



Johannes Cabal the Necromancer

By Jonathan L. Howard

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A charmingly gothic, fiendishly funny Faustian tale about a brilliant scientist who makes a deal with the Devil, twice.

Johannes Cabal sold his soul years ago in order to learn the laws of necromancy. Now he wants it back. Amused and slightly bored, Satan proposes a little wager: Johannes has to persuade one hundred people to sign over their souls or he will be damned forever. This time for real. Accepting the bargain, Jonathan is given one calendar year and a traveling carnival to complete his task. With little time to waste, Johannes raises a motley crew from the dead and enlists his brother, Horst, a charismatic vampire to help him run his nefarious road show, resulting in mayhem at every turn.

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Johannes Cabal the Necromancer By Jonathan L. Howard Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Book Description

In this uproarious and clever debut, it's time to give the Devil his due.

Johannes Cabal, a brilliant scientist and notorious snob, is single-mindedly obsessed in heart and soul with raising the dead. Well, perhaps not soul... He hastily sold his years ago in order to learn the laws of necromancy. But now, tormented by a dark secret, he travels to the fiery pits of Hell to retrieve it. Satan, who is incredibly bored these days, proposes a little wager: Johannes has one year to persuade one hundred people to sign over their souls or he will be damned forever.

To make the bet even more interesting, Satan throws in that diabolical engine of deceit, seduction, and corruption known as a "traveling circus" to aid in the evil bidding. What better place exists to rob poor saps of their souls than the traveling carnivals historically run by hucksters and legendary con men?

With little time to lose, Johannes raises a motley crew from the dead and enlists his brother, Horst, a charismatic vampire (an unfortunate side effect of Johannes's early experiments with necromancy), to be the carnival's barker. On the road through the pastoral English countryside, this team of reprobates wields their black magic with masterful ease, resulting in mayhem at every turn.

Johannes may have the moral conscience of anthrax, but are his tricks sinful enough to beat the Devil at his own game? You'll never guess, and that's a promise!

Brilliantly written and wickedly funny, *Johannes Cabal the Necromancer* combines the chills and thrills of old-fashioned gothic tales like *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, the mischievous humor of *Wicked*, and the sophisticated charms of *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* and spins the Faustian legend into a fresh, irreverent, and irresistible new adventure.

A Q&A with Jonathan L. Howard

Question: You've been working on *Johannes Cabal* in its various iterations for many years now, how did it feel spending so much time with such nefarious characters?



Jonathan L. Howard: It's something of a cliché to say that villains are more interesting than heroes, nor is

it even very true, so I shan't be trotting that particular phrase out. I would suggest that it is the inner life of the character that makes them interesting, and that is true of the virtuous as much as the vile. Cabal does some rather horrible things, it is true, but he never does them purely to give himself the opportunity to curl his waxed moustache—he's clean-shaven, for one thing—and declaim his wickedness. He always has a reason, and it's usually a good one. I find fictional villains who are evil because they are evil unengaging. Cabal, on the other hand, has motivations and drives that most can sympathise with, even if the actions he commits based on those drives can be loathsome. For him, the ends always justify the means, and damn the consequences.

Question: The carnival in your book is used as a device for collecting souls; was there a real life inspiration for the carnival? Do you find there to be something generally sinister about carnivals?

Jonathan L. Howard: There's no real life inspiration for the carnival, really, but plenty in fiction. The obvious inspiration was Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, which is a deserved classic. I liked the Disney film version, too, and dearly wish that its original incarnation as a screenplay in the fifties produced by Gene Kelly—Gene Kelly!—had come to fruition. *Something Wicked's* Cooger & Dark's Carnival wasn't the first threatening carnival in fiction, and it certainly wasn't the last, but it is probably the best. It was the persnickety question of where such a carnival might come from and how anybody would end up as a proprietor that inspired my novel.

As for how sinister they are, that is to an extent a fictional conceit on my part too. You have to bear in mind that carnivals like that are unknown in the United Kingdom, and I haven't heard of the traditional British travelling fair being transported by train either. The Cabal stories take place in a slightly blurry world where things come together because they aesthetically appeal to me, and not because they're historically accurate; a magical realism of sorts. I wanted an American-style carnival travelling by train, and that's what I got. That said, there are plenty of permanent fairgrounds around the country, and they tended to have a slightly creepy air about them. The real Ghost Trains in Blackpool and Porthcawl, for example, inspired the exterior of the Ghost Train in the novel.

