



# The Fear Institute

*Jonathan L. Howard*

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## **The Fear Institute** Jonathan L. Howard

Johannes Cabal and his rather inexact powers of necromancy are back once more. This time, his talents are purchased by The Fear Institute as they hunt for the Phobic Animus - the embodiment of fear. The three Institute members, led by Cabal and his Silver Key, enter the Dreamlands and find themselves pursued by walking trees plagued with giant ticks, stone men that patrol the ruins of their castles, cats that feed on human flesh and phobias which torment and devastate. The intrepid explorers are killed off one by one as they traipse through this obfuscating and frustrating world, where history itself appears to alter. Cabal, annoyed that the quest is becoming increasingly heroic, finds himself alone with the Institute's only remaining survivor, and after a shockingly violent experiment, begins to suspect that not everything is quite as it seems...

## **The Fear Institute Details**

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Author : Jonathan L. Howard

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# From Reader Review The Fear Institute for online ebook

## Jennie says

I searched and searched for a copy of this third entry in the Johannes Cabal series, and actually managed to get my hands on one that cost me only \$20. What was up with the 150-pound prices (sorry, no fancy L-thingy on my keyboard) I found on a book that's only been out a year or so?

Anyway, I'm a little disappointed to say that after all the searching and scrounging, this book failed to meet my (admittedly higher-than-usual) expectations. What I loved about the first two was the whole "charming bastard" vibe from Cabal. While he's not a nice man, the stories themselves had a great deal of humor and life.

Unfortunately, *The Fear Institute* sends our anti-hero and three companions to the Dreamlands in search of the source of all fear in an attempt to eliminate it entirely. Or something. And then they go traipsing around in a weird landscape, encountering weird creatures, and maybe dying sometimes.

The biggest problem with this book is its lack of a foil for Cabal. Leonie Barrow (a character from each of the previous two books) brings out an almost-human side of Cabal's character, and though he's still a bit of a jerk, he's a relatable jerk I can root for. That's lost in this story, as he wanders around with 3 not-very-interesting characters and heaps scorn upon them from time to time. With such two-dimensional characters, it hardly seems worth his effort to mentally roll his eyes at their behavior - they don't really do much to begin with. But, oddly enough, their very blandness, rather than making him more interesting, also washes him out to the point where reading this book just feels like going through the motions.

I hope there will be a fourth in the series (and I hope it'll be easier to find). Cabal is too interesting a character to be left languishing in grey like this - he needs another story - and another interesting foil like Leonie - to make him truly pop.

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## Daphne says

This is SUCH a great series. I really can't get over how hilarious and snarky it is. The writing is damned genius.

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## Tina Rath says

I start with the admission that I am a Johannes Cabal fan. I follow him on Twitter. If I were not already married and he were not a fictional character I would marry him. He is an anti-hero of the deepest dye, duplicitous, selfish, and anti-social to the point of sociopathy. In this latest account of his adventures he leads an expedition into the Lovecraftian territory of the Dreamlands in pursuit of the Phobic Animus financed and manned by The Fear Institute. All - well practically nothing - is what it seems, and there are enough twists in the story to provide half a dozen ordinary plots with surprises... look at this chapter heading alone: In Which

We Contemplate the Life and Death of Johannes Cabal... and yes we really do. But do not despair. A sequel (which I am already anticipating with trembling hope) is definitely possible. We meet ghouls, monsters, the Old Gods, spider monsters with angelic little faces, supercilious zebras and there is even a welcome reappearance of the psychotic fairies who infest Johannes Cabal's garden "Come into the garden Johannes Cabal!... We will help you in! We are you little friends!... And we won't eat you. Honest."

There are thrills. Laughter. Tears. And vicious but stupid crabs.

I am almost inclined to say this is the best Johannes Cabal book yet. Until the next one, I expect. Read it. You'll be hooked.

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## **colleen the convivial curmudgeon says**

3.5

In which Johannes Cabal, Necromancer, walks in the Dream Worlds and confronts some of the Old Ones.

This is, I think, my favorite in the series so far. Maybe it's because of the subject matter - The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath is one of the few Lovecraftian books I've actually read, and it was cool to see old Nyarlathotep make an appearance.

I also really loved the excerpts from the "kids book" guide to the Old Ones.

