

# ENRIQUE FREEQUE'S READS

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2010

## *Drawers and Booths* by Ara 13

I'm at somewhat of a loss as how to adequately discuss "Drawers & Booths" without cracking up in both a laughter and asylum sense during the process, and that's undoubtedly a compliment to its eccentric author, Ara 13, so bear with me while I lay out some facts first to get myself acclimated. Ara 13 is not a pseudonym as far as I know; Ara legally changed his last name from Hirsch to 13 in 1998, "mainly because it's funny," his press release states. Funny -- and goofy -- indeed. "Drawers & Booths," Ara 13's debut novel, won an "Outstanding Book of the Year" award from the 2008 Independent Publisher Book Awards (an IPPY prize, arguably the indie publishing equivalent of a Pulitzer or Man Booker), and also won a bronze medal for "Storyteller of the Year."

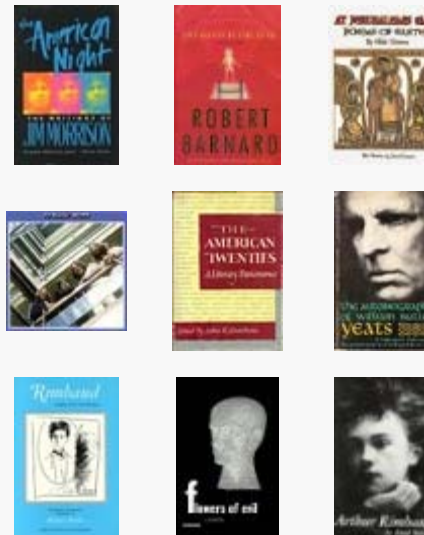
So does "Drawers & Booths" truly merit these awards and accolades? Hell yes! I've had the misfortune of reading (with always the good intentions of positively reviewing) far too many indies and self-published books which lack the backing of big-time publishers with marketing budgets to burn for a very simple reason: they SUCK. They're embarrassingly godawful. Not so "Drawers & Booths".

Remember John Fowles' metafictional masterpiece, "The French Lieutenant's Woman?" Remember how Fowles lost control of his two leading characters and so inserted himself as a character into his own book in order to take back the authorial reigns? "Drawers & Booths" is kind of like that -- hard (as in the author's in the book and out of the book and all over the place) metafiction.

Ayn Rand asked: Who is John Galt. Ara 13 asks: Who is Hattie Shore? Figure out who Hattie Shore is in the novel and you've figured out the philosophy and thematic concepts "Drawers & Booths" repeatedly pivots around, for despite the seemingly arbitrary transitions from third to first person or from past to present tense, or the humorous insertion of its author into the text and ensuing narrative anarchy in which minor characters, heretofore indistinct, begin describing their physical appearance to the reader, blurting out, "Remember what I look like! Remember me! Remember me!" Ara 13 is relaying a compelling even though its long been patented,

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Drawers and Booths by Ara 13

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existential question: Where do I (the reader) begin, and you (the author) end (or vice versa)?

For the first thirty pages or so the reader's just a reader, reading generally about a military base on the fictional isle of Cortinia and its third-world inhabitants, and particularly about a man known only as the Corporal, a media correspondent for the Marines (and I'll bet Ara's alter ego what with Ara's real life years of service as a combat correspondent for the Marine Corps). But then all narrative hell breaks loose....

"Kick approached the church and stepped over the entryway frame. It was dark to his immediate sides, and the sunlit sanctuary made it harder for Kick's eyes to adjust to the recesses of shadows in his periphery.

'Father Atkinson?' he called.

'No,' I reply, emerging from the dark.

Kick turns to his right. 'Who the hell are you?'

'Nobody,' I measure him up, wondering how he will react.

'You don't belong here,' he senses. 'What the hell are you doing? You are going to fuck everything up.'

'How do you know I'm not with the Red Cross?'

'Don't fuck with me. We are well into the story, and here you are speaking first-person and ... and present tense! The readers are gonna immediately realize something is wrong!'

'Well, they will now,' I quip.

'Get the fuck out of here!'

'In due time.'

'What do we do?' Kick panics.

'Relax, no one is reading this. Do you know how hard it is for a first-time author to get published?'

And back and forth we go in and out of Cortinia; from Cortinia to being put on hold for two hysterical blank pages while the author answers his cell phone; to a detective hunt for the mysterious Hattie Shore; to a military grunt declaring "we're in present tense! we're in present tense!" as if present tense were synonymous with

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'Salem's Lot

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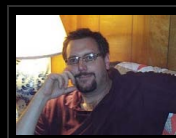
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"incoming, incoming!"; to a courtroom drama where (gasp!) God is put on trial; and finally back to the Corporal, to a "normal" narrative, and the Corporal's unlikely heroics.

No offense to Ara 13s present publisher, Covington Moore Publishing House -- thank God (or thank fate for you atheists) that great independent presses exist and offer up-and-comers like Ara 13 a chance they might not otherwise get -- but were I a corporate head honcho at, say, FSG, Random House, Putnam, Viking, Scribners, etc. et al., one of the Big Boys on the hunt for the Next Big Thing, I'd be saying hup-2 pronto, Ara 13, sign right here on the dotted line.

POSTED BY ENRIQUEFREEQUE AT 4:27 PM

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