

Press Kit

UNDER THE SHADOW

Children of the First Star: Volume I

By

J.M. Kay



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UNDER THE SHADOW

CHILDREN OF THE FIRST STAR
Volume-I



J.M. KAY

Interview with author J.M. Kay

“Under the Shadow: Children of the First Star, Vol. 1”

Can you give us a summary of your book?

“Under the Shadow” is a story of self-discovery. Two thirteen-year-old boys, Jason Swann and Daniel Elliot, are forced into friendship as they are accidentally abducted by the Archivist, a robotic being created by an ancient alien race known as the Shantar Anar for the purpose of studying the universe. But of course, things that seem like coincidence reek of deeper mystery as the boys and the Archivist find themselves lost in an adventure on a foreign world, Ranis Anjiran. What they discover there only further dismantles the myths surrounding their accidental abduction and their connection to the Shantar Anar.

While the boys are in far off worlds, their respective families in the small town of Ashton, in the American Midwest, desperately seek to find them, thinking the worst. Their search uncovers a hidden history with ties to the events surrounding Jason and Daniel’s journey.

What was your inspiration for writing Under the Shadow – Children of the First Star, Vol. 1?

I wanted to write a story that wasn’t just about good versus evil but about an evolution and about the ability to become a better version of oneself by looking within. In that sense, it’s my homage to T.S. Eliot, whose poetry I fell in love with in high school and has always made me want to better understand who I really am as a person.

When did you know you wanted to become a writer?

I don’t know if there was ever a “light going off” moment, but the need to put my thoughts down onto page has been with me since probably late high school. Writing was a way for me to empty my anxiety and my stress, to literally take it from my own body and put it on a page and I would always feel better afterwards. From then, my desire to write evolved into a love of bringing my imagination into the world in a way where it would have a home and not be forgotten. From there it was just a natural progression to thinking, wouldn’t it be amazing if this were my job?

Author Interview (cont'd)

Have you always been interested in science fiction?

Science fiction and fantasy were without a doubt my favorite genres growing up and in many ways they still are. I have always been very fond of astronomy and physics and if my math skills were better I definitely would have pursued a career in a hard science. Some of the best science fiction I have read isn't just about spaceships and aliens but builds on a platform of real scientific research and imagines potentials based upon these theories.

Name your favorite book and author from when you were the age of the characters in this book and explain why it appealed to you so much.

That's tough, a lot of choices, but maybe "The Seventh Gate," which is the final installment of the Death Gate Cycle (Fantasy not Sci Fi) by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman. I read the series for the first time at around fourteen. The world was very original, it employed a great magic system, and the depth and range of the characters they imagined into being were really amazing.

How long did it take you to write your book from start to finish?

I think it took me about two and a half years from first word to final draft, though that doesn't include a stretch of about a year where I had to set it aside for work related issues.

What was the most challenging part about writing your book?

The most challenging part was not throwing it in the garbage and going to look for something else to do with my life after the first time I had a real editor do coverage. I was used to having writing critiqued but not to the extent where I knew I was going to have to spend months and months tearing apart and writing a new story, which I was already happy with.

What are your writing goals for the next 12 months?

In the next 12 months I hope to be able to finish my outline for "A Moment in the Glass: Children of the First Star, Volume II" and be well into writing the first draft. If I have the time, I'd love to keep working on a series of humorous short stories I started a little while back and some poetry here and there always seems to find a way into the mix.

Author Interview (cont'd)

Are you working on something right now? If so, can you tell us more about it?

I've started working on the plot points and the outline for Children of the First Star: Volume II which will continue the adventure of Jason and Daniel on the home planet of the Shantar Anar and will find those searching for them on Earth closer to the boys than they might ever have imagined.

If you could meet three authors, which authors would you choose?