The wry humour was the same as ever, and Cabal seemed really on point this go around.

The one downside is that Leonie didn't make an appearance, and she's always been a nice addition in the earlier books.

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## **Jason says**

4 Stars

The Fear Institute, book three of the Johannes Cabal series by Jonathan L Howard is a dark urban fantasy done right. Johannes Cabal is not a good man heck, he is not even a nice man. He literally sold his soul to the devil and then went to Hell and back to get it back.

This book moves along competently and there is plenty of action, dialogue, and witty banter. This story takes place mostly in the Dreamland a physical place that has manifested over centuries of people's dreams. I really enjoyed the writing style of Howard. He is big on painting a dark and dirty picture and he is big on witty and satirical dialogue. I am a huge fan. I once again was disappointed with Cabal himself. I really want more nasty necromancer stuff, and more raising of the dead.

I loved the setting of this book it is freaking cool. The side characters are fun and The Fear Institute has a couple of really good plot twists. The ending is awesome...

I love the series and can say that they never fail on being completely fun to read. I love where Howard has taken the story and our hero. I will definitely move on to the next in the series.

Pick it up for the fun...  
(less)

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## **Chip says**

OK - after reading three of these books back to back, it is probably time for at least a quick review.

Characters: 5\*  
Plot: 3.5\*  
Universe: 4.3\*

Another fun read for a character I'm getting to know and to love. This book might be a bit weaker than its predecessors, but it was still fun. Looking forward to #4.

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## **Jim Loter says**

The third time is not the charm for the Johannes Cabal series.

I found the first novel to be ... well, novel in its world-creation and thoroughly unlikeable protagonist. The stakes were suitably high (Cabal's eternal soul), the antagonist was nicely malevolent (the Devil), and the story appropriately twisted.

The second book changed things up dramatically, asking the reader to accept the nefarious necromancer - now playing detective - as a sort of hero. Even with lowered stakes and a somewhat more conventional plot, it was an enjoyable read and the character of Cabal was given a bit more depth.

Johannes Cabal and the Fear Institute, however, is disappointing on all fronts. Cabal is inconsistent, the setting - the very Lovecraftian "Dreamlands" - is boring, his companions are non-entities, and the pacing is dull and plodding. I picked this up as a "light read," counting on a couple days of fun with my old friend Johannes, but it was an unpleasant effort to finish the 75% or so of the book I was able to get through.

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## **Zelyaine says**

Rarely do I give 5 stars to books. This one was STONKING EXCELLENT. While I came away from Johannes Cabal Book #1 with a resounding "Meh," I am certainly grateful that I carried on through the series, as they have only gotten progressively and almost exponentially better.

The wit is unmatched and shows a true intellectual depth, the writing is clever, the storyworld is expansive and unique, and the plot is like a fine dish with a complexity of delicious flavors. I literally shouted at the book in my hands when it ended and I realized it had left me at the most wretched cliffhanger - At the same time, I realized it also left me thrilled at the possibility of continuation. And then I had trouble falling asleep for the next few hours.

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## Jacob says

(Repost from <http://drying-ink.blogspot.com/2011/1...> )

Necromancers: dark, depressing, drearily-dressed, and contact with said frequently leads to defenestration. Can I stop alliterating now?

So, find one as our protagonist? It's original - and it works. Johannes Cabal is a necromancer, his blend of cold blooded (or as he's politely labelled by an employer, sang froid) pragmatism, love for the scientific method, and a certain measure of magic - or sufficiently advanced technology - having kept him in business. Ie. away from the nearest stake.

Cabal's faced challenges before in Howard's comic fantasies - hilarious ones. He's won his soul back from the devil, and done his bit as a detective. He still, however, hasn't found how to truly bring back the dead. So when he's employed by the Fear Institute to venture into the Dreamlands in search of the embodiment of fear, Cabal sees opportunities! The Dreamlands have been the province of poets, dreamers and mystics for too long: as the blurb puts it:

'Well, those halcyon days are over, beatniks. Johannes Cabal is coming'

From the moment I read the foreword (warning of dire insanity and pointless crabs), to the (much later) minute I closed the novel, I was completely engaged. Cabal's unique viewpoint is hilarious, especially once he enters the Dreamland - the epitome of irrationality and something he does, of course, get to complain about. A lot. Just watching Cabal attempt to apply the scientific method in a world where not even space and time are continuous, and up is frequently down depending on who's dreaming it - well, it never fails to amuse.

