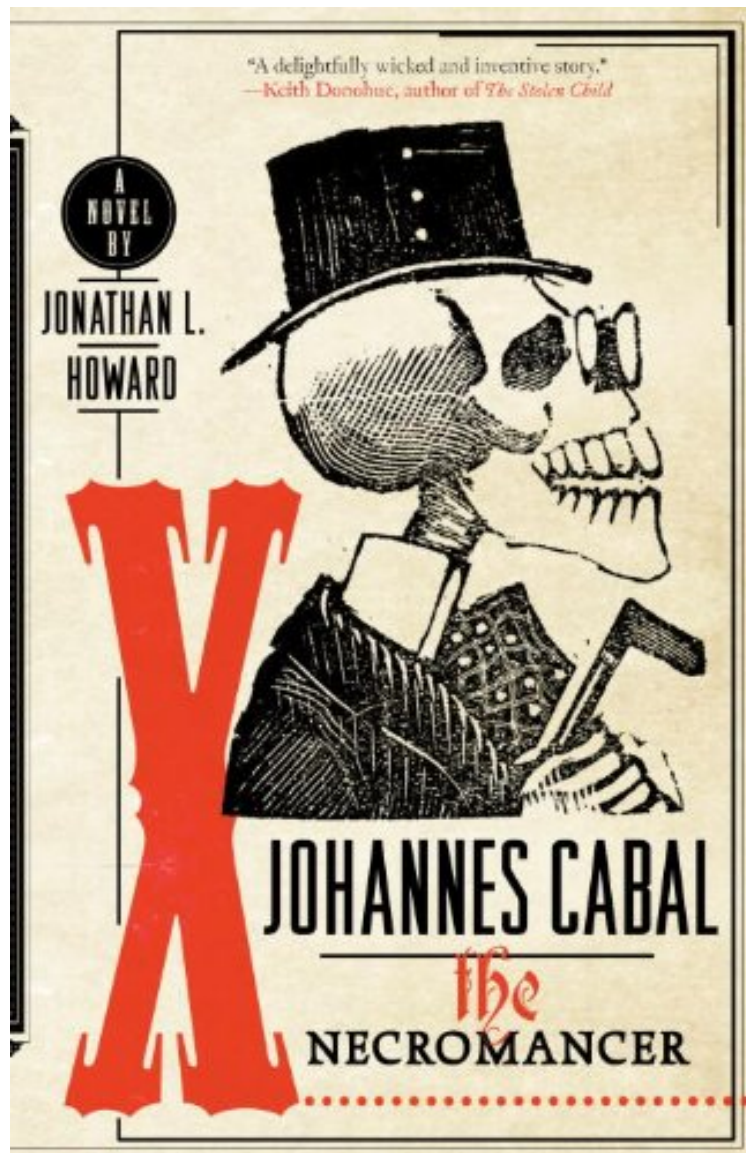


[Library ebook] Johannes Cabal the Necromancer

## Johannes Cabal the Necromancer

*Jonathan L. Howard*

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**Jonathan L. Howard : Johannes Cabal the Necromancer** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Johannes Cabal the Necromancer:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. It makes for an interesting ponder over what you might be capable of doing to others if it meant saving yourself or someone youBy Jamie DavisHoward's portrayal of Johannes, and his vampire brother (Horst), makes for a hilariously dark read that takes you from graveyards, from town to town, and directly into the pits of hell itself. Johannes is a scientist who previously made a deal with the devil to learn the art of

necromancy. Now, he wants his soul back and makes a second deal with the devil in order to win it back. One that involves a dark carnival (read as inspired by "Something Wicked this Way Comes," by Ray Bradbury) in which Johannes must get one hundred souls signed over to the devil in order to win his soul back. You will see just how far over the line Johannes is willing to step as far as getting evil/corrupt people to sign over their souls (people who are arguably damned anyway) vs. tricking innocent souls into signing their lives away. It makes for an interesting ponder over what you might be capable of doing to others if it meant saving yourself or someone you loved. Would you damn an innocent in order to save yourself? If you say that you wouldn't, I bet when push came to shove, you would. The fight for self-preservation in order to live is very strong, and is an ingrained instinct that would be hard to change, even if you wanted to. The writing is full of wit, and the darkness of the subject matter is balanced with the humor of both the situations themselves, and by the dialogue between the characters. I loved it! We learn at the end of this book exactly why necromancy is so important to Johannes. He doesn't want to create a zombie army to do his evil bidding, nothing like that. The point isn't that he wants a bunch of animated corpses to provide free labor to work in his lab. He has a reason for wanting what he wants that isn't based on an evil desire to harm the world, and this reason is what makes him a sympathetic character. This is the first book of a series, and I have already ordered the remaining books, with the exception of the fifth (because it hasn't been released yet).

