

ISSUE No3<sup>I</sup>

1990

**DARK**

£1.00

\$3.00

**HORIZONS**





DARK HORIZONS 31 - 1990

Edited and produced by Phil Williams for the  
British Fantasy Society

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# **DARK HORIZONS**

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## *A New Dawn.....*

Hello and welcome to issue 31 of DARK HORIZONS. Though for all those who can remember the last time this magazine appeared, and as Dave Carson so aptly put it in a letter that complimented his artwork, LOST HORIZONS would now seem a more appropriate title. It's hard to believe that it's four years since the last edition, and most of you'll know the main reason for this has been due to problems in respect of editorship. Hopefully, now that I've taken over the mantle and brought this edition, the past can be allowed to 'rest in peace' with the knowledge that I will not permit a similar situation ever to happen again.

Apart from special fiction issues, DARK HORIZONS has always been noted for its blend of fiction and articles covering a great many aspects throughout the field of horror and fantasy. And this basic policy has been maintained within, though I do admit here and now that the overall content leans heavily toward horror. This is one area in particular that I hope to redress through subsequent issues.

In Dave Sutton's last editorial ('DH' 30) he mentioned that because this magazine is not mass marketed it allows room for 'experimentation and trial and error'. Looking back at the finished product, I have to say that there are certain aspects of format and layout which would now be altered to help improve the appearance. Yet, after taking over in February this year with only the main title, I'm reasonably happy with this edition. And it should give a solid foundation on which the future of DARK HORIZONS can be built upon.

I would like to thank all the contributors to this issue, for without their enthusiasm a great many of these pages would be blank. Special thanks go to Ramsey Campbell for his 'second' short story, and Stephen Gallagher for his article in 'ROOTS OF A WRITER', which chronicles the early influences that have helped known writers achieve success. This article is going to become a regular feature as a large proportion of readers are always interested in where the ideas for stories were borne from. Also, a very special thank you to Pete Coleborn, whose guidance helped to create this issue.

Finally, this publication is aimed specifically toward you, the reader. And it's your feedback, through letters, that will help develop the direction for future fiction and articles. Only you can tell an editor, whether it's a small press or high profile magazine, what you like or dislike. So after you finish reading DARK HORIZONS, reach out for a pen and piece of paper and tell me what you think.

# THE WORST FOG OF THE YEAR

Ramsey Campbell

Thick fog had been drawn over the fields. Since the encircling horizon was invisible, the boundaries of the pale landscape were defined only by a dull silence. The moon was a dab of grey paint on the sky. Ahead, above the surface of the fog, Gaunt saw parallel lines of hedge marking the road which led to the house. With its gables piled askew against the sky the house resembled a waterlogged box soaking out of shape.

Almost before he was ready Gaunt was inside the house and passing along the dark hall, glimpsing a stretched grin on the face which adorned the post at the foot of the banister, a heavy curtain weighted with dust and gradually sagging across a mirror, oak panels displaying framed portraits which appeared to have grown beards of dust. At the end of the hall a fan of electric light lay half closed on the carpet. Gaunt inched past the heavy oak door and its brass meringue of a doorknob, into the room.

Two women sat on couches with rolled arms of thick black leather. Around them the room was piled with silence. The tea in the porcelain cups abandoned on a black table was clouding over like two miniature ponds, and beside the cups and their silver tray an orchid was crushed within a paperweight. Heavy velvet curtains twice Gaunt's height almost curtained a long window.

The older woman reached beside her for a poker, which she thrust into the fire beyond the marble proscenium of the fireplace. Her gaze never left her companion's face, and the pistol in her hand never wavered. "What time is it now?" she demanded.

The young woman shook back her black hair from its band and threw out her wrist to consult her watch. "One o'clock."

The gun rose a fraction. "Don't lie to me."

"Twenty to twelve," the young woman said, shivering. "For God's sake, won't you see what you're doing? We can still leave. "There's time."

"Almost midnight," the other said happily, and then her voice sharpened. "Don't bring God into it. It's God's will that we're here. Whatever happens will be meant to happen."

"Rubbish," Gaunt snorted.

The woman patted her greying hair into place with her free hand while the girl shrank back into the crook of the couch. "Even if you can't cover your knees, pull your skirt down. Your father won't want to see you looking like that, whatever your boyfriends like."

"You," the girl said wearily, "are mad."

"If you knew that," Gaunt demanded, "why did you let her lure you here?"

The woman raised the gun until the eye of the barrel was level with the right eye of her victim, then she threw the weapon on the hearth. "Go on, and take your atheism with you. God couldn't be so cruel to your father. God will let him come to me."