Really tough question and I'm not sure how I could even pick so I'm just going to choose three authors who've written books that changed the way I look at life. Joseph Heller – The sardonic humor of "Catch 22" is melded so perfectly with a profound understanding of the human condition and it inspired the title for my first collection of poetry, which I wrote during college "Snowden's Secret."

Milan Kundera – While I've read many of his books, "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" broke my heart during a time when I had lost a close friend.

Alexandre Dumas – The unabridged version of "The Count of Monte Cristo" is simply and without doubt the best book I have ever read in my entire life.

Chapter 7: Among the Billions

The new surroundings astonished Jason as he followed Nierion down a half-lit corridor. The interior of the ship was starkly contrasted with its monotone exterior. It was made of the same pitch-black metal as the Archivist, though the blue-and-white sheen was absent. However, the walls were covered in strange symbols Jason couldn't decipher. They ranged from simple, solitary shapes to complex, interconnected designs. What Jason found most wondrous about them, was that they weren't actually attached to the walls, but rather hung suspended, as if by invisible spindles of web. He craned his neck to see how far the designs extended, and noticed that the ceiling was covered in strips of phosphorescent gases, trapped behind glass-like, sheath cut-outs. He returned to the symbols and leaned in closely, trying to figure out how they were suspended, but there was nothing obvious.

"What are these things?" Jason asked, pointing at the symbols.

"They are the Arcon Drei," the whisper in his head replied, as if Jason was supposed to have any idea what that meant.

"Okay... what do they do?"

"Each one has a specific function. In aggregate, they control the ship."

Jason moved closer to one until it almost touched his nose. The Arcon Drei glowed in a soft blue hue. Suddenly, Jason felt like he was hit with a minor electric jolt. He examined his hands, which glimmered with the same blue light. Soon the light spread across his entire body, filling him with ticklish warmth. Within a moment, the glow retracted into his hands, and then disappeared, along with the feeling of warmth. The Arcon Drei grew brighter for a second, and then the light extinguished.

Jason spun around to find Nierion and its four empty visors staring at him.

"What just happened?" Jason asked innocently. But the whisper was not quick to return. When it did, for the first time, the Archivist's voice seemed unsure.

"I... I have never... what did you do to it?" The alien asked in faint accusation.

"I didn't do anything, I swear!" Jason pleaded, "I just turned and it started--"

"Never mind," the whisper cut him off. "Continue to follow me, and stay close."

But Jason didn't understand. "Why are you showing me all of this?"

"I am following the Protocol," the whisper replied, having reclaimed its emotionless confidence.

"You told me that already. That doesn't mean anything to me. Am I supposed to be learning something, doing something?" Jason asked. The Archivist's reaction to the Arcon Drei unnerved him and he didn't want to do anything to make the robotic being mad.

"The Protocol does not demand you learn or do anything."

This simple response prompted Jason to press further, but carefully: "So why did--"

"I am an archivist. It is not my job to know the motives of the Shantar Anar," the

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whisper stated, cutting Jason off.

The boy was utterly confused. If he wasn't supposed to learn anything, and Nierion wouldn't tell him anything, then what was the point of all of this? He wanted to find out what was really going on, but felt like he was walking on eggshells. The best thing to do, he figured, was to keep quiet. He meekly followed the Archivist down the corridor, hoping some kind of answer awaited him in another part of the ship.

With each step Jason let his mind wander, imagining what the Shantar Anar might look like, and who or what they really were. He was torn from his daydream by the startling insight that he was in the quietest place he'd ever been. Even the most vast silence he'd ever known, deep in the static grip of night, was still full of whooshing breezy air, and the stretching of old floor boards. He'd never before considered how full of sound the world was.

Jason shouted out "Hello!" just to make sure his own voice worked, and let out a sigh of relief as the word carried through the hallway. That was important; he remembered from science class that sound needed a medium, like air, to travel, and he realized he was breathing normally. But surely Nierion didn't breathe oxygen... which meant the atmosphere was there for him. Yet another indication that he was on the ship for a special reason, but what?

