ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

SCIENCE FICTION

The Somnambulist
Kirk A. Ryan
iUniverse
978-0-595-38136-4
One Star (out of Five)

In *The Somnambulist* author Kirk A. Ryan combines terror and the Nazi occupancy in this tale of evil and a man haunted by the loss of his beloved daughter.

From the moment Captain Martin Schumann a reluctant SS recruit reaches the gates of the camp he has been charged with commanding in Russia he becomes physically and emotionally controlled by his new icy surroundings which include the camp and the village with its sparse population of civilians. As he adjusts to his duties that include providing an evaluation of the physical health of injured soldiers and taking delivery of Russian prisoners of war Schumann experiences nightmares about his daughter (a casualty of polio) that have been reoccurring for years. In the camp the familiar dream morphs into terror that controls the Captain's days and nights and leads him to the discovery of another tormented soul Annabelle.

Although the plot is an interesting mix of historical content and supernatural horror the exaggerated twists leave the reader confused and knotted up in a tangle of vicious nightmares. The intertwining of dream sequences and back story with the present action hinders advancement of the plot even leading to the re-reading of sentences and entire passages to try to gain one's footing. The story of how Captain Schumann came to be the leader of Internment-660 — from a happily married man with a new baby and a successful career as a playwright to a rebellious drama professor with a dead child and failed marriage who voluntarily enlists in the Wehrmacht and ends up punished for unacceptable activities with a young woman — provides a welcome interruption in the dream-nightmare sequences that permeate this piece.

This is Ryan's first novel and it is easily seen in the convoluted manner in which Captain Schumann's story unfolds. There are several passages in this book where it is difficult to decipher where the Captain's dreams begin and where they end. Such confusion encourages the author to include explanations that come directly from the protagonist: "I had slept through the night right there in my bed without moving around at all. The part of the dream where I was thrashing about in the dark must have taken place entirely in my head." The dream-nightmare

states also extend to Schumann’s subordinates which further complicates the plot. Ultimately this story provokes both interesting and scary insights into history but lacks cohesion.