

Harris disappoints in follow-up to 'Lambs'

BY SAMUEL MCKEWN
Editor

So I'm sitting here in disbelief at the final chapter of "Hannibal," Thomas Harris' much-awaited sequel to "Silence of the Lambs," and wondering just how Harris thought he'd get away with such an odd, meandering novel that lacks a singular focus from the get-go.

It isn't so much that there isn't interest in the recluse author's fourth novel, it's that through 486 pages, there is not one single moment of urgency in this tale of Dr. Hannibal Lecter and FBI Special Agent Clarice Starling. It starts without one. It continues without one. And just about the moment "Hannibal" looks like it will smell of tension, and not just mere top-this gory shock, Harris botches the scene and cascades toward an unreal and entirely ridiculous finish.

Not that parts of the novel aren't fine pieces of work, capable of putting a chill in the spine. Harris' novel opens

The Facts



Title: "Hannibal"
Author: Thomas Harris
Delacorte Press 486 pages
Grade: C+
Five Words: "Hannibal" lacks power, urgency.

simply enough, seven years later than the first, with Starling enveloped in a tragic drug raid that will carry itself through the book. It plays strong and believable.

And not much later does "Hannibal" introduces us to the real villain of the book, one of the Lecter's few surviving victims, Mason Verger. Verger, the inheritor of a meat-packing conglomerate and a monster in his own right, wants vengeance on Lecter for a bed-ridden, crippled body and deformed face, the description of which Harris plunges into with vivid detail, beginning a path of graphically told carnage to follow.

Verger has been planning for

Lecter's ultimate torture and death, and has set up camp all around the world to find him. The cannibalistic doctor eventually emerges in Florence, Italy. Lecter, still one of the best developed and most horrific personas ever created, still relishes his tastes, his smells, and he still will not be denied.

Lecter's persona holds a larger place in this book, as does his past, and Harris gives us the treat of touring inside his vast mind of memories and passions. We come to see his thoughts for Starling, too.

These passages, as well as the description of a smart but doomed Italian investigator who searches for Lecter, are what Harris does best. The doctor's fetishes and behaviors are fleshed out into their full glory here, the best scene coming upon a plane ride as he waits for passengers to fall asleep so he can savor his pate. Harris gives depth, although Starling's real identities are held off until late in this

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