

WORLD  
HORROR  
CONVENTION  
1998  
PHOENIX, AZ



# WELCOME TO THE 1998 WORLD HORROR CONVENTION

with guests-of-honor . . .



## WRITER BRIAN LUMLEY

A prolific writer with titles numbered in the forties, Brian Lumley's most influential saga in the field has been the acclaimed *Necroscope* (which recently reached a completion in ten volumes), which has been made into comic books, graphic novels, role-playing games, and figurines. After 22 years in military service, becoming a writer has proved fulfilling as his novels continue to be ever interesting and far-reaching to his loyal readers.

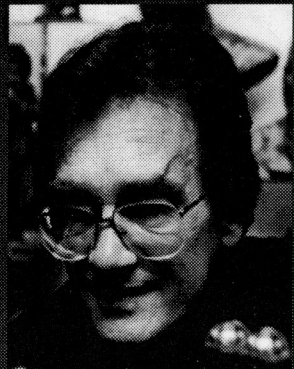
## PUBLISHER TOM DOHERTY

Creating TOR Books in 1980 after being a sales manager for Simon & Schuster, **Tom Doherty** has propelled this upstart publishing house to national success with a combination of sales savvy and distribution expertise. Within five years of operation, TOR Publishing racked up profit margins in the teens — unprecedented in an industry which is lucky if it is able to capture single-digit growth. In addition to his “invincible eloquence”, Doherty has a Nebula Award to his name as well as the admiration and loyalty of his authors and colleagues.



## ARTIST BERNIE WRIGHTSON

An artist with no formal training aside the Famous Artist Correspondence Course, horror illustrator **Bernie Wrightson** began his career cartooning for the editorial page of the *Baltimore Sun* before moving on to DC Comics in 1968, where he co-created *Swamp Thing*. Wrightson's many credits include: creator of Captain Sternn for *Heavy Metal Magazine*; illustrations for Stephen King's *Frankenstein* and *Cycle of the Werewolf*; and conceptual work for *Ghostbusters*, *Batman*, and *Aliens*.





### ... AND TOASTMASTER JOHN STEAKLEY

**John Steakley**, who originally began his lot in life as a race car driver in Texas, quickly moved up the ladder of horror success with a take-off of *Night of the Living Dead* called *Scary Texas Movie*. His life is a "spin cycle" of sports and cinema creativity. He is currently working on the upcoming horror thriller *Vampire\$*.

### COMMITTEE

Co-Chair/Correspondence: Doreen Webbert

Co-Chair/Memberships: Jean Goddin

Treasurer/Online Liaison: Mike Willmoth

Hotel Liaison: Jim Webbert

Autographings: Cynthia Webbert

Guest Liaison: Lowell Larson

Historian: Jim Cryer

HWA Liaison: Adam Niswander

Operations: Wendy Webbert

Progress Reports: Pat Connors

Registration: Irv Holt

Video/Animation Room: Tom Perry

Webmaster: Zack Webbert

Art Show: John Theisen

Dealers Room: David Hiatt

Hospitality Suite: Liz Hanson

Logistics: Ethan Moe

Programming: Shane and Laurie Shellenbarger

Publicity: Tom Tuerff

Convention Book: Charles Seiverd

Security: Captain Morgan

Procurement: Barry Bard



# World Horror Convention

## Tentative Schedule

### THURSDAY

\*Indicates Moderator

**3:00 PM** • NY, NY: *A Hell of a Town* Using Regional Flavor to Enhance Writing Randy Fox\*, Steve Tem, Michael Marano, Melissa Ann Singer, James Moore, Tina Jens • *What Frightens the Frighteners? What Frightens Horror Pros?* Alan Clark\*, Newton Streeter, Cindie Geddes, Adrian Bourne, John Steakley, Ed Bryant **4:30 PM** • *On the Chopping Block: Horror Editing* Ed Bryant\*, Daryl Mallett • *Sacrificing your First Born: Getting Your First Novel Published* James Moore\*, Michael Marano, Jo Fletcher • *Side Show Double-Reading with Lucy Taylor & John Pelan* (60 MIN) **5:30 PM** • *Lorelei Shannon Reading* (30 MIN) **6:00 PM** • *Incredible Shrinking Press: Supporting Small Press Publishers* Paula Guran\*, Margaret Baliff Simon, Gary Jonas, Stephen Jones, John Pelan, Lisa Jean Bothell, P.D. Cacek, David Barnett • *From Lovecraft to Lawnmower Man: Supernatural vs. Technohorror* Tina Jens\*, James Moore, June Hubbard, John Davis **7:00 PM** • *Opening Ceremonies* **8:00 PM** • *Turnabout Is Fair Play: Crossing Genre Lines* Melanie Tem\*, M. Christian, James Moore, Jo Fletcher, June Hubbard **8:30 PM** • *Frights on the Tube: Horror On Television* Newton Streeter\*, Julie McGalliard, Ed Bryant, Cindie Geddes, Don Kinney, Gary Jonas **9:30PM** • *My Name Is Steven and I am a Writer: A Twelve Step Program for Kicking the Writing Habit* M. Christian\*, Daryl Mallett • *Digging Up Details: Using Forensic Sources* Gary Jonas\*, June Hubbard, Joel Ross **11:00PM** • *Hardcore Horror*, David Barnett\*

### FRIDAY

**10:00 AM** • *Unicorns vs. Dracula: How Different is Fantasy from Horror?* Julie McGalliard\*, James Moore, Margaret Baliff Simon, Darryl Mallett • *Alan Clark Slide Show* • *Michael Marano Reading* (60 MIN) **11:00 AM** • *Yvonne Navarro* (30 MIN) **11:30 AM** • *Optioning the Oracle: Predicting What Publishers Want* Melissa Ann Singer\*, Ed Kramer • *Conspiracies in the Crypt: Pros Talk Shop* Ellen Datlow\*, Lisa Jean Bothell • *James Moore Reading* (30 MIN) **NOON** • *Eros Ex Machina: Readings from the anthology* M. Christian, Nancy Kilpatrick, Paula Guran, Gerard Houarner, Stephen Mark Rainey, Marc Levinthal, and Lucy Taylor **1:00 PM** • *Twisted Mosaic: Horror Anthologies* Stephen Jones, Pam Keeseey, Trey Barker, Ed Kramer\*, Ellen Datlow, Nancy Kilpatrick • *HWA Writers Workshop* (By submission only: 1:00-4:00 PM) **2:30 PM** • *Brian Lumley Interviewed Adam Niswander* • *Enough About Me: Self-Promotion in the Horror Genre* Trey Barker\*, Yvonne Navarro, Mandy Slater, John Platte **4:00 PM** • *Bernie Wrightson Speaks* • *Two in the Shadows: Horror Collaborations* P.D. Cacek\*, John Pelan, Alan Clark, Trey Barker, Edward Lee, James Moore • **5:30 PM** • *The Truth About Lies: Writing Non-Fiction about Horror*, Paula Guran\*, Stephen Jones, Pam Keeseey, Daryl Mallett • *Using the Dark Prism: Making Use of Your Own Fears and Traumas*, Melanie Tem\*, Cindie Geddes, James Moore, Lorelei Shannon, Tina Jens, Adrian Bourne • *Brian Lumley Reading* (30 MIN) **6:00 PM** • *Robert Devereaux Reading* (60 MIN) **7:00 PM** • *Artists Reception* (wine & cheese) • *It was Dug Up From the Slush Pile*: Lisa Jean Bothell\*, M. Christian, P.D. Cacek, Cindie Geddes, Melissa Ann Singer, Daryl Mallett • *Necro Publications Reading* (90 MIN) Edward Lee, John Pelan, Tom Piccirilli **8:30 PM** • *What Frightens the Frighteners: What Frightens Horror Pros* Lisa Jean Bothell\*, Brian Lumley, Yvonne Navarro, James Moore, Lorelei Shannon, Tina Jens • *"I want to thank all the little people": Are Awards Honest Recognition?* Trey Barker\*, Stephen Jones, Gordon Van Gelder **9:00 PM** • *Nancy Kilpatrick Reading* (30 MIN) **10:00 PM** • *A pound of flesh: Discussing the Business of Horror* David Barnett, Ellen Datlow, Nancy Kilpatrick, Michael Marano • *The Crow: Shattered Lives and Broken Dreams: Multimedia Presentation of the Horror Anthology based upon the Mythos of James O'Barr* Ed Kramer\*, John Shirley and others • *Newton Streeter Reading* (30 MIN) **10:30 PM** • *June Hubbard Reading* (60 MIN) **11:30 PM** • *Beyond the Bounds: What Line Won't You Cross in Your Work* John Steakley\*, John Pelan, Adrian Bourne • *Hell Hath No Fury: When Women Write Horror* Julie McGalliard\*, Paula Guran, Nancy Kilpatrick.



**SATURDAY**

**10:00 AM** • *In It for the long haul: Writing Horror Novels*. Newton Streeter\*, Yvonne Navarro, Michael Marano, Melanie Tem, Richard Laymon, Cindie Geddes, Gary Jonas. • *Drawing on the Dark Side: The Art of Horror Illustration*. Margaret Baliff Simon\*, Alan Clark, Adrian Bourne, James Moore. • *Sephera Giron Reading* (30 MIN) **10:30 AM** • *Trey Barker Reading* (30 MIN) **11:00 AM** • *Adam Niswander Reading* (30 Min) **11:30 AM** • *HWA Auction* • *Can Scary Be Funny?: Humor and Horror* Lorelei Shannon\*, Alan Clark, Randy Fox, John Steakley, Richard Laymon, John Platt • *Melanie Tem Reading* (60 MIN) **12:30 PM** • *John Shirley Reading* (30 MIN) **1:00 PM** • *Tom Doherty Interviewed by Adam Niswander* **1:00 PM** • *Wielding the Web: Using the Web to Promote Horror* Mandy Slater\*, Paula Guran, John Davis • *HWA Writers Workshop* (By Submission Only, 1:00-4:00 PM) **2:30 PM** • *Imagination Fully Dilated: The New Anthology Based on Alan Clark's Art* Alan Clark\*, John Pelan, Yvonne Navarro, Robert Devereaux, Randy Fox, Melanie Tem, Steve Tem, Edward Lee, Denise M. Bruchman, John Davis • *Rated NC-17: Eroticism in Horror*. M. Christian\*, Paula Guran, P.D. Cacek, John Steakley, Michael Marano, Nancy Kilpatrick, Lorelei Shannon **4:00 PM** • *Is Vlad a Fad?: Will the Vampire Phase Fade?* Melissa Ann Singer\*, Nancy Kilpatrick, Pam Keeseey, Julie McGalliard, James Moore, Yvonne Navarro • *Think Fast: Writing Short Horror* P.D. Cacek\*, Mandy Slater, Newton Streeter, Cindie Geddes, Melanie Tem, Steve Ten • *Tina Jens Reading* (30 MIN) **4:30 PM** • *Gary Jonas Reading* (30 MIN) **5:00 PM** • *Cindie Geddes Reading* (30 MIN) **5:30 PM** • *Bernie Wrightson Slide Show* • *Quit Cloning Around: Making Your Writing Original* Robert Devereaux\*, Gary Jonas, Gordon Van Gelder • *M. Christian Reading* (30 MIN) **6:00 PM** • *Ed Bryant Reading* (60 MIN) **7:00 PM** *Mass Autographing Party: Everyone is invited* **8:30 PM** • *The Trey Barker Radio Show: A Presentation of A Brian Lumley Story* Trey Barker and Friends • *Int'l. Horror Guild Awards* Ed Kramer\*, Nancy Collins, Paula Guran • *Art Appreciation with June Hubbard* (60 MIN) **10:00 PM** • *Dropping the Axe: Horror and Censorship* James Moore\*, David Barnett • *Belly Dancing for Night Owls* Julie McGalliard • *Brian Lumley Reading* (60 MIN) **11:30 PM** • *Yuck, That's Gross!: A contest in which writers do a two-minute reading of their most visceral scenes* John Pelan\* and Edward Lee\*, judges • *S and M: Facts and Fictions* M. Christian\*, Paula Guran.

**SUNDAY**

**10:00 AM** • *Turning a Deaf Ear: Horror and Music* Randy Fox\*, John Shirley, Intro by Brian Lumley  
**11:00 AM** • *WHC Art Auction* **11:30 AM** • *I've Got it: A Cyclops with 2 Eyes! Mining Old Myths for New Monsters* Nancy Kilpatrick\*, M. Christian, James Moore, John Davis **NOON** • *Closing Ceremonies* **1:00 PM** • *It's not just playing with dolls: Voodoo and the Occult* Nancy Kilpatrick\*, Pam Keeseey, Sephera Giron, June Hubbard, Joel Ross • *David vs. Goliath: Small Press and Big Publishers* Melissa Ann Singer\*, Gary Jonas, Daryl Mallett.

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## Kingdom Come, Kingdom Go Fiction by Lorelei Shannon

Well, Billy James, the whole thing started about four months ago. Earl and me had just read in the paper how—are you sittin' comfortably, Billy James? That's good, we take pride in our hospitality. Anyhow, we was sittin' at the breakfast table, and Earl had just finished his salt pork and eggs, when he spits coffee all over the newspaper. I says, "Earl, what on earth has possessed you to do such a disgustin' thing. And on a Sunday, too!" And he just looks at me with these grim eyes, and holds up the newspaper.

There it was, just as big as life and twice as ugly. Jerry Sparkle, our most favorite Elvis imitator in the whole wide world, had got hisself murdered. Oh, it was a shocking thing. They found him split open like a spring lamb. His insides was out, and outsidies was in none too pretty shape neither. It was purely horrible.

Needless to say, we was both heartbroken. We barely had the get up to drive ourselves here, but somehow we managed. Billy James, you know the Elvis Is Our King Boutique is our very lives. But we barely managed to open up this place of beauty on that terrible morning. We was both slumped behind the counter, limp as chickens on a hot day. We put on the King's Moody Blue record, on account of us bein' so blue ourselves. Also, we thought it was kinda respectful.