Question: In addition to writing you work as a video game designer, how does that work compare to the experience of writing fiction? Are there any surprising similarities?

Jonathan L. Howard: There are definite similarities, but I wouldn't say that they are surprising. The games I've worked on tend to have definite narratives, so it's exactly the same process of inspiration, development, pacing, and polishing. The main difference is that a novel can have significant sequences in which physically little happens, which is considered heretical in games. In fairness, there's good reason for that—the player wants to be involved, and there isn't a great deal of opportunity for that in a scene consisting of two people talking over a cup of tea. That's not to say it hasn't been attempted, and pretty successfully. I remember a game a few years ago based on the stories of Edgar Allan Poe. It hit all its target, being very atmospheric, true to its source, even thought provoking, and all without Pit and the Pendulum platformer or Fall of the House of Usher first person shooter sections. In commercial terms, however, it was never going to be the next Tomb Raider.

Question: Have you always been a fan of horror and supernatural lore? When did this sort of thing first capture your imagination?

Jonathan L. Howard: Yes, I've always enjoyed the grotesque and the macabre, right from an early age. I recall that I somehow saw Dana Andrews being chased around the woods by a fireball in *Night of the Demon* when I was about four or five, and being fascinated. I grew up on a diet of black and white Doctor Who, The Avengers, snatched glimpses of the first few minutes of *Out of the Unknown* episodes before

being sent to bed, and any number of slightly disturbing imports like *The Tinderbox* and *The Singing, Ringing Tree*. I remember that I got a book for Christmas sometime in the very early seventies called *Stranger Than People*, which was basically a young person's guide to Fortean phenomena, interspersed with stories like "The Yellow Monster of Sundra Strait," and Poe's "Metzengerstein." I loved that book; I read it so many times that the cover fell off.

Question: What sort of research did you do for the book? Was there anything you came across in the process that really surprised you?

Jonathan L. Howard: I actually did very little research for it; it was mostly lurking in my mind already. I can remember little necessary for day to day living, but if you ask me the birth name of Dr. Crippen's wife, I can tell you off the top of my head. I needed a bit of nomenclature for something or other in the running of a carnival, which a librarian friend found for me, but that was the only real piece of research for it. Even things like the Grand Conjunction to summon a demon—which is an authentic ritual, you may be horrified to hear—was in a book I already had. I have a large collection of books on assorted esoterica to the extent that my wife, a bibliophile herself, rolls her eyes and says, "Not more bloody books?" whenever I come home with a bookshop bag and a sheepish expression.

Question: There is a lot of paperwork in your version of Hell. Did you hold an especially bureaucratic job somewhere before working as a game designer?

Jonathan L. Howard: No, I'm very happy to say. I remember as a child considering the inevitability of growing up and wondering what the worst thing about it would be. It all looked pretty good from that perspective: money, going to bed when you liked, being able to go into any certificate film, and so on. Finally, I spotted a bad point, and that bad point was having to fill in forms. And I was right. There's just something about completing a form that fills me with dread in its consideration, and depression during its commission. Which reminds me; I have two to fill in this week. Oh, joy.

Question: Johannes is a bit of an anti-hero and his motivations are somewhat mysterious. Do you think that he's misunderstood by those around him?

Jonathan L. Howard: He's definitely misunderstood, although if he were understood, it still wouldn't make him popular. The fact that he's labeled a necromancer gives him a public relations problem, as the vast majority of them are power hungry lunatics. Cabal's ultimate aim is to defeat death, and to have the ability to bring people back just as they were when they were alive, physically, mentally, and spiritually. No lurking demonic possessions, no uncouth brain gobbling. His researches in that direction, however, have not been conducted in the most advantageous light.

Question: What's next for you?