The young woman made to reach for her, but drew back. "He's dead,

mother. He's been dead for months."

"Don't you know I still love him, whoever he married? Do you think I could be frightened of him?" All at once the mother's eyes looked as dangerous as the barrel of the gun. "You're afraid of how he may punish your sins, when you should be weeping for the pain you caused him."

The girl sprang up and kicked the gun, which skidded away beneath the table while the cups chattered like teeth. "That's right, you run," her mother jeered. "He's out there waiting for you. You know you're meant to stay until he comes. Why else do you think tonight is the worst fog of the year?" And behind her the music crept up - for that, of course, was the title of the film.

Outside, over the fields which surrounded the house, patches of fog were wearing thin. A threadbare strip like the ghost of a path, perforated by brittle grass-blades, led towards the house. At the end farthest from the house, blades bent suddenly and sprang up; then others stirred closer to the building. Although the fog hung close to the ground, what troubled the grass was crawling beneath the fog.

For the second time Gaunt wanted to leave. The first had been in London, in a cinema off Tottenham Court Road. Surrounded by snoring men, he'd realised that the young woman was trapped. Her own stupidity and inconsistency had trapped her, or those qualities of the script had, and his feeling compelled to will her to escape had infuriated him. Now, having seen it once, he knew her fate, yet more than ever he was urging the film to let her go. He would have left the cinema, except that he was the entire audience for the press show. At least nobody would know he wasn't watching, and so he closed his eyes. With luck he might nod off, just like one of the Londoners who had nowhere but the cinema to sleep; he'd been lying awake for nights trying to think what to make of his life.

In front of him was dimness not unlike midnight fog, and the sounds of stealthy crawling in the grass. Why was he here? He mightn't even be allowed to review the film. His editor had hinted that his reviews were too analytical for a small-town newspaper and in particular for the cinema manager, a friend of the editor's. If the editor gave way to persuasion then Gaunt would have to, like a minor character required to behave as the script demanded. He heard movement dragging through the grass, and thought he could hear the squeak of soil clenched in a groping fist, though last time he hadn't. He felt as if he was dreaming the film, in which case he had to accept some blame for its absurdity, for that of his own situation, for the absurdity of talking to the film in the dark as though it was as real as himself and as though his feelings could make any difference. "Pointless," he muttered. "Meaningless, you and me both." He drew a breath to groan as though the film could hear his impatience with it. For a moment he was enclosed in a humming silence; his head swam unpleasantly, and the fog in his eyes seemed to surge at him. Then he heard grass rustling around him.

Had the projectionist turned on the stereophonic sound? He needn't have bothered; it wouldn't improve Gaunt's view of the film. Perhaps the speakers had momentarily gone wrong, because the sound had ceased. Gaunt's eyes lay shut, and his mind lay inert, until behind him he heard the young woman run to draw the curtains.

"He won't come through the window. He'll use the front door as he has every right to," her mother said, and Gaunt opened his eyes. He wasn't in the cinema, he was in the room.

For a moment he thought he was experiencing some new visual gimmick. The room seemed unreal; it seemed somehow to have crammed itself into his eyes. He was nearest the table, and he made himself dip one shaky finger into a cup of tea. The skin of the stagnant brew gave way, and the chill of the liquid shivered up his arm.

He couldn't cry out. The chill had seized his throat, and he couldn't even swallow. His mind was struggling to deny what he was experiencing,

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but was this really more absurd than his everyday life? As soon as he had the thought, it seized him, and the room opened out around him. "Did he come through the front door for my sister?" the girl cried behind him.

Gaunt lurched aside and stared at her. She was gazing at her mother, who lay in an attitude of regal indifference on the couch. Gaunt shoved one hand almost into the daughter's face, but she didn't flinch. Neither woman could see him. It was he who was unreal.

"No doubt," the mother said.

"And for my brother? Did you lure them both here?"

"They came when they were called," the mother said, and with a hint of bitterness, "He let them see him, but he didn't show himself to me."

"But you saw what he did to them. You saw how they were stuffed with earth."

"Don't you say that! Don't you dare suggest he could do that to anyone!"

We're all mad, Gaunt thought wildly. Everything is. He almost touched the girl to convince himself that she was real, but what would that or its opposite prove? He stood in the room, unable to stir, and then he heard a scratching at the front door.

