



The Sovereign Order of Monte Cristo: Newly Discovered Adventures of Sherlock Holmes (Special Edition)

Holy Ghost Writer

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With audacity and breadth, Holy Ghost Writer takes great bombastic liberties with classic characters and historical events.

An anonymously penned tome comprised of three previously independent novels, *The Sovereign Order of Monte Cristo* offers an abridgment of Dumas's classic as well as a feverish and consumptive retelling of nineteenth-century history with Edmond Dantes at the center.

The bulk of the novel reintroduces Dantes to the audience, distilling Dumas's story of betrayal and revenge and funneling it through the voice of Sherlock Holmes, who alters little from Dantes's familiar plot.

While the original ends with a chagrined Dantes who's no longer convinced of the value of revenge, *The Sovereign Order* allows room for the continuation of his tale. The effect is jarring; the storytelling shifts from a recap to the wholly unfamiliar, rendering Dantes's early adventures almost a calm precursor to what follows. Gone is the bruised hero who winds his way toward redemption through revenge; herein, he becomes replaced by an almost superhuman instrument for the fates.

Holy Ghost Writer resumes the tale by placing Dantes on a ship with Haydee, his sudden wife and companion, as he lurches toward a sultan's harem. Their story moves quickly—he reads the Koran and converts to Islam on the night of their marriage, defeats a notorious pirate the next day, and finds himself ensconced in a fantasy suited to *The Arabian Nights*.

But Dantes's fortune doesn't end there. Once he's inducted Mercedes into his harem, discoveries and fortunate meetings continue to abound. A letter from his late father reveals that divine blood pulses through his veins, a revelation that directly precedes his impregnation of the fiancée of a great caliph, thereby securing his bloodline among Arabic royalty.

He's charged by the voice of God with a mission to undermine slavery in the United States, where he proves a most unusual slave master. From there, other famous literary characters are introduced, from Scarlett "Vivien" O'Hara to Huck Finn, the Yale classmate of the narrator, Sherlock Holmes.

Meanwhile, Dantes finds the time to invent tiramisu, dry ice, Valentine's Day, Yale's Skull and Bones club, an elixir for immortality, and the greenhouse, among other things. His accomplishments prove grandiose and arrayed, and while there are hints toward the farcical, no clear purpose for such designs ever presents itself.

While *The Sovereign Order* is extremely consumable throughout, particularly once the original elements of the story kick in, its pace is in no small part helped along by the audacity of the characters and breadth of the events to which Dantes is connected. The divine mandate that leads him to move among places as disparate as Arabia, Paris, and American Georgia is neither convincing nor surprising in the context of so many other wild turns of fortune.

The Holy Ghost Writer shows considerable chutzpah in making Dantes the hero of the nineteenth century, though this daring never quite pays off. So many liberties are taken, and so many literary figures gratuitously included, that the plot seems driven primarily by temerity, and never quite manages to flourish.

An absurd ending employs harem and torture tactics to set the stage for a sequel, in which Edmond is poised to be the unsung hero behind emancipation. Readers with a taste for the bombastic may find this conclusion hopeful.
MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (January 23, 2014)

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