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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ THRILLER

The God Key: Book I: Return of the Nephilim

John R. Fogarty
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"I don't know what to make of it. Save the obvious," a professor remarks when the hero of John R. Fogarty's *The God Key* shows him a photograph of the strange markings on what may be the remnants of the original Ten Commandments. "Which is?" asks said hero, to which the professor replies: "That the God of the ancient Hebrews was an extraterrestrial. Of the same species that crash-landed outside Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947."

Not content with entwining these two threads, Fogarty sets his loom to weave the mother of all conspiracy theories, one that presupposes that God, Satan, and the angels were ancient astronauts who came to Earth, mated with prehistoric humans, dabbled in genetics to create a master race of giants and demigods, and are coming back to terminate the experiment on December 21, 2012, as predicted in the Mayan apocalypse. Add to this a shadowy race of Watchers set to monitor humanity, some faceless spinal-fluid-sucking pet monsters, an evil government agency or two, and a sexy scientist, and, voilà, the plot is complete.

Fogarty's story is every bit as ridiculous and outrageous as it sounds—but it works, wonderfully. His prose is fast, furious, and fun. The banter between characters is witty and wry, and Fogarty's use of wordplay to ratchet up the sexual tension between his non-romantically linked hero and heroine is as entertaining as it is effective. That said, the text could use a light edit. Fogarty includes many incomplete sentences, and he uses periods and other punctuation marks more often for pause and effect rather than to comply with any rules of grammar.

The plot includes archaeological digs, theological disputes, academic arguments, and scientific discussions aplenty, some of which draw upon passages from the Old Testament, Sumerian legends, Greek literature, and Mayan carvings. Readers won't get bogged down in any dry debates here, however, as Fogarty has tossed in enough murders, gunfights, car chases, love scenes, and confrontations to fill up a Spielberg action adventure.

The hero, David Sean Connors, a "failed SEAL" turned journalist and part-time laser technician, is as refreshing as he is flawed. For once the main character is more an everyman than a superman, albeit one with a unique skill set and enviable physical endowments. Connors relies on the brainpower of others, notably the heroine, to guide him through the twists and turns of their adventure.

Fogarty has also given his hero not one or two but three key villains to contend with. These include "a babbling, half-whacked, old Jewish wizard in Jerusalem," a hard-charging American army colonel, and a cold-blooded Israeli policeman. These and many, many other characters in the supporting cast pop from the pages and power the plot with their quips and pulp-fiction style antics.

The God Key is not for everyone, but for anyone who is intrigued or entertained by theories of ancient aliens, such as those found in Erich von Däniken's classic *Chariots of the Gods*, or who likes theological thrillers of the Dan Brown variety, this is a must read. Fogarty may believe in some of the theories that run through his novel, but if he does he never preaches. His goal here is more to entertain than to enlighten, to excite rather than to educate, and he never takes his eyes off that prize.

MARK MCLAUGHLIN (January 4, 2013)

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