



## Fourth Mansions

*R.A. Lafferty*

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## **Fourth Mansions** R.A. Lafferty

*Fourth Mansions* was inspired by Teresa of Ávila's Interior Castle, & contains quotations from the book, which quotations Lafferty uses as chapter headings. The Interior Castle is a metaphor for an individual's soul; its different rooms, different states of the soul. In the middle of the Castle the soul is in the purest state, which equals Heaven. Lafferty uses more complex symbols to bring colorfully into life his many-sided tale of an individual's reaching towards Heaven or Truth.

Take a trip thru a psychedelic reality, with seven very special people blending to create a higher form of humanity: A laughing man living alone on a mountaintop, guarding the world. The Returnees: men who live again & again, century after century. A dog-ape "Plappergeist," who can only be seen out of the corner of one's eye. A young man named Foley, very much like us, who begins to find out about the above people & things, & how they're reshaping the world!

## **Fourth Mansions Details**

Date : Published 1969 by Ace

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Author : R.A. Lafferty

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## From Reader Review Fourth Mansions for online ebook

### Keith Davis says

A young man becomes involved with four separate conspiracies to control the world. You don't read Lafferty for the plots though, you read him for his crazy storytelling.

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### Nate D says

R.A. Lafferty is a strange writer. He doesn't really seem to deal in true science fiction stories, unless deliberately working within such tropes, as in his resetting of the Odyssey in space, so much as mapping elaborate personal systems into semi-genre action and recounted crackpot theories, both found and constructed-to-order. Here, he traces an ascending spiral/fountain/vortex of secret world-governing forces and the cyclic structures of human progress at every level. There's a mind-weave, there're plappergeists, there's a neatly constructed back-door exit into paranoid schizophrenia for the non-mind-weave-and-plappergeist-inclined, there're lost cities, the secret location of olympus, human origins, a demon, it goes on. Lafferty's actual philosophies seem singular enough to be tough to pin down precisely, which is fine, as I suspect we'd have differences there -- as it is, he's just fascinating. And his words, though mostly direct and punchy, appropriate to the journalist-lead, still allow room for many odd and perfect tangents and sketches.

A description:

Salzy, in the aura of her, was a gentle and unknowing murderess of many small bits of the ambient.

Some offhanded action:

An unlighted car roared out of the street and onto the sidewalk after him, and men boiled out of it when it missed him and half-crashed. Through a gap then, down a half-alley, over a fence, up an old outside stairway, across onto a lower roof, on and on. Freddy might be a simpleton, but he was an agile simpleton. They did not have him that night.

An ersatz epigraph:

There is what seems like a regular pattern of excavated cities. From the bottom, three cities, each more advanced in artifact and building, one atop another; then a city of total destruction: following above will be three more cities showing advance and again a fourth showing total destruction.

It is possible, however, that this most common cycle is actually the failed or broken cycle. Much more rarely do we come on the cycle of the full seven cities: at Leros, at Lough Dorg, at Ankor Kong, at Chichen-Ticul. In these cases we find the first three cities of ascending worth, then the fourth or "confusion" plateau which reveals contradictory and exciting values, fragmentary but contained destruction, and grandiose foundations: above this in each case are the fifth and sixth cities, which can only be called marvelous in both their attainments and in their balance and their prophecy: above these are the truncated bases of seventh cities, which

are absolutely unique in even their low remnants.

In each case, the local legend is that the final cities (having become perfect) were taken up to heaven in every stone and person.

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### **brian dean says**

This is a wonderfully weird book.

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### **Allan says**

Wow, folks...this book. This book. This is the second novel I've read of his, with many short stories and a few essays in between. Fourth Mansions is the most like reading a really good Lafferty story, somehow maintaining the intensity and light-yet-deadly tone, and still remaining cohesive as a novel. Lafferty isn't for everyone--his style and dialog either charm & delight you or annoy & exhaust you--and while this may or may not be his best work, it is certainly the most HIS. I'm dazzled.

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### **siejay says**

If you've never read anything by R.A. Lafferty, please do as soon as you can. I recommend starting with his short fiction, a few examples of which are available online at [[www.scifi.com/scifiction/classics/cla...](http://www.scifi.com/scifiction/classics/cla...)]. (By the way, can anybody give me some tips on formatting here? HTML doesn't work and the advice in the sidebar seems not to either.)

