening narrative palatable, but it might have been easier if Turner had begun with introducing a new character to the context, using their lack of knowledge as a device to re-introduce (or introduce) us to his fictional world. This makes the story pretty long as he tries to come to grips with his large ensemble cast.

That said, *Dreamwalker* is much better when considered for its plot, namely the issues between Ellen, Jessica and Faye. Turner blends the real life issues of a first love teenage relationship with those of guilt and free will, setting up further contexts to be explored later in the collection.

The second story, *Roots*, is a little more straightforward. Again, Turner blends modern social issues with fantasy themes, in this case, drug taking, environmental activism and the Fae. When seen through the eyes of Turner's narrator, Jack, these themes converge into a impressionable exploration of the teenage experience. This is particularly evident as he introduces his friend Tilly to the work of his father, Jardair's activist group, *Taxus Baccata*. Both Jack and Tilly experience a new sense of belonging to a group, something many of us can identify with if we were never part of a popular crowd at school. Turner's depiction of this is knowingly bittersweet, balancing the impressionable nature of his characters with the positive and negative circumstances they find themselves in.

*Barking at the Moon* is more of a separate work from the previous two stories, following up the story of Freila from *The Janus Cycle* but told from the perspective of her estranged friend Pandora. Initially, this works well, as the previous argument between the two is something set in the past and we learn more about Pandora and her work in corporate finance.

When Freila and Pandora meet up at Dinnusos share a bottle of wine and decide to try some magic mushrooms, events start to spiral out of control. Freila's gift for travelling through time was explored in detail in *The Janus Cycle*, so it is a little difficult to re-introduce it here without disturbing the context of the story. However, the use of her out of control gift to disrupt the narrative and bring about a change of life view in Pandora leads to a delicious conclusion. If you have ever had to give a business presentation after a hard night out, you'll certainly smile at the finale.

*A Distant Melody* returns us to the aftermath of *Dreamwalker* and Ellen's attempt to come to terms with life without the haunting presence of her twin sister Jessica. The story is told through the perspective of Patrick, the violinist from the band, and a childhood friend of Ellen. Patrick is trying to help his friend and lift her depressed mood. To do so, he engages the help of a mysterious friend to learn how to play music that will charm her. Turner manages to breathe new life into a variation of a Pied Piper narrative and evoke a wholly new tragedy as events play out. In many ways, this story would not work so well if not for the heavy lifting in *Dreamwalker* beforehand.

*The Picture Changes* focuses on Tristan and Neal. The two men got together in *The Janus Cycle*, and Neal started the Dinnusos nightclub to replace Janus as the go to place for all of Turner's characters. Tristan painted all of the pictures and the walls of the club, but when the pictures start to change of their own accord, he is drawn into another magical mystery. Throughout the story, the changing circumstances of the town continue, setting up more narrative for the conclusion.

*Dreaming Her Back* is written from the perspective of Naomi, Faye's new girlfriend. After seeing shadowing figures in Tristan's paintings, the two resolve to bring back Jessica, Ellen's ghostly twin. Once again, Faye walks through dreams to find her and bring her back. There are some deliberate handwaviums in this piece which require the reader to accept we will likely never know how Turner's dreamwalking works. Turner also alters the traditional mythology about possessive ghosts being cruel and evil, although we do get the sense there is more to come.

In *Bakheia* we return to Jessica's story and the efforts she is making to solve the problems that have arisen for all of her friends. There is a different tone to the writer here, marking out the different quality of Jessica as a character and Turner makes use of her incorporeal form to provide an omniscient perspective at times.

As with *The Janus Cycle*, *Dinnusos Rises* builds to an ensemble finale. The final story of the collection is *Scars*. Once again, this involves a crisis with Turner's best character, Tilly, the young trans girl, trying to make sense of her life. The finale doesn't quite hit the heights of Turner's previous work which conveyed an incredible sense of cathartic achievement, restoring (to me) a faith in the essential goodness of human beings. *Dinnusos Rises* lacks the same punch, probably because this work reveals Turner's world to be less like our own than we previously thought. There is a level of worldbuilding needed to convince the reader of the wider connection between local events and governmental policy.

Turner's prose is strong, but his greatest strength as a writer is in blending real world issues with fantastical elements. His characters are vivid, original and interesting. His understanding of the issues facing young people in contemporary society is insincere and sensitive. In each circumstance, you find yourself caring about these characters and their contributions to the building narrative of the collection.

*Dinnusos Rises* is a good follow up to *The Janus Cycle*. I look forward to reading more stories about the characters of both collections.