When Millie June come in to see if we'd gotten in her Hound Dog salt-and-pepper shakers yet—oh, they're so cute, Billy James, they got little bouffant hairdos just like the King himself! Anyhow, she come in to see, and normally we woulda been thrilled to death. We woulda put Hound Dog on the record machine and hidden them shakers under one of these official Elvis wigs for her to find, like an Easter egg hunt. But we was so dejected that we just plopped 'em on the counter like they was hamburger patties.

Millie June knew right off there was something wrong. Earl just looked at her with those big, sad eyes of his, and held up the newspaper. Well, she started a-squeakin' and a-gaspin'. We had to give her smellin' salts and a belt a' Southern Comfort.

When she could breathe, Millie June started cryin'. "Oh Earl, oh Effie," she was moanin'. "It's terrible. Just terrible. A cryin' shame." And cryin' she was. It was a regular flood. It got me and Earl goin' all over again, there we was, all wailin' away and clutchin' that soggy newspaper to our bosoms.

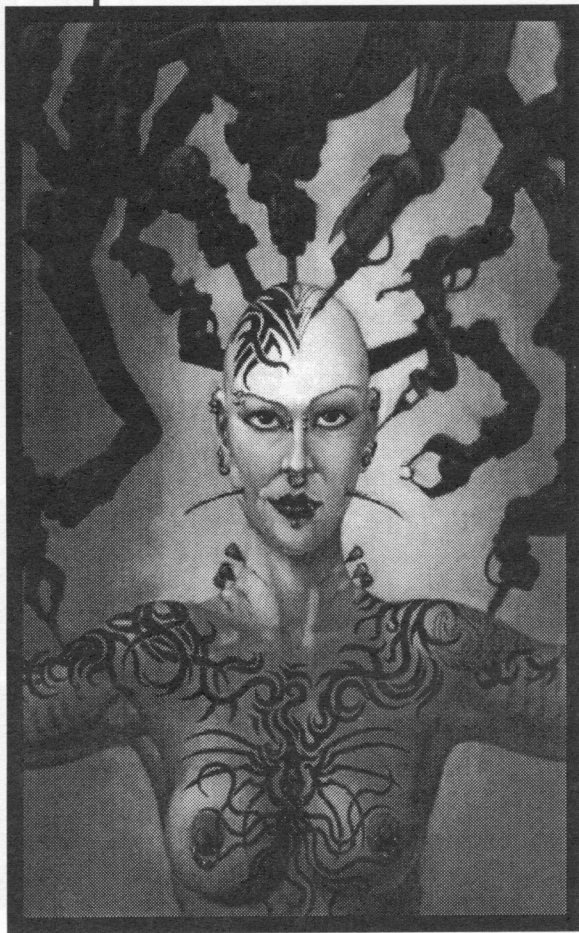
Right about then, Millie June gave a big snort. "And to think," she says, "That I had come here not only for my Hound Dog salt-and-pepper shakers, but to tell you that Bob Aaron King is comin' to the Celebrity Theatre this Friday."

"Bob Aaron King!" We both hollered. Now, I know he wasn't nigh as good as Jerry Sparkle, but he was a pretty fair Elvis imitator anyhow. That cheered us up a bit.

But all of a sudden, Earl got this terrible scowl on his face. "Mille June," he says, "How come we didn't hear about this before? This is awful sudden notice."

Well, Mille June looked all perplexed. Pretty soon, she comes out with, "I don't rightly know, Earl. They just announced it today, all sudden-like."

Now, Billy James, you know Earl is a mighty smart feller. So he gets that look like he gets when he's





thinkin' real hard. You know, with his forehead all scrunched up, and makin' those little grunts and all. Me and Millie June just sat back and watched, respectful-like.

After awhile, Earl says, "Maybe...maybe, someone's been killin' other Elvis imitators, you know, in the Big City. Maybe Bob Aaron King was afraid to publicize hisself."

Me and Millie gasped, all horrified, but to tell you the truth, we shouldn'ta been surprised. All sorts of things happen in the Big City. Phoenix is a terrible place, Billy James. Anyhow, we don't hear much about what goes on there, 'cause we only get the Tuba City Star, not any fancy papers like the Mesa Tribune.

So, we all thought about it real good, but we decided to go see Bob Aaron King anyway. Us and Millie June said our goodbyes, and Earl and me went back to tendin' the shop and mournin'.

The next day we wasn't near over the shock, but Earl decided to do some detective snoopin'. He drove across town to his cousin Freddy Jack's house, and spent the whole day lookin' through his back issues of the Phoenix Gazette. That meant I had to watch the Boutique myself, but I didn't really mind. Besides, I was expectin' a shipment of official Elvis towels, monogrammed with E. A. P. and scented like the King's own sweat. I was pretty excited.

By the end of the day, though, I had gotten pretty cranky. My shipment didn't come, and Earl was late. He finally walked through the door, and I was about to scold him somethin' fierce, but then I saw the look on his face. I was stopped short like a pole-axed puma.

"I was right," he says, his eyes all wild and bulgy like Billy Graham's. "I was right. There has been two other Elvises killed. Butchered like pigs, Effie."

Well, I darn near fainted. It seemed that one Elvis was found dead in the back room of the Velvet Pelvis lounge right after his act, and the other was spread all over the back seat of his pink '58 Cadillac. All me and Earl could do was sit and shake our heads awhile. We had always planned to go to the Velvet Pelvis someday, and now our dream was soiled.

The followin' week was like a wakin' nightmare. The joy seemed to have gone out of our lives. When them Elvis towels finally showed up, it was all we could do to crack a smile. I had been stitchin' on the hand of my lifesize Elvis soft sculpture, but my sewin' machine was silent that week. Billy James, you know I been workin' on that sculpture for the past seven years. It will be my masterpiece, and my immortality when I'm nothin' but dust. But I couldn't bear to work on it. It was so limp and still, it made



© Allen Koszowski



me think of Jerry Sparkle and all them other poor devils. I took to eatin' moon pies instead.

Then Friday rolled around, and we started to feel a mite better. We was carpoolin' with Millie June to Phoenix, on account of she's got a big old Nash Rambler and all we got is our Elvis Memorial Pickup. We closed up the shop early, went to Piggly Wiggly for Yoo Hoo and beef jerky, and hit the open road.

We wasn't the first ones in line, but pretty near. We got glorious seats. You know what they say, about every seat bein' a good one at the Celebrity Theatre on account of the stage rotating, but let me tell you, some seats are better than others. We was right up front.

Bob Aaron King's show was just beautiful. If you squinted a little, he looked so much like Elvis it made you wanna cry. While he was singin' "In the Ghetto," he kept gettin' closer and closer to me and Mille June. And then — oh, Billy James, I can barely say it 'cause my breath is comin' so quick— and then, durin' "Love Me Tender," he came right up to us. He blew Mille June a kiss, but he put his scarf around my neck and sang right in my face. I nearly died of pleasure.

Earl was a mite jealous, but he tried not to show it. "I don't blame you", he told me. "What woman in her right mind could resist him." Darn right, says I.

Anyhow, after the show was over, me and Millie June dried our tears and prepared ourselves for the long ride home. All of a sudden, Mille June gets this wild look in her eye. "Effie," she says, "Let's see if we can get backstage for a peek at Bobbie."

I thought it was a tad silly, women of our age and social position sneakin' backstage like a couple a' bobby soxers. But Earl thought it was a fine idea, because he was determined to see if Bob Aaron King's chest hair was real or not. To tell you the truth, Billy James, I think he was a bit envious.

So sneak we did. It wasn't terribly hard. The bouncers was all in the bar out front, gogglin' at that strumpet Madonna struttin' around the TV in her grandma's underwear.

Bobbie had a star on his dressing room, just like in Hollywood. My heart was poundin' somethin' fierce. We knocked, quiet as mice. "Mr. King?" Millie June called. "Bobbie, honey, are you in there?" But there was no answer at all.

After knockin' awhile longer, Earl gets this cross look on his face and says, "That fella thinks he's just too good for the likes of us. I got nothin' to say to him." and he turns to leave. But Mille June's havin' none of it.

"Maybe he's just not there yet," she says, her eyes gleamin' like a weasel in the chicken house. "Let's just go on in and wait for him."

Well, I thought that was a dandy idea. Earl just snorted. Together, me and Millie June opened the door.

I will never forget what I saw there that night. Bob Aaron King was lyin' on his back in the middle of the floor. His chest hair was unglued and throwed up over his face, and he was cut open like a catfish. There was innards everywhere. You could hardly see an inch of white on his rhinestone jumpsuit for all the blood.

Earl was busy throwin' up his Yoo Hoo and beef jerky, and Mille June was leanin' up against the wall a-wheezin', and her eyes bulgin' like Blanche Jeter's poodle. That's when I noticed it.

Bob Aaron King's Elvis wig was gone.

Suddenly, in the corner of the room, I seen one of the shadows start to move.

Needless to say, we hightailed it out of there like the devil hisself was behind us. I had to drive, 'cause Earl kept throwin' up and Mille June was purely useless. Now, I know you're pry thinkin' we should have called the police or somethin', Billy James. But you gotta understand, we was in shock.

On that long stretch back to Tuba, I did some thinkin'. I wondered if all the other Elvises had their wigs stole too, and I wondered why the papers hadn't said nothin' about that. I reckon it was just too terrible to mention. I had trouble thinkin' clearly though, 'cause of all the retchin' and wailin' and what-not. Pretty soon I just gave up. It was an awful trip home.

It was awful late when we got back, but Millie June just wouldn't leave. She was scairt clean out of



her wits. She wouldn't let neither of us out of her sight. Earl started to run down the hall, and she was on him like a duck on a June bug 'til he 'splained to her that he had to go upchuck again. I couldn't imagine him havin' anything left in his stomach, but he clearly did.

Well, the upshot of it all was that Millie June spent the whole weekend with us, which was kinda horrible, 'cause she snores and is prone to havin' wind. But we all lived through it, and like they say, life goes on.

We put our minds to forgettin' what we saw, although Earl went to Freddy Jack's house and cut the article out of the paper when it come out. He kept it under the drawer of the cash register, for some unknown reason.

Days went by, and then weeks. Our life was not the same as it was. How could it be, after a thing like that? But we survived, and so did the Elvis is Our King Boutique.

The day finally came. Elvis Aaron Presley's birthday. Of course, we always keep the Boutique open 'til midnight on that wonderful day, 'cause folks around here get sentimental. Just think about it, Billy James. You're sittin' up late, watchin' a tribute to

the King and drinkin' mint julips in his honor, when suddenly a powerful need comes over you. We sell more Gyrating Elvis dolls on that night than we do durin' the whole rest of the year.

Well, it come to our attention that the Tuba City Chamber of Commerce was givin' a We Love Elvis parade that night, complete with a float shaped like Graceland and a young Elvis imitator named Jamie Sequin. At first we was kinda sad that we'd miss it, 'cause of course we'd never dream of leavin' our posts at the Boutique. We have a duty to this town, Billy James. Then we got to thinkin' about the last Elvis imitator we saw, and suddenly we was just as glad to stay in. I know it's a blasphemy, but we couldn't wait 'til that night was over.

Oh, we did well. We was busy most of the day, and the whole of the evening. We made enough money for a week's vacation in Tucson, but to tell you the truth, all we could think about was goin' home and goin' to bed.

I just finished totalin' the day's receipts, and Earl finished puttin' the watch tarantulas in the windows, so he switched off the lights.

Just then we heard this Godawful, unearthly sound comin' down the street toward us. It sounded like a cross between a police siren and a cat in heat. I shrieked and called for Earl, and he ran to my side. We threwed our arms around each other and waited, our eyes bulgin' in fear.

It was Millie June. She come runnin' in the Boutique, wailin' like a fire engine. Her hair was stickin' out every whichaway, and her eyes were wild as a colt's in spring.

"He's daid!" she shrieked. "They kilt him! Oh, he's daid, he's daid." When Millie June gets upset, her West Virginia accent gets real strong. I usually correct her real polite, remindin' her that she sounds like a peckerwood. But I was so taken aback that I just gaped at her.

"Didn't you hear me?" she bellered. "Jamie Sequin is daid. He's murdered, Effie! Poor, poor little feller. Some evil thing pulled him into the Graceland float and popped him like a tick."

Suddenly, she went all stiff, and started a-groanin' and a-droolin'. "He's coooming," she moaned. "He's almost heeere!" and then she turned tail and run out into the night.

I nearly collapsed of nerves. Earl began cussin' and rummagin' under the counter for Grandpa Juke's old shotgun. We didn't know who it was Millie June was talkin' about, but we didn't aim to find out.

It was too late.

An unnatural cold wind blowed in through the door, knockin' over the rack of Baby Elvis postcards. And all of a sudden, there was a dark figure standin' by the King Koffee Kups.

*"Didn't you hear me?" she bellered. "Jamie Sequin is daid. He's murdered, Effie!"*



I started squeakin' like a rabbit, and Earl froze like a jacklighted deer. The figure laughed, low and mean. He jingled the Elvis Head medallions, and then started toward us.

It was the King. He was beautiful, Billy James, beautiful and terrible. He was young and skinny, wearin' a black leather motorcycle jacket and tight bluejeans. His chest was bare 'cept for a silver necklace shaped like a skull.

Then I saw his hands, and I nearly got the vapors. They was all bloody, and the arms of his jacket too. He was wearin' this big wide belt with a Harley Davidson buckle, and hung all around it was Elvis wigs of all shapes and sizes. I like to died. He had that sneer on his face, and he swaggered as he walked at us.

He come right up and put his bloody hands on the counter. "Hi," he says.

"Hi," says me and Earl, grinnin' like dogs caught grazin' in the stable. We darn near wet our Levi's.

"I'm pleased to make your acquaintance," says the King, like a perfect Southern gentleman. His voice was sweet as summer magnolias, and he smiled that little-boy smile that always broke my heart.

Well, then he slicks back the sides of his D. A., and looks right at me and grins. It occurred to me that he just greased his hair with blood, but I wasn't about to say nothin. I just grinned like a fool my own self. "I'm always delighted to meet those folks who've kept the faith," he says. "I'm truly grateful to y'all."

"Thank you," I says back in a tiny voice. Earl was just standin there, eyes as big as pie tins.

