

## The Witch's Garden

**William Lyon**

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*The Witch's Garden is a sexy science fiction novel about the possibilities and perils of becoming infected with alien life.*

In William Lyon's salacious science fiction novel *The Witch's Garden*, the bounds of human sexuality and relationships are considered in a near-future world that's been colonized by invading plants.

Richard, a biology professor, finds his life to be unremarkable and dull. When his wife leaves him, he flounders. He realizes how hollow his existence has become. He decides to take a field trip into the Amazon to hunt for exotic plants. There, he meets a keeper of the forest who encourages him to become one with the goddess. Richard takes cuttings of some plants home, after which his haunting, sexual dreams of Carole, a jungle girl, begin.

But Richard's dreams have real-world implications. Carole and Richard join together as a symbiont and host, and Carole seeks to spread an infection through sexual contact. She suggests that it is time for Richard to meet with his high school crush, Carol, who is now a professional dominatrix. Though Carol turns Richard into her sex slave, Richard infects her; she forms a relationship with her own symbiont.

Additional sexual pairings follow. The symbionts hope to help human beings harness their base sexual impulses for the good of all. But those in charge regard the symbionts' goals a problematic, and they treat the plants as possible weapons of mass destruction.

As the novel vacillates between being scary and erotic, Richard discusses his symbiont relationship with his psychiatrist, describing his growing sexual awareness and intriguing changes to his body and mind. His burgeoning quad relationship (two humans and two plants) has its own unique challenges; ideological explorations that are centered in sexuality follow. Secondary characters also function as representatives of ideas, and as Richard interacts with people in public to flesh out his new concepts. Each person is distinctive, and as they are differentiated from one another, they come to seem worth saving.

Made up of materials that document the rise of the human symbiont experience, the novel moves with speed. It follows the invasion of the plants throughout humanity, pausing only to consider related philosophical and religious implications. But repetition marks its exchanges, which follow a question-and-answer format. As it progresses, the book begins to read less like a novel that it does like a series of esoteric lectures, and its digressions are often dry. Further, Richard's outspoken support for the symbionts' cause places him in unresolved peril at the book's tense end.

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JEREMIAH ROOD (July 18, 2022)

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