"He's your father!" the woman shouted as her daughter flinched towards Gaunt. "Don't you let him see that you're frightened of him!" She flung herself at the young woman and grabbing her wrist, dragged her along the hall to the front door. Gaunt felt as if the wake of her violence was carrying him along, past a mirror in which he might or might not be glimpsing himself. There was silence except for the panting of the women; even the front door appeared to be holding itself still. Then something scratched at the foot of the door.

The daughter fought. Gaunt wanted to help her, but the idea felt like a pit into which he would never stop falling. Suddenly several objects like blackened splintered knife-blades were thrust under the door. They were fingernails.

The daughter screamed and wrenching herself free, fled along the hall. Gaunt thought her flight had released him until he felt himself being rushed after her. As he ended up in the middle of the room, the mother came in and locked the door. "He won't mind if I open the window for him," she said. "It'll be like an assignation."

The daughter caught up the silver tea-tray as if it was the only weapon she could bring to mind, sending the cups trundling across the carpet. "After I cleaned up for him," her mother shouted, "and you didn't even wash up!" She captured her daughter's wrists, and the women wrestled for possession of the tea-tray. Flashes of light from it blinded Gaunt, who closed his eyes as if that might help him escape. Then they sprang open. At the window, muffled by the curtains, he'd heard a feeble thud of stone on glass.

The woman released her daughter and ran to the curtains. She dragged them open, and the fog bellied forwards to soak up the light from the room. At the bottom of the right-hand pane Gaunt saw a stone rear up slowly, strike the pane and spatter it with mud, fall back to hang suspended for a moment and then thump the glass. Around the stone were five discoloured things like blades.

The blows were growing stronger. From outside the window came a choking cough, and a shower of mud obscured the glass. The mother pulled the upper bolt free of its socket and stooped to the bolt at the foot of the window. Her daughter ran at her, lifting the tray to batter her down. Then the pane gave way, and the stone thudded on the carpet.

Gaunt staggered back, closing his eyes. The gun! He fell to his knees and groped under the table. Nothing. The women screamed, and what sounded like a mound of earth fell through the window into the room.

As Gaunt scrambled under the table he heard sounds of padding and scraping, like the progress of an injured dog that was causing the floor

to quiver. He forced his eyes open, and saw the gun ahead of him, just out of reach. He hitched himself forwards, and the mother bent to pick up the gun as the young woman stumbled to the door. A shadow fell across Gaunt's path. He peered wildly along it and confronted something like a face.

It was crushed and discoloured. It might almost have been a mask shaped of mud and insufficiently baked. Parts of it were moist, other parts were crumbling. The sight of it paralysed him while a frayed hand wavered up from the carpet and reached towards him with its askew nails.

When Gaunt didn't move, the hand faltered to the ragged lips. Deliberately, and with some effort, the mouth produced a handful of glistening mud, and then the hand came swaying towards Gaunt's face. He felt his lips twitching uncontrollably. It was waiting for him to open his mouth.

He couldn't keep it shut now that an outraged scream was building up inside him. The prospect of his fate made not just his mouth but his whole body squirm. The convulsion released him, and he squirmed aside, seizing the wrist, which was mostly bones, and twisting it. Its flimsiness took him unawares. The arm tore loose from the shoulder, and Gaunt went sprawling. Instead of bones and tendons, the arm ended in a bunch of wires and metal rods.

Gaunt staggered to his feet and gave the mutilated dummy a kick to convince himself it had stopped moving. The mother stood frozen, gun in hand, in the act of turning to shoot her daughter in the leg. The daughter was almost at the door, her hand outstretched to grasp the key. How long before the shot revived the action of the scene? Gaunt sprinted to the door and turned the key, then clutched at the young woman's hand.

He didn't know where he meant to lead her, but in any case the knowledge would clearly not have helped. As soon as he tugged at her cold hand, her arm came away at the shoulder.

He felt the walls and floor and his sense of himself begin to give way to the dark. Absurdity was everything. Everything he touched betrayed it. He lurched away from the standing remains of the young woman, towards the husk of her father. Which of them might come lepsidally for him?

Neither, by the look of it, and the gun would never go off. None of them would ever move again, and there was no point in his moving when there was nowhere for him to go. They were nothing. In destroying them, he'd destroyed nothing. But if he were capable of destroying no more than a symbol of the threat of nothingness then surely he, if nothing else -

He cried out wordlessly, shocked by the pain: the cinema seat had sprung up at last and smacked his arse.

THE WORST FOG OF THE YEAR was written in 1970 and accepted soon after by Gerald W. Page for GOVEN 13 alias WITCHCRAFT & SORCERY. However, before it could be used the magazine folded. Ramsey subsequently mislaid the manuscript, and the title became listed as 'lost'. That is until now; with the first publication of a story written twenty years' earlier.