"You folks are my immortality," he says. "My high priests and priestesses." He wipes his hands up and down the thighs of his jeans, real slow and sexy-like. There was red streaks when he got done.

"I know you love me," says the King. "But sometimes love isn't enough." His grin got wider and wider, 'til I thought it would wrap around his head. "What do you know about theology?" he asks.

Billy James, to be perfectly honest, he just about lost me there. I'll do my best to recall what he said, but it was pretty odd, and you know me. I ain't the brightest light in the outhouse.

Well anyhow, he asks me this question. "Not much," says I. I could barely get them words out of my mouth.

"Let me teach you," says Elvis. He swaggers right to the middle of the Boutique, then spins around like he was startin' a performance. I could just about see the guitar in his hands.

"The birth of a religion," he says, "is a mighty strange thing. Catholicism meets the Cult of Damballah, and boom! Instant voodoo." I squinted, tryin' to understand him. He was standin' perfectly still, starin' right at me and Earl. I thought I would either melt or burn to ashes under the weight a' them eyes. "Do you know the name Kuan Yin?"

he asks all of a sudden.

We both stood there a sec, and then Earl says, real timid, "Ain't he the feller who works nights at Kwiki Mart?"

The King don't even bother to look at him. He just kinda chuckles, and says "Kuan Yin is a Chinese goddess. She's the protector of mothers and children. Isn't that sweet, Effie?"

I nearly threw a piston when he said my name. "Awful sweet," I says, all meek.

So he scratches his chest and says, "She didn't start out that way, Effie. Kuan Yin was a man, who lived a long, long time ago. Then he died, and he became a god. Over time, the stories changed, and then he was a goddess."

I didn't know what the hell he was talkin' about.

He just kept on. "The ancient Egyptians had more gods than Graceland has lawyers. One of them was named Horus. He was a pretty important fella. He started out bein' the god of the sky, then he was the god of wisdom. He kept changin', and eventually, he was seven different gods at the same time."

Earl's face was all screwed up, and I heard them little grunts, so I knew he was tryin' his darndest to take it all in. I was feelin' pretty stupid. But then the King smiles at me, as if to say, "You can do it, Effie!" And you know what, Billy James? I started feelin' like I could.

*... That poster suddenly burst into flames, and so did Elvis himself. Then, just like that, he was gone.*



Elvis nodded at me, grinnin'. "Ever hear the name Kali?" he says.

I smiled back. "Bud Rollins has a collie dog," I says.

"I don't mean Lassie, woman!" he bellered, in a voice like summer thunder. Chills went up and down my spine.

But he never stopped smilin'. "Not collie," he says. "Kali. The Hindu death goddess. At one time, that was the most feared name in all India. A whole tribe called the Thuggs worshipped her, and so did a lot of other folks besides."

The King stepped into the shadows, so he was just a big black shape. His voice sounded like it was right by my ear when he started speakin' again.

"They sacrificed people to her out in the desert. They'd dig the graves first, then go out and find somebody." I could hear Elvis breathin'. "They'd end up with their throat cut ear to ear."

There was this big long pause. I was shakin' like a chihuahua. Earl had stopped his gruntin' and was whindelin' under his breath instead. Finally, the King spoke. "No one's scared of her anymore," he says. "Heck, she even showed up in a Beatle movie, back when Johnny was still mortal. Gods change, Effie. But they don't always go from fierce to funny. Sometimes it happens in just the opposite fashion."

He was suddenly right in front of me. He pointed at the jumbo-sized poster of himself on the powder room door. It was the one I used to like so well, with Elvis in his white karate suit and sweat all over his sideburns.

The King had this big old sneer on his face.

"That," he says, "Is dead. I left it on the toilet at Graceland." He reached out and touched my face, Billy James. His skin was hot as fire. "That's dead," he said. "But I will never die."

That poster suddenly burst into flames, and so did Elvis himself. Then, just like that, he was gone. Vanished like a sucklin' pig at Easter. There was nothin' left of the poster but ashes. As they floated to the floor, real easy-like, I realized I understood everything he said.

It took Earl a mite longer, but he got it after a fashion.

Billy James, when I saw your show at the Golden Oldies Saloon, the buttons near to popped off my shirt with pride. My very own nephew, up there on the stage singin' "Teddy Bear." I do love you, boy. I hope you understand this is for the best.

Fetch the meat cleaver, Earl.



The gargadillo

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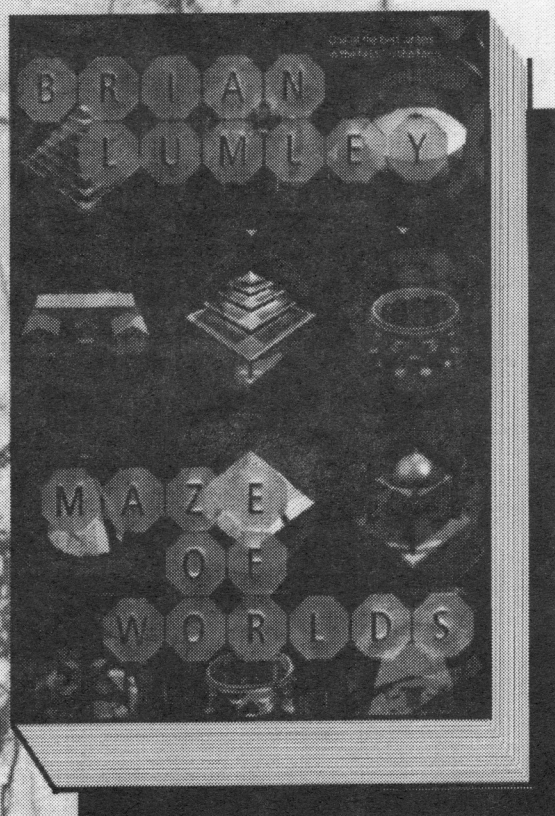
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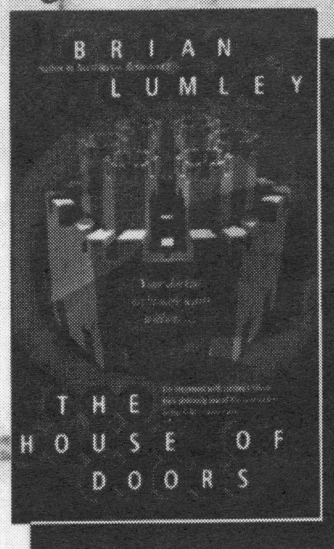


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# BURDEN OF GUILT

*Fiction by James A. Moore*

I've been sitting in this chair for over three hours, holding a .357 Magnum loaded with hollow point bullets. I just don't know if I have the guts to go through with killing myself. I have to confess, I've always been a coward at heart. It's not dying that would bother me, it's the idea of what would be left if I screwed up and lived through the bullet in the brain.

Until last month the idea of suicide never crossed my mind, until last month I was as normal as anyone else. If "normal" is the right word, I can't honestly say that it is.

Last month is when my whole world blew up in my face. If this is to be my suicide note, I suppose I should at least leave an explanation. What would be the point if I couldn't at least explain myself? There might even be a few people out there that would care.

I don't know exactly what caused my change in perception: Perhaps it was God's decision, perhaps I could always see things differently and simply chose not to. In either case, the day had started normally enough. Off to work, off to the great nine to five wage machine and please, God, let there be fresh coffee. I entered the offices of Hinkle and Dowd Attorneys at Law at 8:37 AM, early as usual, allowing me to unwind from the traffic before diving into the latest case load. By the way, I'm Harold R. Dowd, just in case there isn't enough of my face left for dental identification.

When I got to the office that morning, everything was as it should be, quiet. I set up the Mr. Coffee, unrolled my dew-damp newspaper and perched at my desk, waiting for the day to begin Hinkle and Dowd is a small firm, but we've done well as defense attorneys, made a solid number of connections and fairly rolled in money since we started. Hinkle's a good defense attorney. I'm fucking fabulous. Only lost one case, and there was no chance to win that one; they had the bastard on video tape holding up the store, had him shooting the woman in the head on tape too. I got him out in one piece, "Not guilty by reason of insanity." Let me tell you, that was the greatest plea ever designed for a defense attorney who hates to lose. It's harder to get the old "By reason of insanity" these days, but like I said, I'm damn good.

When you consider that the prosecutor was going for LWOP—Life without chance of parole—I think I did a damn fine job. My client didn't complain, and his daddy had enough money to pay my bills, so I didn't complain either. But I'm rambling, back to my main point.

It was just another day, just as ordinary as the day before and the day before that. But when Kelly came in, I damn near dropped my jaw. Kelly's a real pretty little thing, and you can tell when you see her that she knows it and she works at it. She has dark green eyes, light red hair, and a body that belongs on a stripper, not a receptionist. I probably would have asked her out myself, but her body building partner and boy friend would have been likely to object. I'm rather fond of my face where it is—attached to my skull. Kelly's boyfriend worked as a bouncer at one of the biker bars off of Highway 41. He knew how to hurt people.

I looked over at Kelly as she called out her morning greeting, ready to smile and say hello, but what I saw stopped me in my tracks. I had a brief flash in my mind, superimposed over the pretty girl before me, of Kelly dressed in a hooker's outfit—tight mini-skirt, fishnet stockings, the whole nine yards—her boyfriend in front of her, bashing some poor bastard's face into the brick wall of the alley they were all in. Kelly's boyfriend looked angry, the guy in his hands looked very bloody. Kelly was smiling, and I swear she was getting off on this poor jerk's facial rearrangement.

My shock must have been obvious on my face, Kelly ran over on her high heels and immediately touched me lightly, obviously concerned. "Are you okay, Harry? You look a little pale..."

I shook myself out of the stupid expression on my face and forced a smile back onto my features. "Yeah, I'm fine. Just stunned by how good you look today." I know it must have sounded like a come-on, but it was all I could think of to say. To her credit, Kelly blushed sweetly. I wished her a good morning and went back to reading my newspaper.

I thought of Kelly blushing, I thought of the stranger with Kelly's face, the one that smiled as her boyfriend smashed another man's face into hamburger. I ignored the image my mind had produced. It had to be a lie. Kelly was a sweet girl, if a little narcissistic from time to time.

Don't misunderstand me, the image was exceedingly vivid, loaded with details, but there was no way that sweet little Kelly could have been in on anything like that and certainly not with a smile on her face. I wouldn't have put it past her boyfriend, but not Kelly, no way. Then Mike walked in.

Mike Hinkle was and is a certified bastard. He is, in fact, proud to admit as much to anyone who will

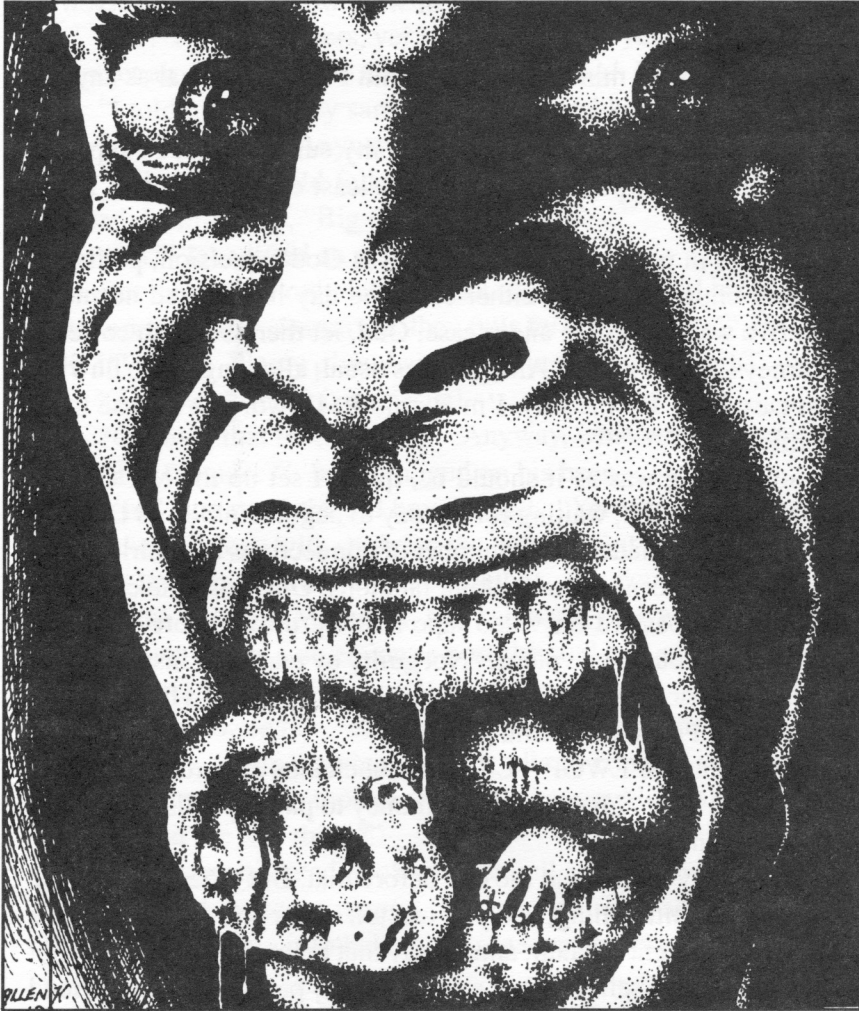
listen. Oh, he's nice enough as long as he has no reason to be rude, but if you get on his bad side, he'll tear you apart. Verbally, of course. Mike would never stoop to physical violence unless there was no other option. Mike came into the office the same way he always does, with a thousand-watt smile glued in place and a designer suit that was perfectly pressed. Mike had ambitions politically, and he certainly never turned off the charm when he was in the office. Habitually, Mike would come over to my desk, turn up the power on that smile and shake my hand vigorously. Habitually, I returned the favor. It was almost like a way of making sure that both of us were up to meeting with any new clients.

Mike blazed over to the desk and grabbed my hand, pumping vigorously: And I was in his house, in his body, feeling his burning hatred with him as he knocked his wife into the wall and shot his fist into her stomach. I felt the satisfaction of her pleas for mercy cut short, I grinned eagerly as my foot connected with her ribs while she was lying on the ground. I made sure not to kick her too hard, because broken ribs had to be explained.