Jonathan L. Howard: I handed in the submission draft of the second Cabal novel *Johannes Cabal the Detective* just the other week, so that will be going through the editorial process shortly. I also have to decide what the next Cabal novel after that will be; I have a couple of ideas so it's a case of weighing pros and cons before making a decision. I have a couple of non-Cabal novels, one of which is completed but needs a second draft, and the other is about 80% done. I'd like to get them polished, and then see if we can get them into print.

(Photo © Emma L.B.K. Smith)

From Publishers Weekly

When Johannes Cabal, a haughty sorcerer, finds that the absence of a soul is an impediment to his occult

studies, he strikes a bargain with Satan in British author Howard's darkly funny debut: in one year's time he'll deliver the bartered souls of 100 unfortunates so that he might repurchase his own. Cabal and his vampire brother, Horst, mount a traveling carnival to scour the countryside for men and women desperate enough to consign their souls to an infernal eternity for whatever will relieve their misery of the moment. Cabal proves marginally competent but maximally amusing in his dealings with a competing necromancer, an asylum of escaped lunatics and a staff of slowly decomposing carnies conjured from the dead. Howard capably synthesizes two classic themes of macabre fiction—the pact with the devil and the dark carnival—but the book's episodic structure and unconvincing ending betray it as a freshman effort. Still, Howard's ear for witty banter and his skill at rendering black comedy bode well for the future. *(July)*

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Review

“Witty, inventive, and thoroughly entertaining, this rollicking Faustian adventure grabs the reader and holds him until the very last page.” --*Tucson Citizen*

"The spot-on work of a talented writer." --*Denver Post*

“Howard makes it look easy to paint a soul-stealing murdering necromancer as a sympathetic character; that, folks, is worth the price of admission. Step right up!” —*San Diego Union-Tribune*

“For anyone whose taste edges towards the intelligent and macabre, this book is a gift.” —*Fangoria*

“Amusing and clever.”—*The Free-lance Star*

“Populated with some of the most creative, and odd, characters to be found . . . hysterical and fascinating.”—*Bookgeeks*

"A delightfully wicked and inventive story." --Keith Donohue, author of *The Stolen Child*

“Cross Susannah Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* with Gregory Maguire's *Wicked*, and you have this witty and sometimes touching debut novel in the Faustian tradition.”—*Library Journal*

“That ole black magic has never been more fun than it is in this deft and quirky Faustian take. A diabolical romp.” —Elle Newmark, author of *The Book of Unholy Mischief*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Julius Montanez:

People live in this new time of lifestyle always make an effort to and must have the spare time or they will get large amount of stress from both daily life and work. So , whenever we ask do people have free time, we will say absolutely indeed. People is human not really a huge robot. Then we ask again, what kind of activity do you possess when the spare time coming to an individual of course your answer can unlimited right. Then do you try this one, reading textbooks. It can be your alternative within spending your spare time, the actual book you have read will be Johannes Cabal the Necromancer.

Thomas Moore:

Johannes Cabal the Necromancer can be one of your beginning books that are good idea. We recommend that straight away because this guide has good vocabulary that can increase your knowledge in language, easy to understand, bit entertaining but delivering the information. The copy writer giving his/her effort that will put every word into satisfaction arrangement in writing Johannes Cabal the Necromancer however doesn't forget the main place, giving the reader the hottest as well as based confirm resource data that maybe you can be one of it. This great information can certainly drawn you into brand-new stage of crucial imagining.

Clarissa Holland:

As we know that book is very important thing to add our expertise for everything. By a book we can know everything we want. A book is a range of written, printed, illustrated as well as blank sheet. Every year had been exactly added. This publication Johannes Cabal the Necromancer was filled in relation to science. Spend your free time to add your knowledge about your scientific disciplines competence. Some people has different feel when they reading a book. If you know how big benefit of a book, you can experience enjoy to read a book. In the modern era like at this point, many ways to get book that you just wanted.

Faye Pearson:

Reading a reserve make you to get more knowledge from this. You can take knowledge and information from the book. Book is published or printed or illustrated from each source this filled update of news. In this particular modern era like today, many ways to get information are available for anyone. From media social such as newspaper, magazines, science publication, encyclopedia, reference book, fresh and comic. You can add your understanding by that book. Ready to spend your spare time to spread out your book? Or just seeking the Johannes Cabal the Necromancer when you essential it?

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