

Five novels and their occult inspirations

By Mark Frauenfelder

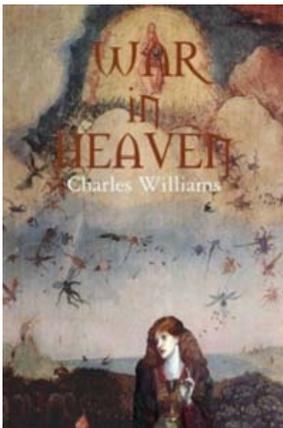
Guido Mina di Sospiro and Joscelyn Godwin, authors of *The Forbidden Book*, wrote about five novels and their occult inspirations for *Boing Boing*:

How do you find works of occult fiction that are not just fantasies? We have just published one of them: *The Forbidden Book*, released as an e-book by The Disinformation Company. It is a murder mystery, a romance, a political conundrum, but above all an account of magick in action. We think of it as belonging to a rare strain of fiction by authors who actually know occult traditions and the philosophies behind them. That way the reader is not just playing "let's pretend" but learning some insights into reality that are potentially life-changing. See below for more about *The Forbidden Book*.

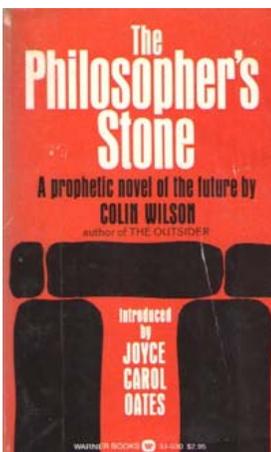
Here are some other novels that we admire:



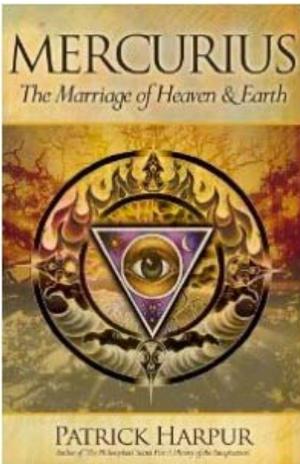
Zanoni, by Bulwer Lytton, is the premier occult novel of the nineteenth century. Lytton was a novelist and playwright, a dandy, a politician, and eventually a Baron. He is supposed to have been initiated into a German Rosicrucian order, and to have been in the Orphic Circle, a London group that used child clairvoyants. Dickens and Disraeli were his friends, but they didn't follow his arcane interests. For instance, they weren't with him when French occult author and ceremonial magus Eliphas Levi, in Lytton's presence, evoked the spirit of the Greek Neopythagorean philosopher Apollonius of Tyana on a London rooftop. *Zanoni* is a description of initiations by one who has evidently passed through them. It is famous for introducing the themes of the "Dweller on the Threshold" who tries to block the aspirant's path, and the "augoeides" or luminous self. The novel tells about two men who have gained the secret of eternal life. One of them is content to rest on the accumulated wisdom of his 5,000 years, but *Zanoni* voluntarily gives up his immortality. He finds that human love is more precious still, even though death is its inexorable price.



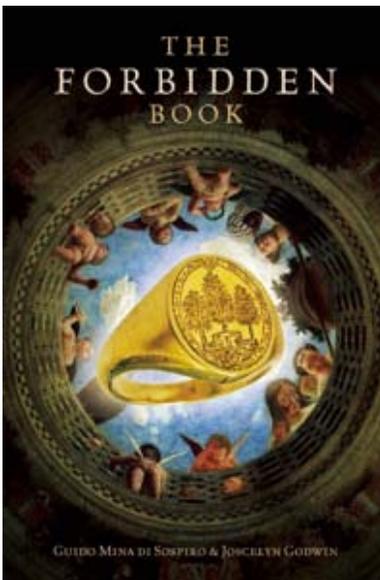
At the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, the elven princess Arwen Evenstar would make the same choice when she married Aragorn and became mortal. But neither Tolkien nor C.S. Lewis belonged to any occult order. That distinction belongs to the third of their "Inkling" group, Charles Williams. One day he may get his movies and be as famous as they. Williams was in a Christian magical order, the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross founded by the scholarly mystic A.E. Waite, and all seven of his novels draw on that experience. His method is to take some mythical or archetypal theme and see what would happen if it became manifest in the modern world. *War in Heaven*, for example, is about black and white magicians fighting for possession of the Holy Grail. Williams probably imagined his chilling account of a Black Mass, but considering that the book was published in 1930, he surely felt the tensions building in the spiritual world before breaking out on earth -- in other words, "As above, so below," an expression well known in the occult milieu and first used in *The Emerald Tablet of Hermes*.



The Philosopher's Stone, by Colin Wilson, is not about alchemy but about Wilson's lifelong quest for "Faculty X," the transcendent consciousness and paranormal abilities that he and many others have known fleetingly but cannot summon at will. Wilson is a great story-teller, and his characters seem at first to be on a typical science-fiction jaunt, using technology to expand their consciousness. But the waters get deeper and the issues more serious, until the climactic appearance of the Old Ones -- that's right, straight out of H.P. Lovecraft! Dedicated to the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, *The Philosopher's Stone* anticipates Wilson's bold leap with *The Occult*, the book that would alienate the literary world while giving wings to his genius.



Mercurius, the Marriage of Heaven and Earth, by Patrick Harpur, is the real alchemical novel for our time. It is set in a "Miss Marple" world in which a very English vicar was doing alchemy on the quiet. (He's probably based on the real Reverend William Ayton, a secretive member of the Golden Dawn.) A later tenant of the vicarage discovers his papers, and a complex web develops between her and him. The story tracks the stages of the alchemical work in a seductive mix of humor, ambiguity, and spiritual tension. It's also a painless crash course in Jungian psychology. As in Wilson's case, the novel is a curtain-raiser for a non-fiction masterpiece. For Harpur, this would be his Daimonic Reality: a Field Guide to the Otherworld.



The Forbidden Book is about the deciphering of a real book from the 1600s, The Magical World of the Heroes by Cesare della Riviera. It's set in Italian locales of bewitching beauty and sinister resonance, with episodes in Washington and Provence. Beside love, murder, and pursuit, the American protagonist finds himself caught up in a burning issue of today's Europe: the growing Islamic presence and the reaction against it. On top of that, the book reveals things about sexual magic, its powers and its dangers, that you won't easily find anywhere else.