I tasted the bourbon on my tongue and I was made angrier still by the thought of her harping at me again about my drinking. The fucking bitch, who the hell did she think she was to tell ME how to live my life!?! Just to show her who was boss, I pulled the belt loose from my pants and wrapped its length once around my hand. The grip had to be solid if I was going to teach her to mind her mouth once and for all. I just had to remember my own strength, not like with Anna Johnson, back in the good ol' days of high-school. No more bodies to hide, not ever.

Nothing on this earth could have prepared me for the assault on my senses. My hand flew away from his as if I had just discovered he was made of thinly disguised dog shit. Mike continued to smile, but the wattage was lowered substantially. His voice was soft, like a purr. "Was it something I said, Harry?"

"Hunh? Oh, no. Sorry." I ad libbed fast. "Just a cramp in my hand. Knowing it was his type of joke, I made certain Kelly wasn't looking and made gestures as if I were masturbating, adding a slow wink so he would see that I was just fine, but thanks for asking. "Little too much time with Rosy Palmer, if you know what I mean." To add gravity to my statement, I started massaging my right hand with my left, adding just a small grimace of pain to my smile. Like I said, I'm a damn good lawyer, and in my business half of being a





lawyer is acting for the jury.

Mike threw his head back and laughed uproariously. Kelly peeked around the corner, but when neither Mike nor I offered any explanation she went back to her typing. Mike slapped me lightly on the

*His mind was a vile pit, dark things crawled throughout that foul cesspool, things that existed only to cause pain.*

shoulder, suggested that maybe I should hire out. I laughed and nodded my agreement.

Ten minutes later I decided to call it a day. I had a few appointments that Mike could easily handle for me, for some reason the early part of summer has always been a slow season for us. Maybe people are too busy enjoying the nice weather to get off on killing each other. Who can say?

I thought that maybe I just needed some rest, and I decided to take life easy for the rest of the day. A little time to relax and I would be fine.

Yeah. Right.

On the way home I stopped at a convenience store. Everyone I looked at was the same way. I saw a construction worker who deliberately shattered his own foot so he could stay at home and collect medical benefits. I saw a would-be actress performing several scenes involving a couch. I saw a doctor who was writing out illegal prescriptions for a couple of hundred on the sly. I saw a store clerk who had raped his baby sister. I didn't finish my time in the store, I was afraid someone would bump up against me in line and I might experience their sins the same way I had Mike's. That was just too intimate and too frightening to consider.

I spent the rest of the week in my house, almost afraid to even call in and tell Kelly I wouldn't be there. God help me, what if it started happening through the phone? For the briefest of times I contemplated my own sanity, or lack thereof, but my life had been almost picture perfect, I knew that I was at least mostly sane. Yes, I know how that sounds, but aside from a few wild moments in college, normally while pickled beyond the ability to think coherently, I had never been in any sort of trouble. Or if you want to get nasty about it, can you prove that you're sane?

The week was uneventful, and I proved incapable of having these little flashes while speaking on the phone. I had my calls routed from the office to my home, and handled as much of my work as I could from my living room.

The next week was destined to be different, the next week I was meeting a new client. I always handled new clients—especially those with enormous bank accounts—in person. I'm a personable sort, I actually like to meet new people.

There's an exception to every rule.

Monday morning came all too soon, and my first meeting was scheduled at nine AM sharp. I got to the offices my customary fifteen plus minutes early. I ignored the flashes I got from Kelly. The more I thought of them, the more I hated her, it was best to pretend that I didn't see them. I ignored Mike's little stomp across his wife; he was my co-worker, and if he had a drinking problem he would solve it or fall through the floor and I would buy out his part of the firm. We had never been close friends, we just worked well together.

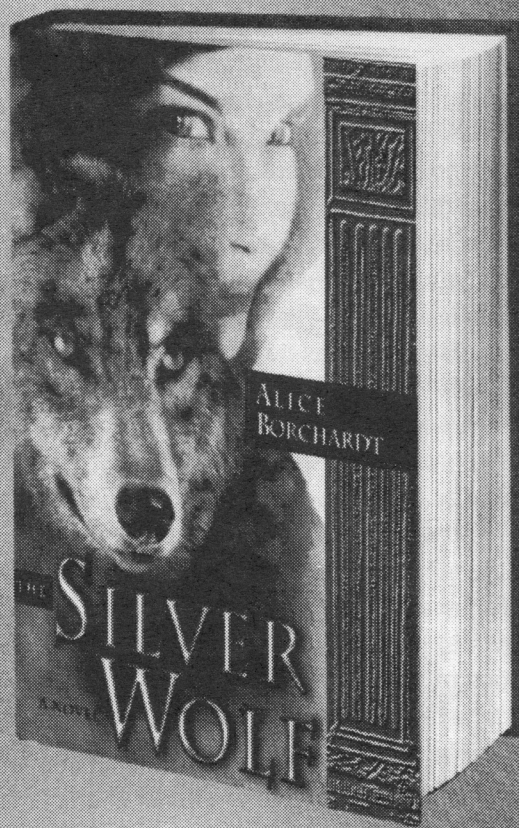
I met my client as soon as he walked through the door. Stan Greips was a tall, heavysset man who looked painfully uncomfortable in his three piece tailored suit. Despite his size, he also looked about as dangerous as a teddy bear. He smiled shyly and we shook hands. And I was in his body, feeling the same sensations as he was, the same emotions. His mind was a vile pit, dark things crawled throughout that foul cesspool, things that existed only to cause pain. I had never met a man so filled with the need to do violence. I felt his satisfaction as he cut into his neighbor with a steak knife. I felt the warm blood wash over my hands and face. I tasted the thick liquid and I shivered in nearly orgasmic delight.

I calmly smiled and returned his handshake, I was mortally afraid that to do otherwise would cause him to take his anger out on me. I then calmly lied through my teeth. "I am afraid my secretary misrepresented the facts to you, Mister Greips. Unfortunately I have several clients on retainer, and most of them can't seem to keep themselves out of trouble. I won't be able to take your case." I did my best to look apologetic. The smile left his eyes.

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Nothing on this earth would have made me defend the loathsome freak in front of me. I had seen too much in just that brief flash. I thanked God it hadn't been longer.

"I need the best defense lawyer I can get, Mister Dowd. I've been told that you are the best. I'm willing to double your normal fee."

Ouch. I wish I could tell you how hard that was to turn down. "I wish I could help you. I really do. But I'm afraid there is simply too much work on my desk at this time. If you'd like I can certainly refer you to several others who are at least as good as me, if not better."

Greips looked through me with his eyes, his face as slack and dead as the flesh off a stillborn infant. I knew in that instant that what I had sensed, the emotional void that I had felt while in contact with his skin, had been real. This man was a killer. Greips stared through me for a few more seconds, and then I felt his gaze actually lock onto me, like a finger thrust into my face. "You will regret your decision. Good day, Mister Dowd." With that he left my office, walking as calmly as when he had entered my place. I was very glad that my home number was unlisted. Very glad that all of my mail was sent to a Post Office Box.

I would have worried more about Greips, but that night I went shopping. I went to the local grocery store on my way home, list in hand and check book ready to be drawn. I guess maybe my strange senses shut down for a while, because I had no real problems while I was in there. Not for the first twenty minutes at any rate. I was finally pulling into a line, done with my shopping and glad of it, when the next flash hit.

The woman behind me in line had caused her family's home to burn down when she was four. No accident, just a passionate hatred of her little brother asleep in his crib. The baby had died. Three aisles over, a fat man had robbed the liquor store for the money to support his unique and highly illegal attraction to little boys. He'd been desperate with the need for release, he felt that he was justified in shooting the clerk in the face with a twelve gage shot gun, from a distance of seven inches.

A hundred people with a thousand crimes, everything from stealing the ball during recess when they were ten to cold-blooded rape, sodomy, and murder. Unlike before, unlike when this had happened only a few days ago at the offices, I felt it all from the beginning to the end. I felt the satisfaction mingled with self-disgust in these people. I saw what they saw, heard what they heard, touched what they touched.

*... Alfonse had been charged with running down a little girl in his neighborhood while driving his station wagon.*

My mind reeled. I vaguely remember crying out, grabbing at the counter for balance, and missing. I see the tiles that jumped for my head as I fell. Then blackness, sweet, numbing, soothing.

I woke up only a few seconds later, the lady arsonist leaning over me with concern, making certain that I was all right. I lied again. I told her I was fine.

It came and went, flashes that slipped into my mind and struck me with fists forged of molten iron. The scars only showed on the inside, I had at least that to be grateful for. It wasn't much, but it was something. For over two weeks I went through my daily routines, pretending that this client or that client was just another person, doing my best to ignore the evidence that came now not only from bodily contact, but from mere proximity.

I got most of them off with minimal fines and penalties. A few went to prison in cases where I simply could not bring myself to defend them to the best of my ability. If I'd had my way in more than a few cases, I would have seen them shot on sight.

But the worst of it all came to a head only three days ago. That's when I saw Alfonse Scarrabelli. Alfonse was a dear man, one of the first I had ever had as a client, ready to believe that I could save him even when others all but laughed at the futility of his case. Alfonse had been charged with vehicular manslaughter. Charged with running down a little girl in his neighborhood while driving his station wagon. Several witnesses claimed to have seen him.

I was young and I was hungry. I took the case. The cards stacked against Alfonse Scarrabelli were substantial, certainly enough to allow the DA to press charges. They were also a crock of shit. Alfonse was a loner, never stayed around one place for very long. He was hardly the joiner type, would do nothing if he saw

a crime, and would never have thought about joining in on any sort of community projects. It just wasn't his thing, he was an artist and had no time for that sort of nonsense. I never did either, that was Mike

Hinkle's department; he was the one running for office, dreaming of the Governorship. I could understand Alfonse, and I put a huge amount of effort into his case, scraping up the quiet witnesses who never saw a thing but a car that MIGHT have been his, or saw Alfonse walking down the street towards the bar at around the same time the accident was supposed to be happening. I also found the mechanic who was working on Alfonse Scarrabelli's car at the time of the child's death. The mechanic who had been drinking a bit too much that night. The mechanic who emphatically denied before a court of law that he had ever seen Alfonse or his station wagon before. But most importantly, I found the cash receipt book that the man had thrown away. Alfonse was acquitted in no time flat after that little tidbit surfaced.

Quite a bit of fancy footwork on my part. I was very pleased with myself for getting him out of that mess. Until I ran across him on the street. There he was, standing proudly in front of the gallery that was showing his sculptures, rocking on his heels and smiling to himself. A nicer man you could never hope to meet, so what if he was unkempt and unshaven, he was still a helluva fine man. When I called out to him he turned and looked at me for a second, uncertain as to who I was. Then his whole face lit up like a kid on Christmas morning. His beak of a nose wrinkled in delight. His short, round body, considerably heavier than the last time I'd seen him, bobbed up and down as he ran over to see me, grabbing my hand and pumping furiously. "Ehhay! Mister Dowd! My God above, it's so good to see you." His head nodded slightly in time with his hand's firm shake.

I smiled. "It's good to see you too, Alfonse, but how many times do I have to tell you to call me Harry?" It was an old routine between us, one played almost out of habit anymore. Then the world spun around me, the world disappeared, and I was assaulted by the images of what my old client had done.

1989: It was December, I felt the cold rains striking across my back, running into my leather coat as I stalked her. She had not seen me and that was good. I pulled the

hunting knife from its sheath. Jesus, I was scared. No! He was scared, this was his sin, not mine.

She screamed as the blade sliced into her back. It was his first kill, some mistakes could be expected. The next time he'd have to cut her throat first, not too deep, just enough to quiet her screams. God have mercy. Who'd have thought there could be so much blood...

1990: August. The sun is bearing down all around him as he stalks his latest prey. I felt his lips bleed as he bit down on the inside. Nerves, all nerves. He didn't want to do this anymore, but the need was so strong. I look at the girl, focus on her sun-bleached hair. So lovely, only twelve years old... I yanked my hand from his, I was vaguely aware of Alfonse reaching for me, concern on his face. I turned and ran before he could touch me. The flashes wouldn't stop, whatever he had done, I was going to have to live the whole damned thing out for him.

Details hit me hard enough to stagger me as I tried to fight back to the present tried to tear myself away from what the twisted sonuvabitch had done. No good, no good.

1990: September. He was starting to get the

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hang of this, starting to understand that the little girl would be safe as long as her skin didn't have a chance to decompose.

He was getting very good at tanning, the one in Ft. Lauderdale had been his big break.

He knew she was happy hanging in his closet. That made him feel good, he didn't want the little angels to suffer, he just wanted to save them from the sick-os out there. Like the ones that had got to him when he was just a little boy...

1990: December. How foolish he had felt, how stupid that he hadn't thought of it before. The girls could only really be happy if he used the bones the right way. He'd already been using cow bones and plastic ivory—no one wanted to see the elephants hurt--If he used the right bones from the girls, they would be lovely forever, things of art to be appreciated. Los Angeles was as good a place to start as any, but he only had a few days before he want home, his small studio there would be abandoned.

He took the thigh bones from Sheila Easley. Just enough time to boil the meat off and pack them up. How much would Federal Express charge him? It didn't matter, he had the credit card, never left home without it.

1993: October. The line of people waiting for his unique sculptures was getting longer and longer. The amount of money he was making was almost obscene. But it was all for a worthy cause, just so long as the girls were happy. That was really all that mattered. It was so good to know that they didn't really mind sleeping with him first.

After all, the first time caused a lot of people to cry, he certainly had.

I still don't know how the hell I made it home that night. I think it was something like twelve hours that I was in that fugue state, almost entirely unaware of reality, of the present time. I have always had a sharp mind, even if mine did feel like it was ready to explode. I jotted down every detail I could remember, where the victims were buried, what they had looked like, everything. The scariest thing to me was the amount of sympathy I felt for Alfonse. I still liked him. I was afraid that maybe his guilt was beginning to rub off on me.

