



Penny Dreadful

By Will Christopher Baer

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To play the Game of Tongues, you must first understand the caste system. Phineas Poe, anti-hero of *Kiss Me, Judas*, returns to Denver to find reality rewritten and the laws of reason fractured. When Poe is enlisted by his old ally, Detective Moon, to find a missing cop named Jimmy Sky, he is drawn into the Game of Tongues, a violent fantasy game played out by disaffected college drones, hacker kids, and Goth refugees in underground punk clubs, on rooftops, and in sewers. Everyone he meets has multiple personalities, and before long Poe begins to lose track of his own identity. If he can hang on to his sanity long enough to find Jimmy Sky, he might just beat the game.

About Chris Baer

Born in Mississippi in 1966. Old Southern family. Lived in Montreal and Italy as a child. Spent high school years in Memphis, Tennessee. Attended college in New Orleans, Louisiana (Tulane). Dropped out. Finished B.A. at Memphis State. Received MFA 1995 from Jack Kerouac School at Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado. California since 1996, Bay Area, L.A., now Santa Barbara. Short stories published in numerous places, notably *Nerve* and *Bomb*. Married, one child by previous marriage. One brother. Parents still living in North Carolina.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Fans of Will Christopher Baer's first novel, *Kiss Me, Judas*, have already met Phineas Poe: defrocked cop, former morphine addict, part-time psychotic, and a man who has lost his heart to a woman who left him in a tub full of ice, one kidney shy of the standard allotment. Poe knows a bad day when he sees one:

The thing is that my consciousness drifts and I have forgotten what I look like. I pass my reflection in a blackened window and I may not recognize myself. My reflection is perceived as a threat, an ugly twin. My reflection is a dark nonperson, a stranger on the street and this is not an identity crisis as I understand the phrase.

The bad days are back in Baer's second noir offering (and book two of his Poe trilogy), *Penny Dreadful*. Fresh from his surgical unpleasantness and eager to start a new life in Denver, Poe contacts a former colleague, Detective Moon, who shares with Poe the drunken admission that several handfuls of Denver's finest are missing. Among them is Moon's dearest friend, Detective Jimmy Sky.

When Poe agrees to look for Sky, things quantumly shift from bad to gross as he uncovers the gothic Game of Tongues, a freakishly cruel and narcotically fueled live action role-playing game (think Dungeons and Dragons in leather and chains), the object of which is to seek, suck, sever, and swallow the tongues of fellow players. Deaths ensue--imagine that!--and things spiral down from there.

Slim, existential, and darkly humorous, *Penny Dreadful* is a challenging (the point of view slides like Jackie Robinson, and if you prefer your dialogue with quotation marks you'd better bring your own) but beautiful train-wreck of a book that constantly dares the reader to look away. But if you don't look at the twisted metal, you'll never see the art. --Michael Hudson

From Publishers Weekly

In Baer's dark sequel to his first novel, *Kiss Me, Judas*, there is no moral yardstick, none of traditional noir's submerged longing for redemption, only a violent, Dungeons and Dragons-ish s&m hell. Phineas Poe, enervated, depressed and missing a kidney after misadventures in Texas, is hired by his old Denver police buddy, Moon, to find officer Jimmy Sky, who has vanished. Because neither Poe nor the reader is told of Sky's importance until he is finally located, the tale hangs not on suspense but on sensationalist gore. Poe descends into a twisted world of sadomasochistic goths playing the dangerous "game of tongues," an elaborate predatory pursuit where biting off one's victim's tongue increases the power of the biter within the hierarchical system of players. Incited by the narcotic "Pale," the mostly college-age participants frolic perilously in stygian alleys, assuming fantastic alter egos that eventually threaten their real identities. One player, "Chrome," instead of performing the bloody French kiss that is the game's currency, kills his victims --and that becomes police business. Poe, initiated into the game, resists its seduction, discovers the double lives of his old colleagues and eventually saves his girlfriend. Baer's language is hip, spare, brutal, sometimes gorgeous. Although there are some touching (albeit twisted) relationships, readers will have a hard time identifying with the deranged, damaged characters, since Baer withholds the truth about their lives until the end of the story. But once the game's main trick is revealed, the narrative loses steam. The payoff, however, is the voyeuristic glimpse the novel affords into the imaginary labyrinth inhabited by obsessive, nihilistic gothic gamers. (Mar.)