# OKAY, SO MAYBE HE WAS A TAD WEIRD.

*by Paddy McKillop*

Call it voyeurism; call it morbid fascination; call it down right sick, but we all love a juicy true-crime story. Whether it's a no-holds-barred newspaper 'scoop' or a pseudo-scientific thesis, we always skip straight to the business section where the gore files and the body count shoots merrily upward.

The last thirty years have thrown up numerous interesting killers for us to get our teeth into. From the Moors Murderers to Dennis Nilsen; Charles Manson & Family to the late Ted Bundy (recently fried in the electric chair for the rape and murder of thirty-six women). But there is one man who has earned a following among the horror fraternity which borders on reverence. He is the man who inspired Robert Bloch to write his most famous work, *PSYCO*, and Tobe Hooper to make *THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE*, as well as providing a wealth of material to keep 'sick joke' specialists busy for three decades. He's the darling of the death set, little Eddie Gein.

It is impossible to definitively identify the root cause of Eddie's depravity, but most observers accept that his mother, Augusta Gein, had a major negative influence on her son's development.

Just like the fictional Norman Bates' dear, sweet Mama, Augusta was a domineering, opinionated woman with strong views on men and the kinds of women who sought their company. She determined early on that her sons, Eddie and Henry, would not assume the detestable faults inherent in their gender, and educated them to that end.

She could have had no finer example of man's short-comings than those exhibited by her husband, George, who was too often out of work and much too often resident in the bar. When his history of drinking finally caught up with him in 1940, Augusta was left to raise her sons alone, free from the disruptive distraction of their father.

Henry, the older of the two brothers, died in somewhat mysterious circumstances in 1944, aged forty-two. He was caught in a marsh fire and burned to death. Some suspected Eddie of involvement, but nothing could be proved. In light of his later criminal escapades, perhaps Eddie was lucky to be given the benefit of the doubt.

Within two years, Eddie lost the final, most important member of his family, his mother. It was then that his problems really started.

Life without his mother left Eddie deeply depressed and listless, the family farm fell into disrepair, and Eddie became even more withdrawn from the local community of Plainfield, Wisconsin. But while his neighbours considered him a little strange, there was no question of his being dangerous.

And then in November 1957, Eddie's fifty-first year, a local store-keeper named Bernice Worden went missing.

It was the start of the deer-hunting season so the town was largely

deserted, but one eye-witness did report seeing Eddie Gein driving the Worden's truck. The police duly investigated, finding Eddie at a neighbour's house. He was taken in for questioning. The two officers who went to search the Gein farm found Bernice Worden... and abruptly lost their lunch.

The major portion of Mrs. Worden was found hanging by the heels in Ed's shed. The internal organs had been removed via an incision running the full length of the trunk, from chest to genitalia (also removed). In hunting terminology, the body had been 'dressed out'. The head had been completely cut off at the shoulder. A positive identification could not be made without the head and unable to find it near the body, the two officers began a search of the house proper.

Eventually the head was found - still steaming - between two old mattresses. To add insult to assorted injuries, hooks had been inserted into each ear and a piece of twine attached in order that the whole thing could be hung on the wall, trophy fashion. Other discoveries would confirm that Eddie's assaults on Mrs. Worden were not the sum total of his misdeeds.

It was obviously the work of a warped mind.

The scene confronting the police searching Eddie's house was one of domestic chaos. It was as if nothing had been thrown away, nothing ever cleaned. Rotting food, empty tin cans, boxes, old rags, piles of rubbish littered the floors, and it all had to be sifted for evidence. It did not take long for evidence of the most damning nature to emerge.

Two or three kitchen chairs appeared, upon a cursory examination, to have been re-upholstered using strips of human skin. The fatty deposits on the underside of each chair supported the investigators' suspicions.

Skin seems to have been one of Eddie's obsessions - he accumulated masses of the stuff and put it to a surprisingly wide range of uses. As well as the chairs, he fashioned it into a lampshade, a tom-tom drum, even a waste-basket (pretty pointless given his pig-sty attitude to house-work and tidiness). More disturbing still, Eddie used the skin from one victim's legs to make himself a pair of puttees, and took the skin from another's torso, breasts and all, turning it into a vest.