I had the common sense to use a payphone to make the first call. And the second, and the third. The police tried to get my name, but I refused. They took down the notes I recited to them, they did only a minimal amount of hunting around, and they started to find the bodies. I gave them Alfonse's name and address on the first call.

Seems he's wanted in around twenty-seven states. Take a number, wait in line, your turn to fry him will come soon enough.

Part of me still feels sorry for him. God that scares me.

The news was on at six o'clock. Alfonse made the local and the national broadcasts. I understand there'll be a feature about him on "Nightline." I'm still waiting for the call and the connection. When the press hears that I got him off against all odds a few years back, they'll wonder publicly about how I feel. They'll send the cameras and reporters.

Part of me seethes that I let him kill those girls. If I had been a little less thorough, he'd have been in prison after the first one. Part of me is scared about what the press will have to say to me and about me. Part of me is thrilled that I managed to spring him so long ago; as publicity goes, you can't buy better.

The gun is still next to me, whispering and asking to be held close as I pull the trigger. I'm sorely tempted.

I still feel sorry for Alfonse, I sympathize with how he feels, I felt it with him.

Most of me can't stand that idea. What if I sympathize too much with the next one? And believe me as a defense attorney, there will always be a next one. What if I start liking the feeling so much that I take up murder as a hobby? Can you understand my confusion? I think about all of the others that I have defended, and I wonder if maybe they were guilty too. Oh, maybe not of that particular crime, but what about others?

The gun is in my hand again, and I guess maybe my hand has decided for me.

Just one last thing. Just one last thought before I leave this world. They say that the prosecuting attorney has to prove the burden of guilt. That seems only fair. But why, out of all the defense attorneys around, why must I be the one to carry the burden of guilt?

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## **E-BRANCH SURVIVORS**

### **I. SEE THE CREECHUR**

It was hot as hell, and flies the size of Jack Cutter's little fingernails had been committing suicide on the vehicle's windscreen for more than a hundred and fifty miles now, ever since they'd left Wiluna and "civilization" behind.

"Phew" Jake said, sluicing sweat from his brow and out of the open window of their especially adapted Landrover. The top was back and the windows wound down, yet the hot wind of passage that pushed their wide-brimmed Aussie hats back from their foreheads, tightened their chinstraps around their throats and ruffled their shirts 'til it made it feel like they were driving headlong into a bonfire. And the "road" ahead — which in fact was scarcely better than a track — wavered like a smoke-ghost in the heat haze of what appeared to be an empty, ever-expanding distance.

Behind the vehicle, a mile long plume of dust and blue-grey exhaust fumes drifted low over the scrub and the wilderness.

"That's your fifth 'phew'," Liz Merrick told him, "Feeling talkative today?"

"So what am I supposed to say?" He didn't even glance at her, though most men wouldn't have been able to resist it. "Oh dear, isn't it hot? Christ, it must be ninety! "Phew" is about all I'm up to, because if I do more than open my mouth a crack — *ugh!* " And he spat out yet another wet fly.

Liz squirmed and grimaced. "What the hell do they live on, I wonder? Way out here I mean?" She swatted and missed as something small, black, and nasty went zipping by.

"Things die out here." Jake answered grimly. "Maybe that's what they live on." And just when she thought that was it, that he was all done for now: "Anyway, the sun's going down over the hills there. Another half-hour or so, it'll be cooler. It won't get cold — not in this freaky weather — but at least you'll be able to breathe without frying your lungs." *Then* he was done.

She turned her head to look at him more fully: his angular face in profile, his hard hands on the wheel, his lean outline. But if Jake noticed her frowning, curiously intent glance, well it scarcely registered. That was how he was: hands off. And she thought: *We make a damn odd couple!*

She was right, they did. Jake hard yet supple, like whipcord, and Liz soft and curvy. Him with his dark background and current ... condition, and Liz with her —

— Which was when they hit a pothole, which simultaneously brought Liz's mind back to earth while lifting her backside eight inches off her seat. "Jake, take it easy!" she gasped.

He nodded, in now way apologetically, almost absentmindedly. He had turned his head to look at her — no, Liz corrected herself — to look beyond her, westward where the rounded domes of gaunt, yellow and red ochre hills marched parallel with the road. They were pitted, those hills, pockmarked even from here. The same could be said of the desert all around, including the so-called road. "These old mine workings." Jake growled. "Gold mines, That was subsidence back there, where the road is sinking into some old mine. I didn't see it because of this bloody heat haze."

"Gold?" Squirming down into her seat, Liz tried to get comfortable again. *Hah!* she thought. *As if I'd been comfortable in the first place!*

"They found a few nuggets here," he told her. "There was a bit of gold rush that didn't pan out. There may be gold here — there probably is — but first you have to survive to bring it up out of the ground. It just wasn't worth it..."

"Because even without this awful El Nino weather, this was one hell of an inhospitable place to survive to bring it up out of the ground. It just wasn't worth it..."

"Right." Finally Jake glanced at her — at *her* this time. And while he was still looking she grinned nervously and said:



“What a place to spend your honeymoon! I should never have let you talk me into it.” A witticism, of course.

“*Huh!*” was his reply. Shielding his eyes, he switched his attention back to the rounded hills with the sun’s rim sitting on them like a golden, pus-filled blister on the slumping hip of some gigantic, reclining, decomposing woman.

“Fuel gauge is low,” Liz tapped on the gauge with a fingernail. “Are we sure there’s a gas station out here?” In fact she knew there was; it was right there on the map. It was just the awful heat, the condition of the road, evening setting in, and a perfectly normal case of nerves. Liz’s tended to fray a little from time to time. As for Jake’s .. well, she wasn’t entirely sure about his, didn’t even know if he had any.

“Gas station?” He glanced at her again. “Sure there is. To service the local ‘community’. Heck, around these parts there’s point nine persons per hundred square miles!” While Jake’s sarcasm dripped, it wasn’t directed entirely at Liz but rather at their situation. Moreover, she thought she detected an unfamiliar edge in his voice. So perhaps he did have nerves after all. But still his completely humourless attitude irritated her.

“*That* many people? Really?” For a moment, she’d felt goaded into playing this insufferable man at his own game .. but only for a moment. Then, shrugging, she let it go. “So, what’s it doing here? The gas stain, I mean.”

“It’s a relic of the gold rush,” he answered. “The Australian Government keeps such places going with subsidies, or they simply couldn’t exist. They’re watering holes in the middle of nowhere, way stations for the occasion wanderer. Don’t expect too much, though. Maybe a bottle of warm beer — make sure you knock the cap off yourself ... yes, I know you know that — no food, and if you need the loo you’d better do it before we get there.” Good advice, around these parts.

The road vanished about a mile ahead; an optical illusion, just like the heat-haze. As the hills got higher, so the road began to climb, making everything seem on a level, horizontal. Only the throb of the motor told the truth: that the Landrover was in fact labouring slightly. And in another minute, they created the rise.

Then Jake brought the vehicle to a halt and they both went off into the scrub fifty yards in different directions. He got back first, was leaning on his open door, peering through binoculars and checking the way ahead when Liz returned.

“See anything?” she asked, secretly admiring Jake where he stood unselfconsciously posed, with one booted foot on the door sill, his jeans outlining a small backside and narrow hips. But the rest of him wasn’t small. He was tall, maybe six-two, leggy and with long arms to match. His hair was a deep brown like his eyes, and his face was lean, hollow-cheeked. He looked as if a good meal wouldn’t hurt ... but on the other hand, extra weights would certainly slow him down. His lips were thin, even cruel. And when he smiled, you could never be sure there was any humour in it. Jake’s hair was long as a lion’s; he kept it swept back, braided into a pigtail. His jaw was angular, thinly scarred on the left side, and his nose had been broken high on the bridge so that it hung like a sheer cliff (like a native American Indian’s nose, Liz thought) instead of projecting. But despite his leanness, Jake’s shoulders were broad, and the sun-bronzed flesh of his upper arms was corded with muscle. His thighs, too, she imagined ...

“This gas station,” he answered. “Sign at the roadside says ‘Old Mine Gas.’ There’s a track to the right from the road to the pumps .. or rather the pump. What a dump! Another sign this side of the shack says ... what?” He frowned.

“Well, what?” Liz asked.

“Says ‘See the Creature’” Jake told her. “But it’s spelled C-r-e-e-c-h-u-r. *Huh!* Creechur ...” He shook his head.

“Not much schooling around here,” she said. Then putting a hand to the left side of her face to shut out the last spears of sunlight from the west, “That’s some kind of eyesight you’ve got. Even with binoculars the letters on those signs have to be tiny.”

“First requirement of a sniper,” he grunted. “That his eyesight is one hundred percent.”

“But you’re not a sniper, or indeed any kind of killer, any longer,” she told him — then caught her breath as she realized how wrong she might be. Except it was different now, surely.

Jake passed the binoculars, looked at her but made no comment. Peering through the glasses, she focused

them to her own vision, picked up the gas station's single forlorn pump and the shack standing — or leaning — behind it, apparently built right into the rocky base of a knoll, which itself bulged at the front of a massive outcrop of butte. The road wound around the ridgy, shelved base of the outcrop and disappeared north.

And while she looked at the place, Jake looked at her. That was okay because she didn't know he was looking.

She was a girl — no, a woman — and a sight for sore eyes. But Jake Cutter couldn't look at her that way. There *had been* a woman, and after her there couldn't be anything else. Not ever. But if there could have been ... maybe it would have been someone like Liz Merrick. She was maybe five-seven, willow-waisted, and fully curved where it would matter to someone who mattered. And to whom she mattered. Well, and she did, but not like that. Her hair, black as night, cut in a boyish bob, wasn't Natasha's hair, and her long legs weren't Natasha's legs. But Liz's smile ... he had to admit there was something in her smile. Something like a ray of bright light, but one that Jake wished he'd never known. Because he knew how quickly a light could be switched off. Like Natasha's light ...

"Not very appetizing," Liz commented, breathing with difficulty through her mouth.

"Eh?" He came back to earth.

"The dump, as you called it."

"The name says it all," Jake was equally adenoidal. "Probably the entrance to an old mine. Hence 'Old Mine Gas.'"

A *great talent for the obvious* she wanted to tell him but didn't. Sarcasm again, covering for something else.

"So what do you thing?" she finally said, as they got into the 'Rover.

"Good time not to think," he answered, and Liz could only agree. At least he'd remembered what little he'd been told. So they tried not to think, and continued not thinking as he started up the vehicle and let her coast the downhill quarter-side to the Old Mine Gas Station ...

Lights of a sort came on as they turned off the road to climb a hard packed ramp to the elevated shed that fronted the shack. The illuminated sign flickered and buzzed, finally lit up in a desultory, half-hearted neon glare; grimy windows in the shack itself burned a dusty, uncertain electrical yellow. In an ancient river valley like this, dry since prehistory, it got dark very quickly, even suddenly, when the sun went down.

It also got cooler; not cold by any means —not in this freakish El Nino weather — but cooler. After they pulled up at the lone pump, Jake helped Liz shrug herself into a thin safari jacket, took his own from the back of the 'Rover and put it on. In the west, one shallow trough in the crest of the domes hills still held a golden glow. But the light was slightly fading, and the amethyst draining from the sky, squeezed out by the descending sepia of space. To the east, the first stars were already winking into being over silhouetted mountains.

Maybe twenty-five paces to the right of the main shack, a lesser structure burrowed into the side of the steep knoll. The "See the Creechur" sign pointed in that direction. Liz wondered out loud, "What sort of creature, do you reckon?"

But now there was a figure standing in the shadow of the shack's suddenly open screen door. And it was

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that figure that answered her. "Well, it's a bloody *funny* one, I guarantee that, much, miss!" And then a chuckle as the owner of the deep, gravelly voice stepped out into full view. "It's a bit into the day, though, so if yer want to see 'im, best take a torch with yer. Bloomin' bulb's blown again .. or maybe 'e did it 'imself. Don't much care for the light, that creechur feller. Now then, what can I do fer you folks? Gas, is it?"

Jake nodded and tilted his had back. "Gas. Fill her up."

"Ah!" The other's gasp seemed genuine enough. "Eh? What's this, then. Brits are yer? A pair of whigein' pommies way out 'ere? Now I asks yer, what next?" He grinned, shook his head. "Just kiddn'. Don't yet be takin' no not o' me, folks."

To all appearances he was just a friendly old lad and entirely unaccustomed to company. His rheumy little pinprick eyes, long since abandoned to the wrinkles of a weathered face, gazed at his customer over a bristly beard like that of some garrulous stagecoach driver in an ancient western. As he took the cap off the Landrover's tank, his wobbly spindle legs seemed about ready to collapse under him. And as if to make doubly sure he'd said nothing out of turn: "Er, no offense meant," he continued to mumble his apologies.

"No offense taken," Liz gave a little laugh. And Jake had to admire her: her steady, give-away-nothing voice. She quickly went on, "Can we get a drink or something, while you're filling her up? It's been a long and thirsty road, and a way to go yet. Maybe a beer? You do have beer, right?"

"Did yer ever meet up with an Australian (but in fact he said *Orstylian* ) who didn't have a beer close ter hand?" The old man grinned again, started the pump, and handed the nozzle to Jake, then hobbled back and held open the inner door to the shack for Liz. "Just you help yourself, miss. Not a lot ter choose from, though — Fosters every one! It's my favourite. And since I'm the one who drinks most of it, it's my choice too."

"Well, good," said Liz. "It's my favourite too."

Jake watched them go inside, frowned at the nozzle in his hand. Just like that, he'd accepted the bloody thing. Damn!

After that ... but it seemed it was going to take forever to satisfy the 'Rover's greedy guzzling. So Jake quit when the tank was only three-quarters full, slammed the nozzle into the pump's housing, tried not to look too concerned as he followed Liz and the old boy into the shack. But he'd hated to lose contact with her, lose sight of her like that, even for a few seconds. And she'd looked back at him just before she passed from view, her green eyes a fraction to narrow, too anxious.

Inside, however, it wasn't as bad as he'd thought it would be. Or as it might have been.