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Disappointing ...but interesting idea  
By Christine Lloyd  
Interesting concept and narrative structure, but I'm not sure the writer was able to pull it off. The book reads a bit as a twisted satire of the urban fantasy genre, specifically Jim Butcher's Dresden Files. The protagonist, Johannes Cabal, is an anti-hero, and a somewhat crazy one at that. He's a necromancer who has become obsessed with raising the dead not as zombies or Frankenstein, but as the person was when they were actually alive. He is willing to do anything to accomplish his aim - he does not care. So he makes a deal with Satan, in exchange for his soul, Satan will give him the knowledge he needs. Only to realize that his experiments aren't working - because he sort of needs his soul to make them work or figure out why they don't work. Frustrated, Cabal goes back to Satan and requests his soul back. Satan agrees in return for 100 souls by the end of one year. Satan will even provide Cabal with the means necessary to acquire the souls - a traveling carnival. Cabal picks up his brother from a local graveyard, to aid him in his endeavor. His brother is a vampire. The book meanders. It's more a series of vignettes strung together over a central plot. With the point of view constantly shifting amongst various supporting characters. It reminds me a little bit of Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett's Good Omens in how it is structured and the irreverent sense of humor. But not quite as deft. I figured out somewhat early on why Cabal was doing it. The writer drops multiple anvils throughout his story. The twist... I also more or less saw coming, but it was less obvious and somewhat clever. Overall it's an okay read, but the characters didn't grab me, and I found myself plodding through most of it. The next book in the series, I've heard, is better -- but I'm not sure I care about Cabal enough to continue.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Clever, episodic comedy - on the verge of being very good  
By J. Shurin  
Johannes Cabal the Necromancer (2009) is an amusing, folklorish tale from Jonathan Howard. Cabal is, unsurprisingly, a necromancer. He's traded his soul for the power of life and death, but now he's discovered that his soulless state is impacting his (otherwise rigorous) experimentation. Cabal is exactly the sort of meticulous proto-scientific sort that can't stand this sort of unpredictable involvement in his research. Therefore, he needs his soul back. Satan, ever up for a good time, is willing to wager. If Cabal can get 100 souls in the next year, the Devil will return the original (slightly worn for wear). Hell, being an accommodating sort of archfiend, Satan will even chuck in the means of soul-gathering: a carnival. Cabal knows that the Devil will cheat, but any chance is better than none, and the narcissistic necromancer has a very high opinion of his own cunning. What follows is a somewhat-blackly humorous series of episodic adventures as Cabal and his cronies attempt to outwit the Devil and reach their quota. The "somewhat-blackly" comes from the fact that Cabal, despite name profession, isn't really a bad guy. For the most part, he's off preying on those beasties and blackguards that are even more reprehensible than he is. Despite some efforts to create moral quandaries, there's never really any tension about it. If Cabal were unlikable, the book wouldn't work. Fortunately, the reader can back him with only the barest amount of unease. The book is also very funny. Howard has a very polished, supremely composed style. The closest comparison, if one were necessary, would be Stroud's Bartimaeus - except without the tangential footnotes. Cabal's dry sarcasm combines with a strong sense of comedic timing (always tough in written form) to create a book that's slick and wry, as opposed to laugh out loud. There are a few set-piece comedic bits that are perhaps a little over-composed - the occasional stretched, near-Pratchettian silliness, for example - but largely, Howard is channeling a voice of his own. There is, however, something about humorous genre pieces that necessitates an episodic structure. No one since (or possibly including) Adams has been able to create a holistic storytelling experience and keep the laughs coming. The carnival set-up is a good one: Cabal moves from town to town, having a different encounter in each. But Johannes Cabal is a child of the TV era. Each chapter has a beginning, an end, some appropriate chuckles and a nod towards a larger plot arc. For Howard, it works - down to the special double-episode season finale. (And appropriate cliff-hanger to start season 2).

Johannes Cabal the Necromancer is a clever, well-crafted book. It sets up a sequel (which is already out) that I'm extremely curious to read. I could see the central conceit of the story getting very old, very quickly. Or, in the hands of a talented author (like Howard seems to be) becoming a cult cultural icon. Either way, this is a book worth reading: light,

entertaining and extremely polished.

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.

.com 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 sad 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 QA 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 repossess 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) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "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 Mischiefs*