In interviews, Eddie admitted to donning these skin garments and cavorting in his yard on moonlit nights. During his nocturnal fancy dress parties, he wore face masks carefully sliced from the skulls of the dead. He explained how he would pack each newly harvested face with paper to ensure they dried uniformly. An application of a penetrating oil was supposed to keep the flesh supple. Eddie would wear the masks for up to an hour at a time before returning to other business.

Of the skulls left faceless, Eddie had heard of Norwegian folk tales which told of mead being sipped straight from a hollowed out head, and he followed the example, hacksawing the tops off skulls for use as soup bowls. Waste scraps of skin from the face-pulling sessions were kept in a Quaker Oats box, leading some people to accuse Eddie of cannibalism (they point also to the human heart sitting in a pot on Eddie's stove - there, he claimed, for disposal, not consumption), but it has never been proved and we don't want to give the guy a bad reputation.

Amongst the other goodies unearthed by the police team were a belt made of ladies' nipples; a large collection of human noses; a similar assortment of vulvas - one sprinkled with salt, not as a culinary preparation but to prevent decay, and another painted silver and trimmed with a red ribbon because, Eddie said, "it was getting a greenish colour". Skulls adorned his bedposts; and his knife had a fine bone handle and a nest made from, you guessed it, skin.

Revelations about Gein's collection of human ephemera shocked and appalled officials, but they also prompted the question: Where did Eddie get his raw material, his supply of bod's ripe for whittlin'?

Police for miles around suspected Eddie of involvement in every missing

persons came on their books, and while a number certainly did end up (sometimes literally) in Ed's shed, by no means all became part of his meat board.

In explaining his method of obtaining fresh bodies to work on, Eddie troubled another taboo - he claimed he dug them up from three local cemeteries. Add to his already horrific curriculum vitae valuable experience as a 'ghoul'.

Midnight raids on the graveyards netted Eddie, by his own estimate, nine or ten corpses between the years 1950-4. Sometimes he would take the whole body, other times only the parts he required, such as the head, genitalia and a patch of skin from the woman's back. On occasion, he returned unused material to it's rightful resting place. Asked what he did with the dead bodies he procured, whether or not he attempted sexual intercourse with any of them, Eddie dismissed the suggestion, giving as his reason that - "they smelled too bad."

It was Eddie's sexual inexperience, allied to the confusion instilled in him by his mother's unconventional attitudes, which led him in his dark pursuit of understanding. Psychiatric examinations revealed Eddie's campaign of murder and grave-robbing to be, in part at least, a quest for some form of remembrance of his mother.

Not surprisingly, Eddie was found unfit to stand trial for murder by reason of insanity. He was sent to a hospital for the mentally insane where, despite an unsuccessful petition for release in 1974, Eddie remained until his death in 1984, a senile old man of seventy-eight.

He was buried next to his mother in Plainfield Cemetery, one of the three he frequented in his flesh-gathering days.

It's difficult to understand why so depraved a man has achieved such widespread anti-hero popularity, to the extent that Gein T-shirts are all the rage and a smitten New Mexico artist even published an Ed Gein fanzine (or 'Gein-zine') a few years back.

Certainly Robert Bloch's novel, *PSYCHO*, and Hitchcock's movie adaptation deserve a lot of the blame/credit, as does Tebe Hooper's vivid and stylish *TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE*, with it's almost documentary feel, putting the cinematic strips of flesh onto Hitchcock's gore-free *PSYCHO* skeleton.

Maybe it is because splatter films and shameless bloodfests tend to titillate rather than scare or shock, and the viewer, who loves nothing better than seeing skin and bone bloodily divorced, recognises and appreciates Eddie's invention and ghoulish diversity.

Rightly or wrongly, books and films have given Eddie a prominent place in murder history, and lauded him as a psycho outstanding in his field (out standing in his field wearing assorted bits of dead ladies, mind). Others may out-score him on body counts, but little Eddie Gein will always have a special place in the affections of we, the true crime enthusiasts.

One final note of interest in the Gein case - one room, and only one, in the 'deadhouse' was free from debris, both domestic and epidermal. It had been sealed by Eddie in 1945 and remained undisturbed for twelve years.

It was Augusta Geina room.



For anyone who wishes to read further into the case of Edward Theodore Gein (August 27, 1906 - July 26, 1984) then you should seek out the following two books:

'DEVIANT' by Harold Schechter, Pocket Books, May 1989.

'EDWARD GEIN: AMERICA'S MOST BIZARRE MURDERER' by Judge Robert H. Gollmar, Pinnacle Books (copyrighted 1981).

NOTE - Gollmar is the judge who presided in the trial which was held to establish Gein's mental fitness or otherwise; and whether he should stand trial.