It was the grime, the blown dust of the desert, clinging to the outside of the windows, that had shut the light in and made the place so dim from the outside. But within — *this might be typical of any outback filling station a million miles from nowhere*. That was Jake's first impression. The bar was a plank on two barrels, with a bead curtain hanging from the plank to the floor in the front, and smaller barrels for seats. Liz was perched on one of them, and the old man had passed her a beer that she help unopened in her hand.

She must have asked him if he was all alone out here, and he was in the process of answering: "Alone? Me? Naw, not much. And anyway, I enjoys bein' on my ownsome. Oh, I got a couple o' boys to 'elp out. They ain't 'ere right now, is all. It ain't so bad, actu'ly. 'Ad a truck through just a day or so ago."

"A truck?" Liz said, all innocence and light. "Out here?"

And the old man nodded. "Gawd knows where they'd be goin'! But for that matter, where be *you* goin', eh? What're yer doin' out 'ere anyway?"

Having taken in much of the single room at a glance, Jake strode to the bar and asked for a beer. Without waiting for an answer from Liz, the old man reached for a bottle and turned to Jake. "Well now, *you* was a mite quick!" he said. "Yer just topped 'er up, am I right? I mean, yer'd never fill a big tank as quick as all that."

"Right," said Jake, accepting the beer. He gave the bottle a quick shake, forced the top off with a practiced thumb. Then, changing the subject as the warm beer foamed, "No cans?" he inquired. He passed the bottle to Liz, took hers and repeated his trick, with the same result. The beer wasn't flat; these bottles were old stock, but they hadn't been opened previously.

And meanwhile: "Cans? I don't hold with 'em," the oldster told him. "All this newfangled shite! But yer

can trust a bottle." And turning to Liz again, "You were sayin'?"

"No," she answered. "You were saying. You asked what we're doing out here."

"Well then?" he pressed.

She smiled. "Can you keep a secret?"

He shrugged his hunched shoulders, sat down on a barrel on his side of the plank and chuckled. "And who do yer reckon I'd be tellin'?"

Liz nodded. "We were visiting kin in Wiluns, decided to get married sort of quick. So here we are, run odd where no one can find us."

"Eh? Honeymooners, yer say? Run off on yer ownsome and left no forwardin' address? All out o' touch, secret an private in the Gibson Desert? *Huh!* Hell o' a place for a honeymoon..."

"I told him the very same thing," Liz nodded her agreement, shaking an I-told-you-so finger at Jake.

And Jake said, "Anyway, we're headed north. We thought we'd take a look at the lakes, and —"

"Lakes?" The old fellow cut in, frowning. "Yer visitin' the lakes?" Then, with a knowing nod of his head, he muttered, "Big disappointment, that."

"Oh?" Jake lifted an eyebrow.

But the oldster only laughed out loud and slapped his thigh "*Lake* Disappointment!" he guffawed. "Way up north o' here. Damn me, they falls fer it every time!" He sobered up, said, "Lakes, eh? Somethin' ter see, is it? *Huh!* Plenty o' mud and salt, but that's about all."

"*And* wildlife!" Liz protested.

"Oh, aye, that too," he said. "Anyway, what would I know or care? I 'ave me own wildlife afterall."

"The creature?" Jake swigged on his beer.

"Im's the one," the old boy nodded. "Yer wanna see 'im?"

Jake had done with studying the oldster. But he would certainly like to take a closer look at this shack, or what lay behind it or maybe beneath it. Liz could feel his curiosity no matter how hard he tried to keep it from the old boy. Moreover, she knew that between them they must check this place out, and so decided to do her bit, create a diversion as best she could. And anyway (she told herself), the old man didn't seem much of a threat.

"I'd like to see him," she said. "I mean, what's the mystery? What kind of creature is it, anyway? Or is it just a con — some mangy, diseased dingo crawled in out of the desert — to pull in a few more travelers?" And to her partner, though she knew he wouldn't take her up on it: "What about you, Jake? You want to come and see this thing?"

Jake shook his head, took another pull at his bottle. "Not me, Liz. I've a thirst to slate. But if you want to have a look at some mangy dog, you go right ahead." Almost choking on the words, he got them out somehow. Damn it to hell — the idea was supposed to be that they *didn't* get split up! He hoped she knew what she was doing. There again, she'd been in this game longer than he had. And that pissed Jake more than a little, too: the fact that Liz was in effect his boss here.

"Torch," said the old boy, taking a heavy rubber-jacketed flashlight from the shelf and handing it to Liz. "Yer'll need it. I keeps 'im in out 'o the sun, which would surely fry 'is eyes. But it's dark in the back o' the shack there. And this time o' evenin' even darker in 'is cage." When she looked uncertain, didn't move, he cocked his head on one side and said, "Er, yer just follers the signs, is all."

Liz looked at him, hefted the torch, said, "You want me to go alone?"

"Can't very well get lost!" he said. But then, gumbly, he hobbled out from behind the makeshift bar. "It's these old pins of mine," he said. "See, they don't much like ter go. But yer right — can't let a little lady go wanderin' about in the dark on 'er own. So just you foller me, miss. Just you foller old Bruce.' And then they were gone.

Jake took a small pager out of his pocket and switched it on. Now if Liz got in trouble she only had to press the button on her own beeper and he would know it ... and vice versa. For in the game, it was just as likely that he would be the one to make the wrong move.

Those were his thoughts as he stepped silently behind the bar, and passed through a second bead curtain hanging from the timbered ceiling to the floor. And as easily and as quickly as that he was into a horizontal



mineshaft, and almost as quickly into something far less mundane ...

Liz had followed the old man (*Bruce? Hell of a lot of Australians called Bruce*, she thought. *There had to be at least as many as there were John's in London*) along the floor of the knoll to the lesser shack that leaned into an almost sheer cliff face.

It was quite dark now, and the torch he'd given her wasn't nearly working on full charge. The batteries must be just about dead. Of course, knowing the place as he did, that wouldn't much concern the old boy, but it concerned Liz. And despite that she followed slowly and carefully in old Bruce's footsteps — mainly to give Jake the time he needed to look the place over — still she stumbled once or twice over large rocks or into this, that, or the other pothole. But in truth much of her stumbling was a ploy, too, so that it was perhaps a good thing so at the outset, anyway.

Until eventually: "Here we are," the old man said, turning a key in a squealing lock and opening an exterior screen door. Beyond that, a second door stood ajar; and as old Bruce, if that really was his name, reached out an incredibly long arm to one side to push it fully open — at the same time managing to bundle her inside — so she recognized the smell of a lair.

It was a primal thing, something that lies deep in the ancestral memories of every human being: to be able to recognize the habitat of dangerous animal or animals. The musty, feral smell of a cavern where something dwells — or perhaps an attic where bats have hibernated for untold years — or maybe the reptile house in a zoo.

But there are smells and smells, and this wasn't like anything Liz had ever come across before; or perhaps it was simply tainted, composite smell of all of them. Until suddenly she realized that it wasn't *just* a smell — wasn't *simply* a smell — but her talent coming into lay, and that the stench wasn't in her nostrils alone but also in her mind!

And then she had to wonder about its origin, the focus or point of emanation of this alien talent. Was it the shack — or the steel-barred, wall-to-wall cell it contained — or perhaps the night-black tunnel beyond the bars, with its as yet unseen, unknown "creechur" ... or could it possibly be old "Bruce" himself?

There came a sound from the darker depths of the horizontal mine shaft. And just as there are smells and smells, so are there sounds and sounds. Liz gasped, aimed her torch-beam into the darkness back there, and saw movement. A flowing, gathering, figure, taking on shape as it came, bobbing, wafting on a draft of poisonous air from wherever and whatever lay beyond. And it had luminous-yellow eyes — slanted as a beast's, and yet intelligent, not-quite-feral — that held her fixed like a rabbit in a headlight's beam!

But only for a moment. Then —

"You!" Liz transferred the torch to her left hand, dripped her right hand into a pocket and came out with a modified Baby Browning, used her thumb to release the safety and aimed at the old man ... or at the empty space where he had been. While from outside in the night, she heard the grating of his booted feet, his now obscene chuckle, and the squeal of a key turning in the exterior screen-door's lock as he shut her in.

Hell! But this could quite *literally* be hell! Along with her talent — held back far too long by her desire not to alert anyone or thing to her real purpose here — Liz's worst fears were now fully mobilized, realized. She knew what the creechur in the mineshaft was, knew what it could do. But even now, she wasn't entirely helpless.

Tucking the torch under her arm, she found her beeper and pressed its alarm button ... at the precise moment that it commenced transmitting Jake's own cry for help!

The shock of hearing that rapid *beep! beep! beep!* ing from her pocket almost made Liz drop the torch; she somehow managed to hold on to it, held her hands together, pointed the gun and the torch both through the inch-thick bars of the cage. But as the weak beam swept the bars, it picked out something that she hadn't previously noticed; there had been little enough time to notice anything. The cage had a door fastened with a chain and stout padlock — but the padlock hung on the inside, the other side, where it dangled from the hoop of its *loose* shackle!

She knew what she must do: reach though the bars, drive home the shackle to close the padlock. A two-handed job. Again she put the torch under her arm, fumbled the gun back into her pocket. Then, in the crawling, tingling, living semi-darkness, Liz thrust her trembling hands between the bars ... and all of the

time she was aware of the thing advancing toward her, its slanted, sulfurous eyes alive on her ... and the beeper issuing its urgent, staccato mayday like a small, terrified animal ... and on top of all this the sudden, nightmarish notion: *But what if this thing has the key to the padlock!?*

At this moment, it was Liz Merrick who felt like some small, terrified, trapped animal — but a *human* animal. While the thing striding silently, ever closer to her along the shaft was anything but human, though it might have been not so long ago.

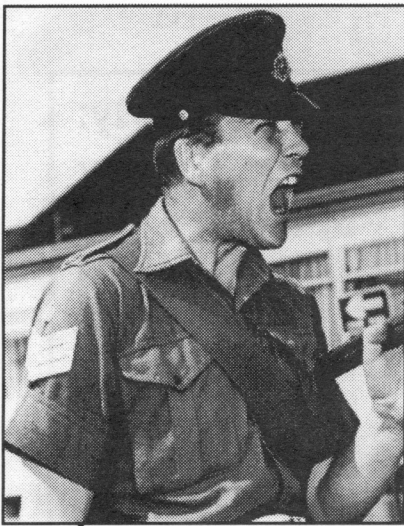
It was almost upon her; she smelled the hot stench of its breath! Liz had squeezed her eyes shut in a desperate effort to locate the padlock. Now she opened them ...

...And it was there, it was there! Its face, caught in the upward-slanting beam of yellow light from the torch in her armpit, looked down on her! And:

“Ahhh!” It — or he, the “creechur” — sighed. “A girl. No, a *wooman*. And a fresh one. How very *good* to met you here! How very ... provident. Ahhh!” And as simply as that his cold, cold hands took the padlock from hers, freed it from the chains, let it fall with a clank to the dirt floor ...







## Brian Lumley: An Appreciation

When I was asked to write a little something about Brian Lumley, I said "yes," without any hesitation. I was honored, and I still am for that matter. Brian has been one of my favorite writers ever since I first read his work, though it wasn't until years later that I connected the name with the book. That was back in the days when I'd first really discovered my passion for reading something besides comic books, and it was a few years before the circuits in my head started associating authors with their books instead of just locking onto titles to remember a work. *Spawn of the Winds* was one of the first books I really sank my teeth into, and it wasn't until well after I'd read the first three books of the Necroscope series that I realized I was enjoying the same fabulous author all over again. (Sometimes, just sometimes, I wish my brain would work along more standardized lines than it normally manages. Then I could have read all of Brian's works years earlier. Well, not all of them, I'm still missing a few from my collection.)

It wasn't until a few weeks later that I realized just how daunting writing about Brian Lumley was going to be. This is a man I've had the pleasure of knowing for roughly five years, but whose writings have been an influence on me for much longer. If it weren't for Brian's dynamic writing voice, there's a good chance I'd never have bothered with H.P. Lovecraft in more than a cursory

fashion. Lovecraft was a master, no two ways about that, but when I was really getting into reading, I often felt there wasn't enough action in his stories.

It took me a while to appreciate the subtleties of his style and to respect the careful build of tension he managed in his works. With Brian's Titus Crow series, I managed to get the best of both worlds, the slow building dread as the creature behind the door is revealed, and the sudden rush of adrenaline as a well-crafted fight explodes on the written page. The same stands true of the Hero of Dreams books, and it saddens me that there aren't a dozen more volumes in each series to keep me awake long after I should be asleep and preparing for another day.

Brian opened my eyes to just how wide and varied a field the horror genre can be. For the longest time I felt there was little beyond tales of the ghost in the house that the struggling family got at a bargain price. My mind opened up to whole new vistas about the concepts of Life after Death when I opened

Necroscope for the first time and read the words on those pages. They opened even more when I read it again and started really considering the ramifications of what a man could do if he could speak with the dead. What a man could learn from the generations of the past now rotting in their graves.

But enough about that. I was supposed to be talking about the man here, not just the things he's written. What can I say about Brian Lumley that you probably don't already know? It's common enough knowledge that he spent twenty-two years in the military. You have but to look at his credentials in the front of almost any book to see that he's written over forty volumes of work, all of which are treasures to be enjoyed again and again. Well, if you haven't met Brian, I can tell you that he's an impressive figure. He has presence. When Brian Lumley walks into a room, your eyes are almost magnetically drawn to where he is. The first time I saw him I couldn't help wondering how many times a day he bench presses tractor-trailers to get as big as he is. The second time I realized he isn't really that much of a giant, he just seems that way. He cuts an intimidating figure: tall and well-proportioned, one can't help but wonder how badly he could maim a person if he set his mind to it. His is a personality that commands respect, even when seen from a dozen yards away.

I can tell you that Brian has a lovely wife, and one who is as devoted to him as he is to her. I can tell you that despite his seemingly gruff exterior, Brian is a gentleman. He's quick with a joke, and he has more natural charm than any one person should be allowed. I can tell you that his smile lights a room, and that when he pays attention to you, you know he's actually listening to you, not just making polite noises. I can tell you that he's gone out of his way to help me personally on a dozen occasions, and that he has done so because he is a good person and a good friend, not because he felt any obligations and certainly not because he had anything to gain from it. I can tell you that he has always donated absolutely amazing things to the HWA Hardship Fund Auction, knowing full well that he had nothing to gain from it.