His eyes darted from the glowing ceiling to the floating symbols, and he felt like he might explode with questions. The fact that the Archivist wasn't interested in answering any of them made Jason afraid. He stopped for a moment and watched the alien being move through a dark threshold into another chamber in the ship. The feeling of familiarity with the Archivist was less comforting as the shadow outline of its form disappeared into the dim light beyond the entrance.

Too late to go back now, Jason thought, sure that there was no way for him to escape anyway.

The hallway opened into a large cabin with a dome-shaped ceiling. The first thing Jason noticed was that there were no Arcon Drei. In fact, the chamber was mostly bare of any detail, except for a hollow cylindrical totem in the center of the room. Affixed to the totem were four clear, empty orbs, which appeared to be made of the same crystal-like material as the Archivist's visors. The apparatus smacked of a mistake in engineering and looked to Jason like a chandelier some foolish alien architect had bolted to the floor instead of the ceiling. The rest of the chamber was similarly uninspiring, which Jason found just fine. There didn't appear to be any hideous tools or torture devices used for experimentation on abducted subjects, and he let out a sigh of relief. Nierion stood patiently beside the totem, as if entreating Jason to an examination. He walked to the cylinder, but saw nothing more than a hunk of metal and some ordinary looking, empty orbs.

"This is 'Esan's Heart.' It is the reason I was able to come to Earth to study you."

Jason bent towards the totem and scanned the surface for hidden details. "This Esan guy sure likes to name things after himself doesn't he... It, I mean."

"Esan's Heart has allowed my creators to learn much about the universe," the whisper related as the Archivist ignored Jason's comment.

"If the Shantar Anar are so powerful, how come you talk in a whisper? Couldn't they have given you a real voice?" Jason asked. He circled the totem, trying to figure out how the

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metal cylinder could possibly do what Nierion said.

"You should not be hearing me as a whisper," the Archivist became very still for a moment, then the voice returned.

"A minor error must have occurred last night when I formed our bond," Nierion said, now in a clear, bright voice.

Jason couldn't help but laugh. The mysterious whisper that spilled his blood into billions of tiny vessels of fear not an hour before had been nothing more than a volume dial set too low! His amusement was short-lived, as he realized what Nierion said. Jason felt a tingle of apprehension creep into his spine.

"What did you mean 'last night?' We just met."

"We did, in physical form. But in order for us to communicate, I had to instill you with 'Esan's Touch,' so you could understand my language and I could understand yours."

"Esan's Touch?" Jason exclaimed. "How many freaking things does Esan have?!"

"Many," the Archivist replied bluntly.

Jason was perplexed, "but you're speaking my language."

"I am not. Esan's Touch is translating my communications in a way you can understand."

"Are you *sure* you can't you read my mind?" he asked. The idea made him shiver.

"As I stated before, I cannot."

"Then how can-"

"Think of it this way," Nierion interrupted. "You are surrounded by ropes on all sides. Each rope represents a possibility of thought. I am holding the other end of one of an infinite number of ropes. I only feel the tension, and only know the rope is connected to you, when you tug on the single rope that I am holding. I have no power to influence or to interact with any of the other ropes that surround you."

"So that's Esan's Touch? Language software?" Jason asked.

"We needed a method of communication," the Archivist replied.

But why? Jason wondered. *Why did we need to talk, and why me?* There are billions of people on Earth... Why did Nierion pick him? Aliens and space ships and far off mysterious beings infiltrating his mind; who was he? *Nobody, I'm nobody*, Jason concluded, lowering his head morosely.

Then he glared at Nierion straight on. "What exactly did you do to me last night?"

The Archivist responded with a hint of annoyance. "I have told you this already. I instilled you with Esan's Touch. You felt my presence, though you didn't know exactly what I was. The beginning of the process can be uncomfortable, and for that, the Protocol insists I explain that the initial discomfort is essential to the process of connection."