## THE GROUNDLING

D. J. Lewis

At precisely 1.03 p.m., George Darly entered the church door.

He had footed it from Driffidge, which meant all of the morning since breakfast had been spent clambering along ill-used woodland tracks that tirelessly followed the contours of the countryside hereabouts. So, with a certain depletion of puff, George tramped over the last brow and looked down upon the roofs of the village, glistening in the aftermath of a summer shower that he at least had not noticed. Repositioning the shoulderstrap of his lunchbox, kindly prepared by the Driffidge Arms Hotel where he had been staying, he pumped his legs against the downward slope.

The time was 12.33 p.m. as he wandered through the village street. Nothing about. He made a joke about siestas in this little patch of Old England, for the watery sun was more an ingredient of an oil painting than a heat source. George prided himself on a poetic frame of mind, something he claimed was as important as it was rare these days. A precious view of life, seen through the eyes of a castaway in a murky ocean of tabloids, soap operas and quick bargains, he said: this time he was not joking.

He felt his cheeks and lightly cursed, for he had forgotten to shave this morning. Luckily there was no one about to call his bluff of gentility; his trousers had been ripped too, which was understandable, seeing the terrain he had had to traverse; his face was smudged, but he had yet to realise this.

He sat upon the dedicated bench in the graveyard and, just as the

church clock reached 12.44 p.m., his jaws met through bread and fish paste. His mind did not record the flavour, for he was gazing at the tower of the church which, as indicated by the local history books he had been studying, did lean slightly. He was particularly intrigued by this phenomenon, for most sources put it down to the slight earth tremor in 1894 that diarists of that era had spoken of...

"On arising with a sun that was already hot, despite the early hour, I felt the ground shudder for a moment in time. I asked Nancy whether she had noted it. She shook her head negatively, but I argued the case blue of face, 'till she fully believed me, and we proceeded round most of that day inspecting the foundations, but discovered not one item of masonry loose or out of place..."

17 June 1894

George had memorised that specific entry in a peculiar diary that Driffidge Library had in its archives. Its first few pages were unaccountably missing, so nobody knew whose diary it was. There had been others, less anonymous, all talking of an earth tremor but, incredibly, the dates assigned to the event (if indeed it was one event) differed by a few days, and even weeks, in each case. What is more, he discovered an edition of a novel written by an unknown Victorian lady, prefiguring Hardy in her mood, which spoke of the leaning church tower in the village, and this had been published long before 1894!

"Jude gazed down upon the church, studying the pattern of the tombstones, for his sorrow and pain needed a diagram to trace themselves to a source ... the tower seemed to lean the more, bringing further tears to his already reddened eyes..."

He had memorised those short extracts too, and now was opportune enough to recite them aloud, if it were not for the last morsels of apple turnover at the bottom of the lunchbox.

Brushing down his shirt, he noticed the sweat that had encroached within the armpits; its waft of unwelcome memories of coming from animals followed him up the church path.

The heavy door creaked on its hinges, breaking a silence that had suddenly ensued. He looked at his watch, but more to see if it was still working.

Inside, the pews had a few locals dotted about, heads bent, most kneeling. The strong light of the sun, despite its weak heat, shafted through stained glass, casting rippling reflections of its colours upon the stone floor.

George now found himself wondering if he should be there at all. One of those partaking of contemplative prayer had looked up on his entry, to take the measure of the intruder, as it were. George slid into the nearest pew, noticing that all the prayer pillows had designs upon them depicting certain dedicatees of the congregation through the centuries. The one in front of him had a deer embroidered with a spear through its flank:

"Mary Murto 1874 - 1894, she was a spirit of the woods - may her early death mean a longer rest."

The letters were spirally stitched, with ends of threads coming out, making them difficult to read.

Unexpectedly feeling ill (must be the fish paste), George lowered his head and closed his eyes to see if that would settle the dizziness. He slumped to his knees.

It seemed like several hours later but, on looking casually at his watch, he saw it had been barely 5 minutes, he raised his head again. The

previous inhabitants of the pews had all gone; he was surprised he had not heard them go. The sun was no longer streaming through the stained glass, but there was still sufficient dim light to make out the large golden eagle plinth upon the pulpit to one side of the altar; a massive open Bible was spread out there, like another bird creature. He glimpsed yet another form poised above this, with pointed face, and eyes which quickly grew more light than the rest of the church interior altogether. Its mouth was moving, as if it was learning parts of the Bible by rote. Then, with a shuffle of wings that George missed with an inopportune blink, it had evidently gone to ground.

