

A Novel Form of Arson

by Jarred Lyndaker

Joe Hill returns to the scene once again to light a fire under his readers'...well, you know. Staying true to his own black-humored brand horror/fantasy that fans have come to know and love, Hill delivers and real scorcher in his latest novel, *The Fireman*.



The plot follows Harper Grayson, both a dedicated nurse and a loving housewife, in the wake of a new plague. A fungal spore called Dragonscale, named for the black and gold “scales” that break out across the flesh of the afflicted, causes people to spontaneously burst into flames as the condition progresses. Nobody knows where it came from, and nobody knows how to treat it. Every day a city burns as humanity stands on the brink of total immolation.

Harper Grayson survives the end of the world at a hospital in Boston, caring for the infected until they burst into flames, singing songs from *Mary Poppins* to keep herself going, and doting on her husband Jakob, who studies philosophy, works on a crappy novel, and plans romantic suicides for the two of them. Harper does have family in another state, but with a quarantine in effect she has little-to-no contact with them.

One morning Harper awakens to the discovery of two things: she’s pregnant, and her legs are showing those familiar flecks of black and gold. With her medical knowledge of the ‘scales, she reasons that she can survive long enough to carry the baby to birth, and so she decides to do just that. When she brings this news to Jakob, she learns two more things—that Jakob’s true character leaves plenty to be desired, and their marriage is dead. Jakob blames her and abandons her in their apartment, for fear of getting infected. And with the arrival of the Cremation Crews—roaming death squads poised on wiping out the infected—Harper can’t leave. Hiding in her own home, afraid of her own neighbors, it seems that nobody can help her. That is, until she meets the Fireman: a mysterious man in firefighter getup who has learned to co-exist with the Dragonscales, allowing him to control the fire within.



Joe Hill is a tremendously talented author. While you can call *The Fireman* a horror novel—and it most certainly is—the truth is that Hill's narrative takes you to all ends of the emotional spectrum. You will be horrified, not just by the fiery death and destruction, but by what you will see people do to one another when they lose that all-important structure of society. But you will also be elated by some of the most joyful and tender scenes that you will find in any

genre. Hill is an author who loves his characters, and he works at great lengths in his writing to make sure that you, the reader, love them too. Each character, however beautiful or vile, gets their own dose of empathy. The result is a world that feels very authentic. In addition, we get to view this world through the eyes of a very likeable protagonist. Harper may need rescuing at the beginning of this novel, but she quickly adapts to her new situations and before long she's the most badass pregnant woman you could imagine.

Characters and plot aside, you can tell that Hill did a lot of research for this novel. Before you turn to the first page, Hill states that “while the Dragonscale is an invention...almost every feature of my fictional spore can be found in nature.” He also places the story in the modern, contemporary, take-it-or-leave-it US of A. The book is overflowing with pop-culture references and social commentary.

“FOX said the Dragon had been set loose by ISIS, using spores that had been invented by the Russians in the 1980's. MSNBC said the sources indicated the 'scale might've been created by engineers at Halliburton and stolen by culty Christian types fixated on the Book of Revelation. CNN reported both sides.

...Then Glenn Beck burned to death on his internet program, right in front of his chalkboard, burned so hot his glasses fused to his face, and after that most of the news was less about who did it and more about how not to catch it.”

The Fireman

By Joe Hill

<http://www.riversendbookstore.com/book/9780062200631>

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768 pages

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and Company

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Hill is a master storyteller. The son of Stephen King, he wanted to take a pen name so that he wouldn't simply get famous off his father. Judging by the way he writes today, that would have been an absolute tragedy. Joseph Hillstrom King may not have kept his father's last name on the cover, but he did steal the best parts of his writing style, which Hill proudly admits in a brief author's note.

That isn't to say that he writes the same; in fact, Hill is a very different author than his father—even, arguably, better in some

ways. He knows when to suspend you in the moment, and when to move on. His writing never drags on past the point, and some of his chapters only amount to one powerful gut-shot of a paragraph, but it's all that they need to be. He knows when to divulge information to the reader, playing his hand close to his chest, and daring you not to read the next chapter. Combine that masterful authorship with a white-knuckle narrative, a wonderful cast of characters, and a dynamite post-apocalyptic premise, and you have seven-hundred and sixty-eight pages of damn good reading, served hot.

Learn more about Joe Hill at: <http://www.joehillfiction.com/>.

Jarred Lyndaker is a non-traditional student at the State University of New York at Oswego, where he double majors in writing and film. He spends his time honing his storytelling skills, binging on quality horror fiction. He pays the rent bartending at the local hotel.