Fourth Mansions is a shaggy badger story starring an improbably likeable young reporter with "good eyes but simple brains" named Fred Foley. Freddy has stumbled into an ancient mystical conspiracy that is trying to immanentize an (also mystical) eschaton. It might sound like the setup for Illuminatus!, and indeed dates from around the same time. Lafferty's inimitable, exuberant prose will pull you along the helical path of Freddy's awakening so skillfully you won't even realize what's happening to you until it's too late. As Lafferty warns us on the first page: "It is too late for you to withdraw. The damage is done to you. ... Die a little. There is reason for it."

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### **Tim Hicks says**

Someone else called this a "shaggy badger story" and that sounds about right.

Just re-read it after many years. There's still no doubt that Lafferty was brilliant, but the book lost me about 3/4 through. Foley's grand adventure, and the unfolding of his ability to deal with almost anything, were great. But as he meets up with the real powers involved, the book degenerates into a philosophy seminar.

I don't require slam-bang action, explosions and car chases, but I do want the characters not to sit there lecturing each other on abstruse concepts.

This might be the first book in a long time that I set aside unfinished and still gave three stars. Lafferty writes that engagingly, until he bogs down.

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## **Martin says**

It begins thus:

I: I THINK I WILL DISMEMBER THE WORLD WITH MY HANDS

There is entwined seven-tentacled lightning. It is fire-masses, it is sheets, it is arms. It is seven-coloured writhing in the darkness, electric and alive. It pulsates, it sends, it sparkles it blinds?

It explodes!

It is seven murderous thunder-snakes striking in seven directions along the ground! Blindingly fast! Under your feet! Now! At you!

And you! YOU who glanced in here for but a moment, you are already snake-bit!

It is too late for you to withdraw. The damage is done to you. That faintly odd taste in your mouth, that smallest of tingles which you feel, they signal the snake-death.

Die a little. There is reason for it.

There was a young man who had very good eyes but simple brains. Nobody can have everything. His name was Freddy Foley and he was arguing with a man named Tankersley who was his superior.

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## **Perry Whitford says**

*"Oh, it's all allegory and beyond the comprehension of a flatlander."*

That's just a typical throwaway line from *Fourth Mansions*, the like of which Lafferty tosses out here and there at the rate of about four or five a page, yet I can't think of a better way to describe the way I feel when I read (or in this instance, reread) one of his books.

He may be occasionally beyond my comprehension, but he's also heaps of fun. With Lafferty, almost every line is either a joke or a deep rhetorical question, a non-sequitor or a theological conundrum, a put-on or a piece of wisdom.

I can't think of any other writer who can sustain such a steady diet of thought-provoking, rib-tickling nonsense for twenty-five consecutive pages, let alone two hundred and fifty.

Even his chapter headings are enough to tell you that Lafferty is a more interesting writer than most, e.g.

Either Awful Dead or Awful Old

If They Can Kill You, I Can Kill You Worse

Helical Passion and Sainly Sexpot

The Line of Your Throat, the Mercurial Movement etc.

I mean, come on, who *doesn't* want to find out what those chapters are about?

It's hardly worth summarising the plot of *Fourth Mansions*, but here goes. A journalist named Freddy Foley, 'a young man with very good eyes but simple brains', uncovers an ancient conspiracy by people long dead who have returned from the grave to take over the world.

But these "returnees" are only one of four ancient conspiracies currently, er, conspiring.

There are also the Harvesters, a septet of extraordinary people who aim to ascend normal humanity via a "mind-weave"; an uncle and nephew named Michael Fountain and Miguel Fuentes, who work apart using different methods to diminish mankind; and a goofy, scattered group of old duffers called "patricks" who work together to keep everything the same.

The Harvesters are symbolised by the snake and are essentially liberal; the "patricks" are symbolised by the badger and are essentially conservative; the "returnee's" are symbolised by the toad and are Communists; whereas the Fountain / Fuentes duo are both Fascists symbolised by the falcon.

I think the symbols, along with much else, are derived from Teresa of Avilla's *The Interior Castle*, a 16th century Christian text about the different levels of spiritual development.

There are seven levels in her mansion, so that tells you which part of her work you need to read to get a better understanding of where Lafferty is coming from here.

Not that it helps much, or even matters. In his allegories Lafferty draws on a vast number of sources, but he never stops anywhere for a lengthy drought. And yet for a writer so scattershot, he can (sort of) sustain an underlying structure in theme and purpose.