He hurriedly rose from his knees, replacing the embroidered pillow in its niche.

The afternoon light was already derelict, as he strode back into the graveyard. The door had this time not broken the silence, as if going out turned different hinges than going in. Or the silence itself was now of a different breed, more intractable, less straightforward.

He was convinced the path moved under his momentarily, but he could not be sure: he was walking far too quick.

The village street was still empty, but an almost imperceptible flick of curtains betokened that he was being watched out, just as much as he had been watched in; not that it seemed to matter then as much as it did now.

Once upon the brow of the hill as he began his journey to Driffidge, he reluctantly returned his gaze down upon the village. It was more like doll's houses and toy models. The church-tower, if he could but believe the darkness, was slowly, very very slowly, lowering itself to the ground, though he knew that could not be true. The hands on the clock, he could just about see, were also moving so very slowly, but far too fast, he thought, if he could actually see them move...

He forged on into the woods, rather worried about the attitude of the Driffidge Arms when they got to hear about his losing the lunchbox that they had provided.

He must have left it in the graveyard or inside the church.

But he need not have worried.



# JOE R. LANSDALE

## MAN FROM THE SOUTH

*by Robert Parkinson*

When NIGHT THEY MISSED THE HORROR SHOW won a Bram Stoker award from the Horror Writers of America last year, it must have seemed that at last Joe Lansdale had written something pretty special. At least that is how it must have seemed to those only casually aware of Joe's presence in the genre. To anyone who has followed his work for the last few years it must have been more a case of about time too. After all Joe has been writing for over ten years, has been published in the field's top magazines, appeared in many big name anthologies, and put out at least seven novels to date.

So why has it taken so long for him to get on the front page? Why so long in the shadow of King, Koontz and Co?

Well, this article is supposed to be a profile of the man and his work, right? Where he's been and where he's going, yeah? Okay, I'll get to those things, but it is difficult to answer the above questions without understanding the way the genre works; and how Joe's work has been perceived by those running it and reading it. (yeah, sounds real boring I know. But stick with it, things will get better!)

To be a success in any field of Art it seems to me that there are a couple of ways of doing it. Each with varying degrees of effect:

First of all you can be totally radical. You know the kind of thing. Try to push back the boundaries of the field so far that people have to sit up and take notice for a while. Some will stick with you, but most won't. Take the Splatterpunk movement for instance. They tried to pin that label on Joe, but it just slid right off again. He's done stuff that gets down in the dirt, yet he's also written gentle fantasies and humorous westerns.

No, Splatterpunk fits Joe like it fits Ramsey Campbell.

Alternatively, you can try to jump on a bandwagon. Try and imitate a style or form, and hope that people will perceive something about your style of the style that's different to everyone else's (sounds like a contradiction in terms to me, but what do I know?).

Maybe some people will be attracted to you by association with the people you are 'copying'. Or maybe not. Look at any of the Splatterpunk crew.

Then there is the type of person who is happy to go on doing their own thing in a fairly unspectacular way that steadily gains a loyal following. They do it because they need to; because they believe in what they are doing, and will wait for people to come to them. Joe Lansdale is one such writer.

He is not the first to try and forge his own path in the field, and he won't be the last. Others, who have become known for a style of their own whilst staying within the field as a whole, include Robert Aickman, Ray Bradbury, Ramsey Campbell and, most obvious of all, Dennis Etchison.

For years Dennis Etchison was writing his own brand of fiction because he couldn't write any other way; and wouldn't write to suit the labels that other people wanted to put on his work. Dennis's time has come and

so, thankfully, has Joe's.

Like Dennis, the trouble that Joe has faced in the past is that he is at once in many genre's, but most of the time in none. He writes the kind of stories that give editors sleepless nights. They know that his stories are good, though they are not sure where they belong. They fall into so many different genres, or at times so few, that it is classed as 'risky' material. In a competitive market the editor can't always stick his neck out for a risky story, and so it is turned away. The vast majority of punters want their stories cut and dried (preferably cut; nothing like a good dose of grue to satisfy the mass-market-moron, eh?). So, for much of Joe's early career his stories were driven underground; generally finding homes in obscure magazines and small press publications.

In hindsight this could have been a blessing as Joe was still learning his trade. His first story, THE PRINCESS, appeared in 1980 and about this story Joe has said: "My first professional horror story... and it shows."

Over the next few years Joe continued to try and find his feet, putting out stories wherever he could sell them and penning a few novels along the way.