"You mean my dream? That was you?" Jason asked, the memory pouring back to him. The eagle wings, the canyon, the river, the house, the great feeling of elation as he finally reached the door, the smell of home, the figure in the dark. He'd found his father again, and then, the gift of re-discovery was ripped away by the icy touch of strangeness. The incredible pain he felt as he'd been torn apart, and then the stillness, the gentle touch, the sense of understanding. The vision had been so vivid, so wonderful to find his father again. The idea that he'd been used as an emotional ragdoll without a choice by this... creature enraged him.

"You screwed with me just so we could talk to each-other?! Why? Why me?"

"You misunderstand," the Archivist remarked, oblivious to Jason's pain.

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“Communication is a proximate reason for using Esan’s Touch; the ultimate was so that I could study you.”

“Study me? It was just a dream. If you want to know stuff about me, ask me now. What do you need to know; what I eat, stuff like that?”

“You have misunderstood my purpose.”

“What is there to understand? You won’t tell me anything!”

“I was not sent here to study your eating habits. I was sent to study your physiology. Everything I needed to know, I learned last night.”

Jason stared at Nierion with a blank expression as the truth dawned on him. His anger became sadness. There was nothing to this encounter other than a great coincidence after all. He wasn’t a long lost hero of an alien prophecy. Any idiot with a skeleton would’ve done as well.

“So that’s it? You came all the way to Earth just to study my body? You don’t want to know anything else? I know I’m young but I’m... I’m not stupid. You don’t have to keep secrets from me!”

The Archivist’s cold glare fell on him, no sense of compassion evident in the empty visors.

“I have no questions for you. I am ordered by the Protocol to reveal my existence, show you the ship, and inform you, since you are a sentient life form, of the invasive process I was required to use in order to do this, and the purpose of its intent. That is all, our meeting is concluded.”

“What do you mean it’s concluded?” Jason pleaded.

Nierion didn’t respond as its visors erupted with color, flipping rapidly through blues and reds, shifting faster and faster. Jason felt a sharp, twisting pain inside of him, like something he hadn’t even known was there was being ripped away. A crushing emptiness flooded the space the unnamed essence had inhabited, and left a chilling void. He clutched at his chest like a wounded soldier trying to hold in the exposed gore of his guts with trembling hands.

“No!” Jason shouted. “No, you don’t have to do this, not yet! Don’t take it from me! Please!”

The Archivist was shocked and frightened as the human writhed in pain. Nierion had removed Esan’s Touch tens of thousands of times in its long life, but this was the first time it had ever seen the extraction cause this... result. But there was no time to figure out what was different. The sequence could not be interrupted or the human would die.

Two panels in the Archivist’s chest burst open. The inner visors of Esan’s Eyes shot forth, reaching out like two inter-locking arms surrounding Jason and the space around him began to shimmer.

“Wait, please wait!” Nierion heard the human croak, Jason’s body a rag doll in the grip of the inter-locking arms. The Archivist watched the human’s flickering body fade away and felt distinctly unsettled. This anomaly was definitely going to have to be in the report.

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Author J. M. Kay



About the Author

J. M. Kay started writing seriously his sophomore year of college at University of California, Santa Barbara. A few poems here and there led to several collections of poetry, a book of short stories, and many other writing projects. Under the Shadow, Children of the First Star: Volume I is his first novel. He, his wife and their adorable Shih Tzu all hope that this is just the first book of many, as being a writer, for all of its aggravations, is still way more fun and rewarding than what he used to do.

To learn more about the author, visit: <http://www.jmkaywriting.com>

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Summary:

In the small mid-west town of Ashton, two boys are accidentally abducted by a universal archivist from a distant planet. The boys must travel with the archivist to a planet filled with secrets, all the while hoping it is in the interest of the archivist's superiors to send them back to earth. In Ashton, the apparent kidnapping of the two missing teens spark old hatreds and suspicions in a town that once before suffered a very similar tragedy.