There's also a lot more imagination: the bizarre environment of the Dreamlands gives Howard an opportunity to showcase just how weird and wonderful Cabal's world can get. Dreffs - animals which manipulate the wood they live in, and (memorably) get trained to operate the world's best peg leg...

It's not all fun and games, of course - even in comic fantasy. The cover claims The Fear Institute as both 'dark' and 'gripping': both of which it surely lives up to. Cabal has been getting development over books one and two, and it's starting to show - and the expedition for the Phobic Animus certainly isn't all it seems. There's a mystery in play, and with Cabal attempting to get to the bottom of it... It makes for an interesting ending.

While the novel slows down slightly near the end, the ending itself took me entirely by surprise - and in hindsight, really works. It's reminiscent of Sanderson's endings: the clues are there, but how they tie together will defy expectation. There's a hook for the sequel to die (and in this series, be messily resurrected) for. This is comic fantasy written by one of the wittiest genre voices of recent years - and within its scope, I can't fault it.

## Lea says

A lot of people seem to enjoy the first book in this series the best, but I find that I'm enjoying them more as the story continues from book to book. While the first book, *The Necromancer*, was slightly more literary in tone, I find Howard's more playful writing in the second and third books to be more fun.

This installment finds Cabal leading an expedition into the Dreamlands in order to locate and destroy the source of all fear. The author has a lot of fun here, filling the book with Lovecraftian references and characters.

Howard takes a very naughty turn at the end of this book, leaving a very large cliff hanger -- I sincerely hope the next book is ready to be published, because waiting to see what happens next will be very difficult!

Highly recommended for fans of the previous two books, as well as those of Lovecraft -- especially those who don't mind a bit of irreverence with their Mythos.

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## Daniel says

Iskreno moram priznati da sam malo razočaran ovom knjižicom. Na momente konfuzno (razumem da je namerno al opet ne mora da mi se sviđa), sa pričom koja ima par finih ideja ali na kraju skoro nema neki poseban značaj. Odnosno dođe skoro kao filler knjiga.

Šteta pošto je opet fino pisano, Kabal je standardno interesantan i u suštini nema dosadnih momenata.

Ništa, idemo dalje.

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## Carol. says

Upon reflection, *The Fear Institute* reminded me almost exactly of that time in high school when my friends and I were watching Monty Python's *Life of Brian*. Clever concept, witty one-liners, apt characterization... and then I fell asleep. Every time I tried to watch it. Something to do with the inability of a joke to sustain a plot, I suspect.

Johannes Cabal is minding his own business when three men approach his house with an offer: accompany them into the Dreamlands, and they'll give him the Key that lets one travel there in body, no mind-altering substance or poetry needed. Cabal agrees, mostly because the knowledge he could gain will likely prove useful in his studies. It isn't long before fighting their way through a mythical woods, searching for information in a border town, traveling overseas to haunted dead cities and other such feats.

## Cabal smiled, technically.

Much like that scene in Python where people are crucified, this is a story that relies on the darkest of humor, or as Dr. Cox once said, that people are "bastard coated bastards" (and thanks to Kemper for that little reminder). Cabal has never been particularly nice, but now he's downright self-serving with more than a

tendency to regard people as disposable commodities. So while the beginning is certainly funny, it gets old, particularly since in this case, not only is he dead serious, but there's little redemption for it.

**"Have you ever looked at your fellow man? It is not edifying. I have hopes that time and evolutionary forces may improve matters or, failing that, eliminate us and give something else a chance. I think that insects deserve a turn."**

Characterization is well done. Cabal seems a bit more ruthless, a bit less human in this book than in #1. The Dreamworld is reasonably well done, and if it feels a bit like our team is traveling through Epic 101, I suspect it's a point Howard might be trying to make. There is a bit that's more out of the Carroll/Dick school of writing, so as always, reader mileage may vary.