But any attempt to summarise Lafferty is unnecessary. I admit that I have only done it this time around because I fully intend to read *Fourth Mansions* for a third - and yes, why not? a fourth time - again at some point and I don't want to waste time making any sense of it again!

No, next time I want to just enjoy the glorious goofiness and brio of it, the sheer shaggy-doggedness of the thing!

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## **Jim Mann says**

Lafferty's *Fourth Mansions* is an energetic, rambling, and strange novel. It moves ahead with a bizarre narrative force, then moves sideways with some of the same force, before jolting ahead again.

A reporter who we are several times told is not very bright has been pushed by a strange mind-meld of people to investigate an immortal, or perhaps group of immortals. Along the way he encounters vagrants, called patricks, who guard the gates to the universe, a person who may or may not be his childhood friend, a Mexican revolutionary, and others. This novel seems to be influenced by everything from conspiracy stories to *The Circus of Dr. Lao*, but all told in Lafferty's unique style. In the end, it rather runs off the rails, but that takes only a little away from the fascinating ride.

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## **Stephen says**

4.0 to 4.5 stars. Brilliantly written, very funny and very, very strange. In other words, a CLASSIC R.A.

Lafferty novel.

Nominee: Nebula Award for Best Science Fiction Award (1971)

Nominee: Locus Award for Best Science Fiction Award (1971)

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## Combiner says

what the heck

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## Robert Wigard says

My first reading of this book I did without reading St. Theresa of Avila's *The Interior Castle* on which *Fourth Mansions* is based. My second reading will have her work as the backdrop.

The opening of this book is the best opening ever. It was this opening that turned me into an avid Lafferty fan - I was snake bit!

That said, I found it hard to follow along. The sequence of events didn't always make sense to me and I think that is because I was missing some background and not only of *The Interior Castle*.

Some say a book should stand on it's own, requiring no prerequisite or extra material for its comprehension. I thoroughly reject this model as it leaves everyone stuck on the lowest common denominator. The true story would go to the writer that wouldn't challenge the knowledge resources of the world's biggest ignoramus.

A second reading may get the 5th star.

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## Sandy says

Despite it having been given pride of place in Scottish critic David Pringle's "Modern Fantasy: The 100 Best Novels," and despite the fact that it has been sitting on my bookshelf for many years, it was only last week that I finally got around to reading R.A. Lafferty's 1969 cult item "Fourth Mansions." The author's reputation for eccentricity, both in terms of subject matter as well as writing style, had long intimidated me, I suppose. But just recently, Jen, one of the managers of NYC sci-fi bookstore extraordinaire Singularity, was enthusing to me about her recent acquisition of a first edition of Lafferty's 1970 short story collection "Nine Hundred Grandmothers" for only \$40, and I suppose that her enthusiasm proved contagious in my case, as I manfully dove into "Fourth Mansions" soon after. This book was Lafferty's fourth novel, released when the Iowa native was 55 (Lafferty was a latecomer to the sci-fi game, only releasing his first story at the age of 46, after decades of being an electrical engineer!), following the near-simultaneous release of 1968's "Past Master," "Reefs of Earth" and "Space Chantey." Well, to my great surprise, despite the fact that Lafferty is "one of the most madcap writers of them all" (that's Pringle talking), and notwithstanding that "faintly irritating title" (Pringle again), I found myself hugely enjoying this crazy romp of a book.

That's not to say, of course, that I can honestly claim to have fully understood it. "Fourth Mansions" is loosely based on St. Teresa of Avila's "Interior Castle," a guide for the development of the human spirit, which came out in 1577. Although the book is described on the Amazon site as "one of the most celebrated

works on mystical theology in existence," I must admit that I have not read it, and wonder just how many people have today. The plot of Lafferty's novel is so outré and bizarre that I despair of even describing it; any such description will surely not give justice to the loopiness of the entire conceit. Suffice it to say that our hero, young reporter Freddy Foley, learns that the U.S. Secretary of State's right-hand man, Carmody Overlark, bears a remarkable resemblance to both an Egyptian civil servant of 1350 B.C. AND a Mamluk officer of around 500 years ago; the thought occurs to Freddy that all three might somehow be the same man! This thought has been placed in Freddy's mind by a septet of mental mutants (three very strange couples plus Freddy's teenage girlfriend, Bedelia Bencher), the so-called Harvesters, whose "mind-weaving" sets some very strange events in motion, as they attempt to mutate further and overthrow the world. And eventually, Freddy learns that the mundane events of our unknowing planet have long been influenced by another "secret society," the so-called "returnees," who live for a while, then hibernate for centuries, and then come back again to take over the bodies of other men! Not to mention a third secret society comprised of the "patricks," dedicated to fighting the returnees! And before long, poor Freddy is caught up in the cross machinations of all three of these groups, only to find himself thrown summarily into the nuthouse, while the world is racked with plague, hysteria and civil war....

