

# I Have a Nightmare....

## Review of Gloria Evan's *Meh'Yam*

by June Pulliam



Evans, Gloria. *Meh'Yam*. Gainesville, FL: T. Bo Publishing, 2000. 257 p.

Because the vampire is probably the most popular of monsters in the horror genre, anyone wishing to write this type of tale must work hard at being original in order to produce a fictional work that's not just another hackneyed cliché. This is particular difficult because of the nosferatu's long history: The vampire has evolved from Stoker's hirsute count with halitosis, whose mesmeric powers drew victims otherwise repulsed by his hideous appearance, to Rice's pensive and beautiful nosferatu, who spend eternity contemplating the nature of quiet desperation. More recent incarnations of the undead incorporate both extremes: they're feral and remorseless creatures that use their physical beauty to lure their prey. One characteristic that has endured is the vampire's class affiliation. More often than not, the vampire is at the top of the food chain, a decadent aristocrat that exists above the petty concerns about money and morality exhibited by the bourgeoisie, a creature free from any working class need to eke out a living, but one who is a deadly predator not easily subdued by humans.

Gloria Evan's novel *Meh'Yam* exists within this contemporary representation of the vampire. Pomoda, an extraterrestrial from the race of the Meh'Yam, is at the top of the universe's food chain. The Meh'Yams' need for melanin has caused them to hunt other races to extinction. Pomoda is a Meh'Yam explorer, attracted to Earth by its abundance of dark skinned humans whose flesh is rich in melanin. He realizes that humans would make excellent cattle for the Meh'Yam; once the more aggressive ones are consumed, the remaining docile individuals could be bred to produce an infinite supply of melanin. Pomoda begins his exploration in the third world countries of Africa, where the presence of exsanguinated and dehydrated bodies does not draw much attention, and soon is ready to move on to the challenge of conquering the United States, with all of its technology and potential for discovering his presence and thwarting his mission. But Pomoda soon discovers that human technology is laughably primitive when compared to what the Meh'Yam possess.

Also true to the traditional vampire tale, Evans has Pomoda use his own physical beauty to attract prey. In their natural state, the Meh'Yam are orange creatures taller than the average NBA player, but the Meh'Yam are also shapeshifters, and assume whatever form is needed at the moment. Pomoda's human form is that of a mysterious stranger: an expensively dressed, tall, thin Sudanese with blue-black skin, a mane of long micro-braids, and an aristocratic bearing. Pomoda feigns being naive to the ways of Americans, specifically American women who would quickly part him from his money. In the United States, he hunts in singles bars haunted by young black women who fancy themselves sexual predators of sorts in search of if not the perfect mate, at least someone with wealth and grace. Pomoda quickly turns the tables on these women, luring them away for furtive unprotected sex which leaves them nothing more than mummified husks, their bodies drained of all fluids, and their genitals protected by a mysterious orange substance that will attack and kill anyone foolish enough to approach.

Meanwhile, the unusual appearance of Pomoda's victims alerts the FBI and the Center for Disease Control. Both agencies are clueless, and the CDC is unable to contain the dangerous orange substance left on bodies and which has already killed several technicians working on the case. The small Florida community begins to panic when it reads of a serial rapist and killer on the loose, and fears that law enforcement isn't overly concerned with the situation since the victims are all young, African-American women.

Because Pomoda is an extraterrestrial, he's not concerned with human morality. Like with the more traditional aristocratic vampire, this lack of human morality is what makes him monstrous. Ironically, in the end, it is human morality which causes his downfall. Like many vampires before him, Pomoda the predator falls in love with his prey, and it is his love for a particular mortal that makes him vulnerable.

Nonetheless, *Meh'Yam* transcends the traditional vampire tale, and is remarkable for its re-interpretation of the Black vampire, as well as for Evans' using the horror genre to comment on the dangers of racism. Traditionally, Black vampires such as Blacula and Blade see their condition as another form of enslavement rather than something that allows them to transcend the bounds of mere mortality; thus they have more sympathy for humans than they do for their own kind. Blacula, once prince of the fictional country of Ebonia, is himself enslaved in darkness by Count Dracula during a mission to Transylvania, when he (Blacula) has the temerity to suggest that this country stop participating in the slave trade. Blade too wishes to be free of his condition, and to rid the world of vampires, since many of them advocate making the human race into their own personal cattle, essentially creating another form of slavery.

Unlike other Black vampires, Pomoda has no such sympathy for humans, let alone for "fellow" members of his race (Pomoda is masquerading as a Black man, ironically, one from a country where slavery is still practiced). He sees his own behavior, if anything, as something that would inadvertently strengthen what he believes is a weak race that needs "to be controlled, purged, contained, maintained and cultivated. . . ridded of the ne'er-do-wells that were mass-producing like weeds." Here Pomoda echoes the Victorian attitudes that shaped Stoker's *Dracula*, the xenophobia that caused fin-de-siècle white people to fear that immigrants were invading England and America and breeding at alarming numbers, bringing with them pestilence and immorality

which threatened to bring an end to civilization as they knew it. But Pomoda is a true outsider expressing these sentiments.

Also like Stoker's count, Pomoda is extremely powerful and quite capable of subduing the human race, although his strength isn't so much supernatural as it is simply the result of a technology vastly superior to anything on planet Earth. But here the similarities to Dracula end. In *Dracula*, a group of white Anglo-Saxons unite and use their "superior" intelligence, technology, and morality to pursue the Count to his homeland and destroy him; in Evans' novel, this sort of thinking will be the end of the human race. The only advantage that people have is their sheer numbers, since Pomoda's fellow Meh'Yam haven't yet arrived on Earth.

The theme of *Meh'Yam* is similar to the Rusty Cundieff's 1994 film *Tales from the Hood*, which employed the conventions of the genre to contemplate the problems caused by racism. Both Evans' and Cundieff's works examine racism as perpetuated by whites as well as how Blacks often adopt racist attitudes towards other Blacks. But where Cundieff created a nightmare world where African-Americans had to empower themselves to fight the evils of racism, in Evans' novel, humans' ability to coordinate their efforts is hindered due to centuries of institutionalized racism which has caused deep divisions and mistrust among people who must work together. Ultimately, a mostly white Center for Disease Control and FBI must look beyond racial stereotypes and truly listen to the African-American characters who have come into contact with Pomoda and hold the key to destroying him. Evans' vampire novel presents a world where everyone, no matter his/her ethnicity or skin color, must work together to protect life as we know it.

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Readers and fans can visit Gloria Evans' website at [www.tbopublishing.com](http://www.tbopublishing.com)

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