I can tell you that when Brian was the president of the HWA, he footed all of his own bills, including some excessive phone bills from calling all over the United States, knowing full well that he could have been reimbursed with ease.

Why? Because, Brian didn't want to put a dent into the coffers of the organization, despite the fact that his predecessors, Lawrence Watt-Evans and Robert Weinberg, left the HWA financially sound for the first time in ages.

I can tell you that he put up with me as his Vice-president, and that was a task in and of itself, because my life was doing a fast crumble around the same time and I was even more scatterbrained than I usually am. Rather than tear me apart verbally, he encouraged me and offered aid and advice.

Mostly I can tell you that Brian is, from my own perspective, an amazing man. He has accomplished goals that only a handful of authors ever manage, he has proven himself time and again to be a genuinely good person, and he is one of only a small handful of authors whose works I enjoy rereading. Visiting with Harry Keough and David Hero on their adventures is like kicking back with old friends. They're comfortable, and at the same time I always find something I missed the first time around, some simple sentence that reawakens the kid in me and has me wanting to cheer the good guys or crawl under the sheets and call for my mother. I'm glad Brian is still writing new works to add to my old favorites, and I'm glad I've had the chance to meet the man behind the stories.

Keep your eyes open and look for Brian Lumley while you're at the convention. Meeting him is as interesting an affair as reading his works, and I'm sure you can agree with me that settling down to savor one of the Necroscope series or a few of his high-caliber stories like "Fruiting Bodies" is an experience few easily forget.

—James A. Moore

## Tom Doherty: The Bouncer, The Bookman, And the Blarney by Brian Lumley

*Definition: Blarney Stone — A stone in a 15th Century castle in Blarney, Ireland, which, when kissed, reputedly endows one with invincible eloquence.*

When I let my small press publisher friends W. Paul Ganley Randy Everts talk me into attending the World Fantasy Convention in Providence 1988, it was probably the best move I ever made. It led to whatever small measure of success I have since known as a writer, and perhaps more importantly to friendships that have lasted ever since. Not least, Tom Doherty's.

This was my first American convention. Outside a small but gradually-expanding throng of H. P. Lovecraft and Cthulhy Mythos devotees, this Lumley bloke wasn't much known in the U.S. of A. I felt kind of lost following a bunch of people down a long hotel corridor toward a promised party. The bunch in front were each and every one known to the bouncer who leaned in the doorway of the party room with a can of beer in his big left hand; he had words with all of them as they passed the inspection and moved on into the room. But he didn't know me.

"The TOR Books Party?" I inquired. I didn't even know what TOR Books was, just that it was throwing a party.

The bouncer stood up straight and blocked the door. When he thrust his free hand in my direction I might even have started to duck, but he had a grin on his face that would light the world. The same smile has for all his friends. "Tom Doherty," he said.

"Brian Lumley," I told him. And because I didn't know what else to say — "I'm a writer, from England." And despite that I didn't think that was especially funny, he burst out laughing.

"Damn!" he said. "You know, a guy was here just this minute; he asked me if Brian Lumley was at my party and I told him I didn't think so. And he said: 'Well if he's not here, it's pointless me coming in.' And off he went. So you had better come in, Brian, 'cos I hate to see people turning away from my party."

And then I laughed too, and thought to myself, "If ever a man kissed the Blarney Stone, this has got to be the him." Certainly, because it was that kind of gentle, bantering flattery, or blarney that has Irish written all over it.

We got talking — for quite a while, if I remember correctly — and have him a dog-eared copy of the first British paperback edition of *Necroscope* with a creased jacket that was later abandoned because it was a bloody terrible piece of artwork. This was a badly battered copy of a badly packaged book. Chances we would look at it twice? — nil.

Oh really .... ?

Since then, lots of water, beer, brandy, fizzy stuff, and other liquids have flowed under the bridge. Here are a few.

1990, after World Fantasy in Chicago, I stayed with Tom in New York a couple of days before flying home. The morning of my departure, I drank a huge mug of coffee before taking a shower. Looking at myself in the mirror as the steam clears, I couldn't help wonder: "Tom Doherty, what did I do to deserve this? What, razor blades in the soap?" This bloody, nightmarish figure was gawking back at me, and it was me! Talk about horror stories!

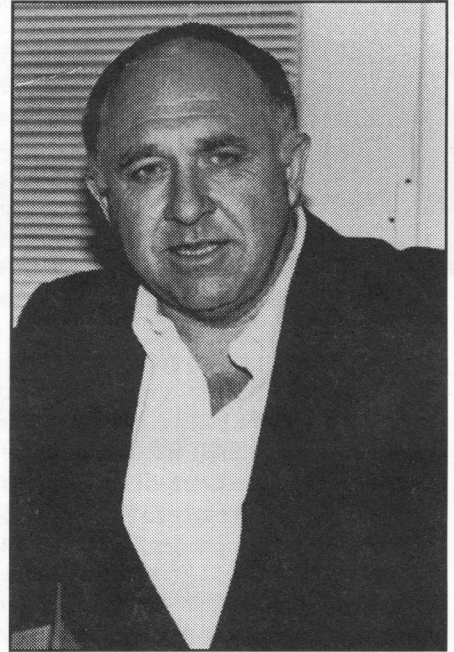
Apparently, there had been a break in the pipes somewhere, and red dye or mud or something had found its way into the Manhattan water supplies — and into the coffee! Tom had got through two big mugs to my one (which is about the same ratio for booze, too), but it hadn't harmed him (neither does the booze). But as for the coffee: well I wish I could say the same for me. An eight hour flight, and yours truly sick as a dog all the way home ... from both ends.

I got my own back one time when I forgot the time difference and called him at 9 a.m. my time. I wasn't fully awake myself, reckoned on one hour's difference, figured I'd catch him before he went into the office. If I had called him any earlier it would have been the previous night! And at four in the morning he told me, "Now we're even for the blood bath and poisoned coffee."

F. Paul Wilson once asked me, "Can you name one other boss of a big publishing house who can call about a problem?"

I Said, "Yeah, but you've for to be careful *when* you call him. Or make sure he owes you first ..."

Tom is a very genuine fellow, and a genuine gentleman. After the World Horror Con in Stamford, we took a train back to New York. Silky insists on a suitcase with room enough for a stowaway, then sills it with every conceivable item, some of which we actually use. When the train came in, Tom hoisted her suitcase onto his shoulder and set off down the platform. It stopped silky dead. She said, "Look at that millionaire, carrying my suitcase!"





And Linda Quinton, Tom's beautiful daughter, shrugged and said, "That's my Dad — he's a gentleman." Now, when a friend says something like that you can't always be certain sure it's true, but when a daughter says it ... (Maybe I should send copies of this to my two girls?)

So there you have it. Tom Doherty is a self-made man who knows the publishing business backward. He can lose you in all the facts, figures, and statistics. Charles N. Brown of *Locus* once said of him: "The reason for TOR's success is Tom Doherty ... he's an expert on distribution." And if I might add to that, a quite few other things, too. Like all the American cities we have wandered through, each and every alley of which he knows like the back of his hand, a legacy from his days as a salesman. Get Tom to take you on a guided tour of New Orleans, or the maze of indoor walkways and subways and conduits of Minneapolis, and you'll end up in some weird and wonderfully entertaining places — but *always* at the correct destination, and never a false step along the way ...

While his flesh and blood children are all grown up now, TOR Books is still Tom's baby despite that it got too big for one man to handle. Tom's pride in TOR Books is very obvious and totally justified. I'm not sure how often TOR has collected the annual *Locus* Award for best genre publisher, but I know it's a very healthy score, and I'm also sure it isn't over yet. It is my great pride and pleasure to be a friend of Tom's, and to be a name on TOR's list of authors.

If you don't know him — though I can't possibly imagine that anyone even remotely connected to this business wouldn't know him (Andrew Porter of *SF Chronicle* has said he is "something of a folk hero to the industry") — you will most definitely know this big "bouncer" when you catch sight of him. His welcoming smile is unmistakable.

So let me use a certain well-chosen word just one more time: genuine, and assure you that as I write this there isn't an ounce of blarney in sight. Neither on my side, nor on Tom's.

What do I mean? Well listen.

At the World Fantasy Con in Tucson '91, I was signing at the big Friday night session when a fellow I'd never met said: "Brian, I seem to have been chasing you for years! The closest I got was in Providence '86. I was about to leave for home but thought I'd try to find you at the TOR Party. The bouncer told me you weren't there, so I missed you."

It's a true story folks! But it would be a different tale entirely if I had missed Tom Doherty...

## Biography of John Steakley: A Diamond in the Rough

by David A. Cherry

John probably won't forgive me for paying the driver. After all, he had almost killed us. And it really was his (bleep)ing fault. Stemmons Freeway. Saturday night. Driving rain. Six or seven lanes of traffic at seventy miles an hour. Lots of tractor trailer rigs whipping up blinding curtains of spray. You don't stop dead in the road even if both of your windshield wipers did just fly off the cheap Ford you were using for a taxi. [I hate Fords, and lately I'm not so wild about taxis in general.]

I've thought a lot about why I did. It certainly wasn't for scaring us both out of 10 years growth that we could ill afford. Minutes before I had been absolutely certain that, if I survived at all, it was going to be in too many pieces to do all the paintings I had planned or be much use to my two little girls. And it certainly wasn't for saving our lives, because if that yo-yo had had his way, he would have gotten out of the car to play with the wipers, and we would all have gone up in flames and sharp metal. No, I think the reason I paid him was because of the one thing he did right: he listened to John.

That hadn't been that easy a thing for him to do. He had been arguing with John when the wipers quit and was not happy at how irate we became as the cab came to a halt. John's first impulse, as was mine, was to pound the little sucker. I think the only thing that kept me from it was that I was busy physically restraining John and getting my seat belt buckled. The driver, who was unnerved but probably felt he had things under control to that point, was actually more afraid of John than of the traffic. That was great for us because it got his mind off of stepping outside and focused his attention on John. That accomplished, John switched modes.

When he gets real intense, John calms down. He is surprisingly good under pressure. And he can be quite motivational. He can manage a "voice" to rival a Bene Gesserit. Thank goodness. My kids really needed that cab driver to follow John's voice that night, and he did, against his will, against his better judgment. Slowly and carefully, shaking all the while, he followed John's instructions. And we lived.

John and I have been friends for something approaching twenty years. I like John for a lot of reasons, including the fact that he is a great writer. That night I became even fonder of him. He is your Toastmaster. You are going to see him being jolly and telling a lot of jokes that he knows are groaners but which he will tell repeatedly anyway, just to see what you will do. He has a long-standing rep as a playboy and a carouser [which he richly deserves], but if that's all you know of him, you don't know John. I do, so I have been asked to let you know a little about him.

John was born in 1951 in Cleburne, Texas. [That makes him two years my junior, which he hates, so he always introduces me as his dad, which some people actually believe, which really ticks ME off.] He was the son of a second-

generation small town Chevy dealer, and his existence through the fifth grade was fairly normal. Then came a move to the Big City and a rather large change for the better with regard to his father's business ventures. Suddenly, John's life was faster paced and a lot more competitive. He found himself in a private school where his classmates were the sons of the social and business elite. [Boz Skaggs and Tommy Lee Jones are among the notable alumni who had already graduated from this school.]

John began college at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, but he returned to the Dallas area after a year and a half. It seems that since being in Fulton was getting in the way of his primary source of income: i.e., racing cars. John had quite a reputation as a driver. He quite often had the slower car, but he still usually won. At the Greenvalley Raceway near Dallas he never lost. He retired 24 and 0 from that track. Of course it is true that none of those races were sanctioned. In fact, they occurred late at night when the track was closed.

John was very serious about his racing. While attending SMU, he began racing stockcars; this time when the tracks were open and the fans were there. Predictably, he was good at it, and had just been offered a spot as a driver for a team racing super modifieds when fate stepped in and took him in another direction entirely. The same week that he received the offer to drive super modifieds he had an offer to go to Hollywood. It seems that in addition to driving, John had a passion for writing. He had been doing screenplays, among other things, and had sold a couple locally. This time it was a much bigger deal. He had sold a script for a John Wayne movie. So John made a move to California and tried his hand as a screenwriter. He describes it as a time of no credit but plenty of money.

It was also extremely frustrating. On the John Wayne deal, for example, John got to talk to Mr. Wayne once on the phone. Mr. Wayne said, I haven't seen a script this good since Pappy died. Some research on John's part disclosed that Pappy was John Ford. Pretty heady stuff. But John Wayne died shortly thereafter, so the movie never saw the light of day.

Let's see. What have I covered so far? John as a race car driver. John as a screenwriter. There is way too much to cover here. I could talk about his time as a semi-pro quarterback. His passion for tournament golf [including trips to Scotland], John's work as an actor and movie producer. . . say, I do want to mention that one. It was SF Horror and great, great fun. John made a movie called Scary Texas Movie.

It is very much Night of the Living Dead revisited, is very low budget, very campy and a ton of fun. I am lucky enough to have a copy of it, and I just love it. John winces when you mention it because it was his first effort as a producer and didn't nearly meet his expectations. To be honest, his director was a boob and his editors were inexperienced [mistakes he won't make next time], but all in all the movie is a hoot, and John is great. It also shows John's old digs [a very impressive bachelor pad] deep in Deep Ellum [Dallas art district].

OK. What else? There is John as a businessman. He owns and runs a business or two. There is John's trip to South Africa. That was pretty interesting. There is John as a sailor. He just bought a 39-foot boat. He also just found out he gets seasick. Ha. I hope he doesn't get too seasick, though, because one of the main reasons he bought the boat was as a getaway where he could be alone to write, and I can't wait for his next books.