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From Kirkus Reviews

Please deposit four quarters to read the following, about a novel that bears bits of colored glass and has sex coming from it in waves. A warning: Some will not grasp, and if they grasp will not like, Baers crazed world of death-chocolates and bloody strawberries, all done in a neon noir express influenced by the Siamese Bills, Burroughs, and Gibson. Baers superbly stylized debut novel, *Kiss Me, Judas* (1998), is Penny Dreadfuls prequel. That one opened with Internal Affairs Division detective Phineas Poe rattling on his own agency in Denver, recovering from a nervous breakdown after his wifes death, picking up Jude in a bar, being given a horse tranquilizer, then waking in a bathtub full of ice with a kidney missing, his side stapled closed and a phone nearby with the note Phone 911 to save your life. A wonderful opening, with unrelenting invention throughout. Theres no dimming of same here, either, although for sheer weirdness the storytelling rockets to even higher levels of glowing semiconsciousness. The missing-kidney ploy is replaced by The Game, in which Chrome, the boyfriend of the exquisite Goo (a.k.a. Eve), and assisted by Mingus the Breather (a.k.a. Matthew Roar), finds starved, bruised, and bombed- out Tremblers in alleys and bites out, chews, and swallows their tongues. Phineas has returned penniless from South America and Mexico and is put up by Eve/Goo. He calls his star-crossed buddy Detective Walter Moon for help, and Moon enlists him in finding homicide cop Jimmy Sky, who has faded from sight along with 13 other deep-cover narcs and vice cops. Thus at last Phineas is led to master villain Theseus the Glove. Demanding, violently lighted changes of brainscape keep you blinking. The baffled reader often feels like someone sitting at a red light with eyes shrunk to pinpricks and horns honking hysterically behind. Baers over-the-top magic, however, will attract and lock in new members to his cult. -- *Copyright ©2000, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Sandra Conaway:

In this 21st one hundred year, people become competitive in most way. By being competitive now, people have do something to make them survives, being in the middle of the actual crowded place and notice by surrounding. One thing that occasionally many people have underestimated the idea for a while is reading. Yep, by reading a book your ability to survive enhance then having chance to stand up than other is high. In your case who want to start reading a new book, we give you this kind of Penny Dreadful book as starter and daily reading guide. Why, because this book is greater than just a book.

Arthur Mead:

Nowadays reading books be than want or need but also turn into a life style. This reading behavior give you lot of advantages. The huge benefits you got of course the knowledge the rest of the information inside the book which improve your knowledge and information. The details you get based on what kind of book you read, if you want drive more knowledge just go with training books but if you want experience happy read one together with theme for entertaining for instance comic or novel. The actual Penny Dreadful is kind of book which is giving the reader unstable experience.

Janet Baltimore:

That guide can make you to feel relax. This specific book Penny Dreadful was bright colored and of course has pictures on the website. As we know that book Penny Dreadful has many kinds or genre. Start from kids

until young adults. For example Naruto or Investigation company Conan you can read and believe you are the character on there. So , not at all of book tend to be make you bored, any it offers up you feel happy, fun and unwind. Try to choose the best book for you personally and try to like reading that.

Diana Johnson:

As a pupil exactly feel bored to be able to reading. If their teacher questioned them to go to the library or even make summary for some e-book, they are complained. Just minor students that has reading's spirit or real their passion. They just do what the teacher want, like asked to the library. They go to right now there but nothing reading seriously. Any students feel that studying is not important, boring as well as can't see colorful pics on there. Yeah, it is to get complicated. Book is very important to suit your needs. As we know that on this time, many ways to get whatever we would like. Likewise word says, many ways to reach Chinese's country. So , this Penny Dreadful can make you feel more interested to read.

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