**There were no longer any unexplained sounds to haunt them... But this did not settle their nerves: if there is one thing more disquieting than an unexplained sound, it is a silence after an unexplained sound.**

Somewhere past the pirate sequence, things started to stall for me. Like a movie without a competent director, it stalled on its one concept, and I found myself having to choose between quitting, skimming and sleeping. Skimming it was, so I'm afraid I lost some of the philosophical bon mots of the journey. When we get to Cabal's elaborate solution, I could have cared less. Not by much, you understand--I had just enough caring left to want to finish. It was just like the end of that evening in front of the television and VCR; aware by sheer stubbornness, I had remained awake, but had virtually nothing but self-satisfaction to show for it.

Oh, and the teaser end merits an eyeroll, for being entirely inconsistent with the rest of the story, characters, motif, everything. I'd give this a two and half stars for how little I enjoyed the second half, except for the writing in the first was entertaining, and the (view spoiler) quite clever.

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## **Stamatios says**

If you are not familiar with the character of Johannes Cabal and the previous works by Jonathan L. Howard, then you will probably enjoy this book more than I did. Howard's main weakness is pace, and although this third book in the Johannes Cabal series is not as bad as the first one in that respect, there's clearly a problem with the way the story unfolds. The introduction is excellent and builds up momentum, only to lose it when the adventurers enter the Dreamlands. Nothing exciting happens for a very long time until much later in the story and the excellent finale.

The Dreamlands themselves are disappointingly boring. The Dreamlands, based on the works of H. P. Lovecraft, are terribly underdeveloped, being essentially your typical epic fantasy setting with sparse references to the Cthulhu mythology. When you are told about an entire dimension, built by the dreams of all living creatures that ever lived, you expect a lot more, don't you?

The characters also are totally uninteresting (with the exception of one -- not to spoil the twist). They have no impact to the story whatsoever and they only serve as targets for Cabal's sarcasm. But the thing I cannot forgive Howard for is the character of Johannes Cabal himself, who is the main reason I read his books in the first place. His personality has been diluted and expanded to all sorts of directions. He is uninterested to the Dreamlands' curiosities one moment and terribly curious the other. He is portrayed as a sociopath and has thoughts of murdering his companions, but tries to save and help strangers he inexplicably develops a liking



for. And so on and so forth. Unforgiven.

Having said all that, *The Fear Institute* is not a bad book by far. Howard's dialog is as clever and amusing as ever (although you may want to keep an English dictionary handy -- and a French, a German and a Latin while you're at it). The book is worth reading through just for its ending and the brilliant resolution to Cabal's predicament. The whole idea is simply genius and is delivered very smartly.

The last chapter of the book leads directly to a sequel. With his second Johannes Cabal book (*Johannes Cabal The Detective*) I thought that Howard had improved in all areas over his first one (*Johannes Cabal The Necromancer*), but the third book is a step backwards. Let's hope that with the fourth one he will find his best self again.

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## **Melora says**

This held steady at 3 ½ stars most of the way – the lack of a strong secondary character to act as foil to Johannes's cold personality is unfortunate – but the final quarter of the book is funny enough to bring this up to 4 stars. The ABC poem about the gods, Johannes's relationship with the ghouls, the ghouls (who'd have expected them to be so quirkily charming?)... I enjoyed it. As with earlier books in the series, recognizing references is part of the fun. H.P. Lovecraft's creations are foundational throughout (*not* in a way which creates difficulties for readers who haven't read Lovecraft – I haven't, *yet* – but I'm sure those who have will find things to enjoy which I missed), but other allusions, to *Moby Dick*, Coleridge, Lawrence Oates (an Arctic explorer), “Ten Little Indians,” etc. are scattered generously through the book. As I mentioned, the lack of a sympathetic secondary character is a weakness in this installment, though there are a few interesting minor characters, one with a nice twist. Recommended for those who've enjoyed the earlier books in this series.

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## **Ivan says**

Weakest book in the series so far but it's still a book with Johannes Cabal in it so I enjoyed it immensely.

I like that these books in these series don't follow same pattern, instead every one is different experience from previous. While his previous two books drawn inspiration from entire genre (late Gothic for first book, murder mysteries for second) this book has single author for inspiration, H. P. Lovecraft. Maybe more than just inspiration as this book is set in Lovecraft's dreamland with his pantheon being mentioned or even having part in the story. Setting darkly humorous and cynical misadventures of Johannes Cabal, necromancer of some little infamy, into Lovecraftian story may seem like parody but it really isn't. This comes of more as a tribute from from some who appreciates his work.