He is not what you would call a prolific writer, but what he writes is powerful. It grips you and takes you for a wild ride. His first SF novel, *Armor*, blew me away. I was anxious for his next. When it came, it was horror rather than SF. It was a novel called *Vampire\$*. I loved it, but then, I am prejudiced slightly. I am one of the characters in it; well, half of one, anyway. *Cherry Cat*. An attorney from Oklahoma who gave up law to become an SF cover artist? Ring any bells? Then too, there is the heroine, a beautiful strawberry blonde named Davette Shands. Life is funny. When John wrote *Vampire\$*, Davette and he were both friends of mine, and I was somewhat surprised to find that they not only knew each other but were an item. Today, we are all still close friends, but Davette and I are married with kids.

All this being the case, you can imagine how excited Davette and I were to learn that John Carpenter had picked up the movie rights to *Vampire\$* and was filming with James Woods and Daniel Baldwin as leading characters. We tried to get Davette a bit part, thinking it would be fun to have the real Davette Shands in the movie as a waitress or something. John, good friend that he is, even flew out to the shooting site in New Mexico and met with the producer, only to learn that the character, Davette Shands, had been written out of the script. Scuttlebutt also has it that Baldwin is to play *Cherry Cat* but that *Cherry Cat* may now be called Dominguez. The most frustrating thing for me right now, since I have been waiting for months to see this movie, is that it has not yet been picked up for domestic release. I can't imagine that John is too thrilled about that either, but then they have changed the characters and plot so much that he may actually be happy the delay.

Do you get the idea yet that John is a man of many talents with a lot of different irons in the fire? Good. Perhaps you can understand, then, why John has not been as prolific a writer as his fans might wish. Take heart, though. John is back at the computer console, working seriously to bring us more enjoyable tales of mystery and adventure.

One final note, to those of you [especially you, George] who remember John in his slightly younger days as an inveterate carouser, I assure you from recent experience that John can still hold his own with the best of you, but I think you will find him at least a bit more conservative in that regard. Parenthood tends to do that to a man, and John is the proud father of a beautiful little girl named Alexandra [Lexi to her friends]. If you want to see the true John Steakley, John at his best, ask him about Lexi and see the pride in his eyes.

Well, that pretty well gives you a brief introduction to this fascinating, frustrating, complex and truly wonderful person. I hope you all have a lot of fun together. I wish that my schedule had allowed me to be there with you. Enjoy.



# Bernie Wrightson:

by Paul Chadwick

## *The Man Behind the Painted Skull*

If one can assign such a title as “dean of horror illustrators,” Bernie Wrightson certainly is it. In the 30-or-so years his work has been appearing in print, a cryptful of fine comics, books, prints, portfolios, cards and film designs has earned him this distinction.

Wrightson’s work is full of voluptuous curving forms; a sharp awareness of directional light; and a knack for exaggeration which makes the monstrous elements more writhing and weird and the people just a bit arch. A fair amount of his output could be classified as humorous as well as horrific. And unlike the truly disturbing darkness of Giger or Arisman, there’s a quality to Wrightson’s work that suggests he’s chuckling as he’s drawing that pile of severed heads.

Wrightson was born in Baltimore in 1948 to a hardworking blue-collar family of Polish and Russian stock. Perhaps significantly, their house was beside a cemetery. He credits the horrors of a Catholic school education for fueling his work, but a muse of another sort may have had a role.

When he was four, a woman visited his bedroom on three occasions. Each night she methodically searched through his dresser drawers and his toy box. Little Bernie was paralyzed with fear; the woman was headless. The object of her search was obvious. On the third night she approached Bernie and leaned down to check under his mattress. He got a clear view of her cleanly-sliced neck. It showed the cross-section of veins, throat, muscle and vertebra in perfect anatomical detail, of which no four-year-old would likely know or imagine.

Whether dream (and Wrightson has never otherwise had recurring dreams) or ghost, the experience clearly got Wrightson off on the right foot.

Remarkably, Wrightson never went to art school. He drew along with TV art instructor John Nagy as a child. EC comics and monster movies on TV fed his imagination. A broken arm at eleven created some enforced sitting time when he drew to fight boredom.

Eventually he became determined to be an artist and draw comics.

As a teen he plowed through the Famous Artists correspondence course. Shortly after high school, a job at Baltimore Sun gave him experience doing art for reproduction. And before too long he made the trek to New York, was deemed “Best New Talent” at a convention, and was offered work by Dick Giordano at DC comics.

The comics field was emerging from a long slump. The lean years had shaken out the artistic community, leaving a group of older men who had, because of low pay rates, focused their skills on quickly turning out fairly simplified artwork in a “house style.” Penciling and inking were almost always divided among two artists.

Wrightson was among a number of fans-turned-pro who entered the field at this time, about 1968. Young, living cheaply, without families to support, they labored on their pages (and often inked their own work), producing prodigies of detail and rendering.

Their passion showed.

Though not the best draughtsman (Neal Adams deserves that title), Wrightson outshone his peers with his stunning brushwork and lighting effects. He’d learned much from EC greats Ingels, Wood and especially Frazetta, and a Wrightson page had an unmistakable panache. Almost immediately he was a fan favorite.

But there were bumps in the road. He froze up and was fired off his first book, *Nightmaster*. He was rehired after Jerry Grandenetti did the first issue, but his enthusiasm was understandably diminished. Silly compromises had been made with the character; evidently distrusting the sword & sorcery genre, they gave *Nightmaster* a superhero costume and made him a displaced rock star. It lasted only three issues.

Learning Conan was to be adapted to comics at Marvel, Wrightson drew up samples but was told they weren’t superheroic enough. However, they gave him another job: a Kull story called “The Skull of Silence.” He threw himself into it, loading on detail, craftint and letratone effects. He colored it himself, symbolizing the apocalyptic silence the skull unleashes with the color leaching out of the latter pages. It was the best thing he’d done. But the printed version was atrocious; coloring had been added to the final pages, for fear readers might feel cheated. And, apparently reproduced from bad photostats, the detail dropped out of the artwork. Heartsick over the debacle, for years thereafter Wrightson did only the occasional cover for Marvel.

The magazine *Web of Horror* appeared around this time, with Wrightson stories and cover paintings promi-



ment. But the publisher departed leaving a cleaned-out office and unpaid fees (though taking the artwork he was supposed to return) before the fourth issue ever went to press. *Abyss*, an artist-financed magazine Wrightson did with Jeff Jones, Bruce Jones and Mike Kaluta, died after one issue because the printer mistakenly printed only half the number of copies ordered!

Where Wrightson shone during this period of the early seventies was DC's *Mystery* books, for which he supplied a wealth of covers, intro pages and occasional stories. Editor (and EC alum) Joe Orlando loved the weird quality of Wrightson's work gave him latitude to express his gifts fully. In one such story in *The House of Secrets* #92 (1971), the Swamp Thing was introduced.

The next year the landmark Swamp Thing series debuted. With writer Len Wein, Wrightson produced ten classic issues (1972-74) that sealed his reputation. An amalgam of a murdered scientist, his "bio-restorative" formula, and the seething biota of a swamp, this hulking vegetable encountered a werewolf, mutant freaks, Lovecraftian god-creatures, an alien, even the Batman. Speaking two words was a wrenching effort for him. His burned-off arm would regenerate like a tree limb. Deliciously strange and gorgeously rendered, the original Swamp Thing series is still treasured.

In 1974 Wrightson began to work for Jim Warren's magazines, *Creepy* and *Eerie* (where, years before, his first published drawing had appeared on a letters page). Here he produced the weird classics "Jennifer," "The Pepper Lake Monster," "Nightfall," and adaptations of Lovecraft's "Cool Air" and Poe's "The Black Cat." There was also a parade of spectacular inside front cover drawings. These works were the apogee of Wrightson's early brush-feathering dominated style.

During these years comics fandom was coming into its own. Conventions and slick, semiprofessional fanzines came into being. Wrightson was a favorite of older, more sophisticated fans, and was tapped to do fanzine covers, prints and interviews. His following in this arena made possible such books as *Badtime Stories* (1971), an all-Wrightson anthology, and *The Monsters* (1974), an oversized gallery of creatures ostensibly designed for coloring.

This upscale market welcomed Wrightson's color posters and prints, which had more of the look of turn-of-the-century book illustrations than of comic art. The 1979 book *The Studio* suggests these and illustrations for *Frankenstein* (published 1983, but preceded by several portfolios of the artwork) occupied Wrightson throughout the late seventies.

Documented in *The Studio*, this time has taken on the aura of a short golden age to admirers of the the four studiomates, Jeff Jones, Michael Kaluta, Barry Windsor-Smith and Bernie Wrightson. All these artists went through spectacular growth. Escaping from the restrictive environment of comics at that time, and united in regard for great illustrators and painters of the past, each member of the group drew new and spectacular imagery from within himself. Wrightson's *Frankenstein* is a perfect example.

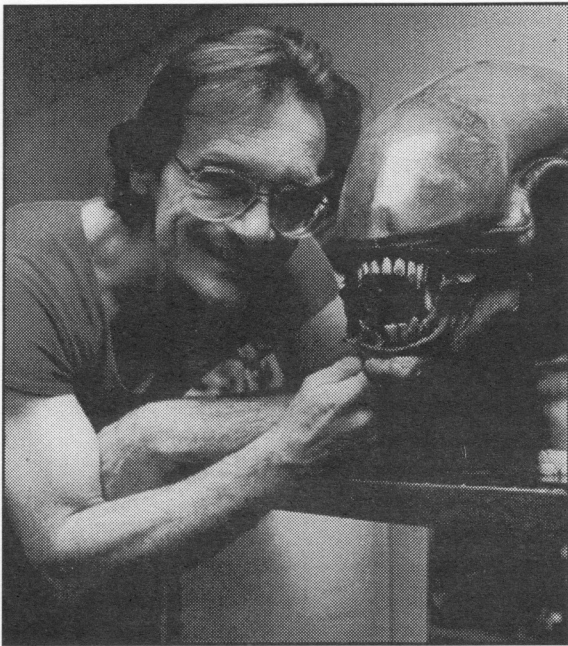
For *Frankenstein* Wrightson laid down his brush and picked up a pen, to magnificent effect. He studied the work of golden age illustrator Franklin Booth and applied some of his techniques to sometimes elegantly spacious, sometimes magnificently cluttered compositions. An enormous Glimmer Graphics print of one of these, Victor Frankenstein's laboratory, was produced years later with great success. The result of years of painstaking effort, *Frankenstein* remains a highlight of Wrightson's career and horror illustration in general.

During the *Frankenstein* years Wrightson created his roguish Captain Sternn character (which he later realized was an echo of James Garner's con man in a movie that deeply influenced the young Wrightson, *The Great Escape*). The first Sternn story appeared in *Heavy Metal* the magazine in time for it to be adapted for *Heavy Metal* the movie in 1981.

The movies have often drawn on Wrightson's skills. The indispensable Wrightson omnibus, *A Look Back* (1979, reissued 1991) contains early production art for an unproduced film, *Traveler: Ghostbusters* (1984) benefited from Wrightson's designs. In 1988 he visualized elements from Lovecraft's *Shadow over Innsmouth* for director Stuart Gordon, though the film remains unproduced. Recently, he's designed creatures that have a better chance at coming to the screen: for Chuck (The Mask, Eraser) Russell's *This Present Darkness* and an as-yet-untitled Robert (Desperado, From Dusk Til Dawn) Rodriguez film.

It was a comics adaptation of the Stephen King/George Romero film *Creepshow* (1981) that first brought Wrightson and King together. Soon thereafter, King's first illustrated book, *The Cycle of the Werewolf* (1983), appeared, brimming with Wrightson drawings. King also had Wrightson illustrate his "uncut" reissue of *The Stand* (1990). Last year, though King did not instigate it, Wrightson painted a cover for TV Guide featuring





King's miniseries *The Shining*, and illustrated a King short story therein. Given the magazine's circulation, this might be the most widely disseminated horror story and illustration in history.

Wrightson frequently returns to comics. *Batman: The Cult* (1988; with Jim Starlin) was a tremendous success. For *Punisher: P.O.V.* (1991; also with Starlin) Wrightson toughened up his artwork with less feathering and more graphic shapes. Interestingly, Starlin originally wrote this as a Batman story to follow up *The Cult*. When that didn't work out, replacing longtime DC Characters with longtime Marvel characters was a snap, underlining just

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*Running Out of Time* (1993; inked by Shepherd Hendrix) was a refreshing SF romp, perhaps an outgrowth of Wrightson's being a father of young children; there are certainly plenty of Wrightson comics I won't show my four-year-old! Perhaps he wanted one he could read to them at bedtime. *Batman/Aliens* (1997; with Ron Marz) pitted the Dark Knight against the hardy cinematic menace. Recently Wrightson did a Hulk story for Marvel's *Shadows & Light*, and a new Batman story for DC's *Legends of the Dark Knight*. For *Eleven Eleven*, he provided a penciled illustration for each facing page of Joy Mosier-Dubinski's text.

Wrightson is always in demand for covers. Dark Horse engaged him to do covers for *Tarzan: Le Monstre* and for *Dark Horse Presents #100* (of Mike Mignola's *Hellboy*). This year five painted covers for *Chaos' Nightmare Theatre* appear (as well as one story, written by Joy Mosier-Dubinski and inked by Jimmy Palmiotti).

Another venue for Wrightson's work is collector cards. Two series have appeared, *Master of the Macabre* (1993) and *More Macabre* (1994). These are well

worth seeking out, each with 89 painted images not seen anywhere else. Thanks to the unfortunate bankruptcy of the publisher, FPG (not due to Wrightson!), they can be picked up at bargain prices. And what of the future? Wrightson seems to be entering a new phase of his career this year, heralded by a move from New York to Los Angeles. We can expect fewer Wrightson comics and more Wrightson art appearing in "making of" books; and, of course, his designs in the finished films.

That may seem bad news for Wrightson collectors; more than the ideation, it's the art itself, every little feathered stroke and gnarled tree limb, that is special about his work. The intensity and dedication apparent in it give it its transcendent appeal. But judging from Wrightson's past career, he won't be out of sight for long; he's held in such esteem in his field, and so many want him to work for them, that some persistent souls will pull more prints, covers, perhaps even comics out of him. In the meantime, we can expect some strange and interesting visions on our movie screens.







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