Anyway, those readers who deem David Lindsay's "A Voyage to Arcturus" (1920) the strangest science fiction novel ever written might want to revise their opinion after reading Lafferty's "Fourth Mansions." But despite its way-out plot (there is simply no way for the reader to ever predict what is coming from sentence to sentence!), the author, remarkably, maintains absolute control, and the book manages to hang together. Often, seemingly meaningless lines and bits of business attain significance a hundred pages later on. Conversely, the strangest things are mentioned in passing sometimes, never to be dealt with again in any sort of depth. (For example, the author tells us offhandedly that the Harvesters have just inducted Baubo, a demon from hell, into their group. In most stories, this would be kind of a big deal; here, it is just a brief aside of casual strangeness. Then there is the matter of the "plappergeists," the fascinating half dog/half ape familiars of the patricks that can only be seen out of the corners of one's eyes; they are mentioned a few times in passing but the reader is certainly left mystified by them, and wanting more.) Perhaps the single best thing that "Fourth Mansions" has going for it, though, besides its wild story line and its author's seemingly limitless imagination, is Lafferty's manifest great joy in writing and his love affair with the English language; in that regard, he is reminiscent, for me, of a writer such as Mark Helprin, whose novels almost read like poetry (I say this despite the fact that "The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction" mentions Lafferty's "labored singing prose"). Thus, in telling us of one of the Harvester couples, Lafferty writes: "There was sometimes a frightening gaiety about this couple, something of serpentine mottled green humor, wholly uncontrollable under-strata of recklessness bursting up in artesian fountains of water that was frosty with forbidden minerals...." Wow! And like most authors who are in love with language, Lafferty is not afraid to make up his own words to suit the occasion; thus, "intengent," "gangeroo," "actionist" and so on. Despite the fact that the book's range of literary reference is fairly formidable (besides the St. Teresa book, Milton's "Paradise Lost" and "Lycidas," G.K. Chesterton's essay "The Nightmare," and Shakespeare's "Othello" and "Henry IV, Part 2" are also mentioned), "Fourth Mansions" is very often laugh-out-loud funny. Freddy does a lot of maturing as the book proceeds (a partial benefit of his brain having been touched by the Harvester mind-weave), and he never seems to be at a loss for a clever comeback or amusing one-liner.

A hugely entertaining, maddeningly bewildering, beautifully written mindblower in the best sense, "Fourth Mansions" is certainly like no other book that I have yet to come across. Pringle tells us that Lafferty's work is "full of blarney and mysticism," and the book in question certainly is that. But really, how could I possibly dislike ANY book that references my favorite author, H. Rider Haggard, repeatedly, and that uses my favorite word in the English language, "chthonic," no less than three times? Thanks for the inspiration, Jen!

(By the way, this review originally appeared on the FanLit website, <http://www.fantasyliterature.com/>, a most excellent destination for all fans of R.A. Lafferty....)

## **Bob Rust says**

Fourth Mansions (1969) a protagonist (or several) finds a pattern of flamboyant, arcane, dreamlike clues to a conspiracy between Good and Evil whose outcome will determine the moral nature of reality to come; and enters the fray joyously (though confusingly) upon the side of the angels. There is an abiding sense in his work that the plays of a deadly serious Godgame are being unfolded, almost certainly in terms of a deeply held Catholicism.

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## **Erik Graff says**

My next door neighbor in Loose Hall during freshman year at Grinnell College shared a liking for science fiction. His appreciation of the genre was more mature than mine. I had been reading the stuff since childhood, but other than a few big names like Clarke and Asimov, I barely paid attention to whom I read. My reading was based on book availability and, except for Andre Norton, I would read almost anything. Rick introduced me to R.A. Lafferty, Robert Sheckley and others--many of them quite funny, most of them a bit offbeat.

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