Reasons why this book was lacking compared to previous two was lack of interesting characters beyond protagonist, someone as a counterweight to his cold pragmatism like Horst Cabal or Leone Burrows in previous books. Still even as one man show Cabal manages to make this very entertaining read.

Somewhere between 3 and 4 stars maybe closer to 3 stars but Lovecraftian alphabet song is alone worth extra star.

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## James Adams says

Mr. Howard has bested himself here, and I loved every page.

I, like many horror fans, have an abiding fondness for the works of H.P. Lovecraft, especially the dream cycle. So when I read the blurb for this and saw the Silver Key mentioned, joy filled me. That joy is still here, because this is one of the best novel-length explorations of Lovecraft's themes and creations I have yet to read. All this in the presence of a delightfully sarcastic, and morally dubious, necromancer.

This is probably the funniest book in the series thus far, as well as being the most fantastical. Howard seems to be having a lot of fun here, pushing this series as far as it will go in several directions at once. The strange thing is, this is also the first true horror novel in the series. The jokes never get in the way of the fear. The characters are in over their heads, and very well may not make it through intact, even the unflappable Cabal. I could go on and on, but let me sum up. This series is one of my new faves, and this is the best installment thus far. Admittedly, my opinion is partly due to the fact that it touches on themes quite dear to me, but criticism is subjective anyway, so there!

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## Mario says

I actually wobbled between a 3 and a 4 on this one.

Still a rather decent exploration into the universe of Cabal as this time, after having outwitted the devil while running a carnival, and after solving a murder mystery with an old friend/nemesis, the necromancer is commissioned by the titular Fear Institute to actually find and eliminate the very animus of fear. Like... Fear itself.

Anyway, the reason this book gets a 4 rather than a 3 is because, once again, Howard delivers on the wit, the dry humor, and the character of Johannes Cabal. All of this set quite firmly in the Cthulhu mythos, providing us with more of what we love about Cabal as well as another aspect of his occupation.

This was, for me, the more laborious, or rather slightly heavier of the Cabal books. On the other hand, if you've stuck with the necromancer to this point, you'll actually enjoy it.

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## ? Irena ? says

One: this is one of those books where I write a review and I know it won't be enough.

Two: this is one of those books/series where I deliberately ignore negative reviews. Sometimes I do read opposite opinions but in this case to say I am not interested would be a huge understatement.

Three and the most important one: I am a huge fan of H.P. Lovecraft and to use any of his ideas, let alone this many, can only make the book more awesome as far as I am concerned. I lost count how many Lovecraftian ideas, places, beings, gods, animals, Jonathan L. Howard used in *The Fear Institute*. That many.

I must admit (in an attempt to be fair) that I can't say how much would a reader who hasn't read Lovecraft love this book. A lot, I hope. It deserves all the love even if you hear of certain things for the first time. No, it is not necessary to know what the Silver Key is, recognize the Ulthar or the Nameless City reference, know

about the cats, know who Nyarlathotep or Cthulhu are or know anything about ghouls and gugs, and so on. But I do, and that had a huge impact on my reading experience. All those references, which I loved, tripled my reading enjoyment.

Lovecraftian themes and ideas aside, this is a thrilling and extraordinary adventure through the Dreamlands in which four completely different men go on a quest to find the embodiment of fear. In the Dreamlands nothing is the same as in the real world. There are twists within twists within twists within twists. Some of them are cruel, some even make Cabal almost a hero (to his annoyance).

And that ending?! It is safe to say nobody would be unhappy about it (an understatement if there ever was one).

None of the *Johannes Cabal* books follow the same rules as others and I love that. And I loved this book, in case I wasn't clear enough.

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## **Miriam says**

If the library hadn't been closed today, I would be reading this right now :(

In the meantime, I should probably read at least some of Lovecraft's Dreamland Cycle, since that is what this installment of Cabalventure is based on. Starting with Polaris, which is free here:  
<http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/t...>

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## **I. says**

“For the first time, he truly understood what Nietzsche had meant when he had yammered about looking into abysses. Not only had the abyss looked into him, it had noted his name, address and shoe size.”

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