In 1981 his first novel was published, titled ACT OF LOVE. Everything should have been fine and dandy, except that ACT OF LOVE was not a horror novel. This doesn't seem to be any great cause for alarm, yet when you are writing promising horror and you put out a suspense novel things get kinda thrown off course. Clearly, Joe was just writing what he wanted, but because it wasn't what people were expecting it had only limited impact.

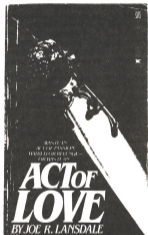
Some people might have thought that Joe had taken one step forward and two steps back.

Between 1982 and 1986 Joe was more prolific than at any time to date. He wrote all kinds of stuff: from horror; to crime; to westerns. Used more pseudonyms than I've had hot dinners, and appeared in as many and varied magazines as you could think of. Once again though, he was still consolidating his style and trying to experiment with mixing genre themes for optimum effect. Thus, he wrote a

western called NIGHTRIDERS under the name Ray Slater. He also wrote several strange 'horror' stories like FISH NIGHT, DUCK HUNT and DOWN BY THE SEA NEAR THE GREAT BIG ROCK (though they weren't really horror, they just appeared in books with other horror folks). There was also a wierd western-zombie-horror novel called DEAD IN THE WEST. Oh, and a couple of heroic fantasies. And a story for Bill Pronzini under the pseudonym Jonathan Barker. See what I mean? The man was everywhere.

When DEAD IN THE WEST was published it seemed that Joe had finally found the formula; the mix of styles he was after to create a uniquely flavoured novel. It looked like he had found his voice; his own place in which to stand up and be counted. Until he wrote THE MAGIC WAGON, which appeared a year later.

This was again a pot pourri of themes: folklore, western, and a hint of the supernatural. But this time he had really given the work a regional feel that had only been touched on in other work. Kind of like how Manly Wade Wellman did his 'John the Balladeer' stories only this time set in Mud Creek, East Texas, an area drawn from Joe's childhood in Gladewater.



THE MAGIC WAGON is a perfect example of how Joe had allowed the needs of the story to dictate the style and narrative - not vice versa. This is the fundamental basis for Joe's work now. He allows the story to develop on its own terms, without pre-conceived ideas of tone, style or theme.

Since THE MAGIC WAGON was published Joe has firmed up his style and control of narrative even further. Giving his work a broad base which covers many genre boundaries without putting him completely outside any of them.

Take a novel like THE DRIVE-IN. Basically a story comprising murder, mob-violence, cannibalism and melting people. Yet it also squeezes in some humour, Science Fiction (okay, a bit nebulous, but it's still there) and some time-travel too!

At no point in time is the story taken out of the horror camp although there are feelers into other genres that provide a little light relief.

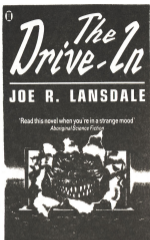
Joe has also turned his hand to suspense novels like ACT OF LOVE and COLD IN JULY, along with a sequel to THE DRIVE-IN, and a terrifying tour de force called THE NIGHTRUNNERS, which would give the Kray twins nightmares.

BY BIZARRE HANDS, a collection of his best short fiction is soon to be published by NEL in the U.K. And forthcoming are a 30,000 word story for a Night Visions volume; a novel from Ziesing Books called GIT BACK SATAN, which he is writing now; some comic book work, and a final instalment of the DRIVE-IN series of stories. Looking ahead to next year, Pulphouse are going to release another set of Joe's short fiction from his early years, though 'a few surprises' has not been ruled out.

People have tried to pigeon-hole Joe, but it really can't be done. Many of his best stories seem to defy categorisation and seem all the better for it. Perhaps people should just be happy to call them stories. After all that's what seems to have mattered to Joe.

In this piece I wanted to try and dispel the notion that Joe Lansdale writes horror and nothing else. Joe Lansdale WRITES. He gives us what the story needs, which should be enough for anybody. Take him or leave him, Joe Lansdale is here to stay.

I just hope he stays for another ten years now that he seems to be getting the acclaim he has for so long deserved.



The following bibliography is far from complete. For instance, Joe's first fiction appeared in the late '70's, though this bibliography only covers stories written since 1980. And there at least another two pseudonyms under which Joe has written. If you do have any information which can further complete this bibliography, then please send it to the editorial address.

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\* Denotes that the  
story was collected  
in By Bizarre Hands

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# 'ROOTS OF A WRITER'

featuring

*Stephen Gallagher*

I can remember the first time that I ever went to the cinema. It was to see WHISTLE DOWN THE WIND, with Hayley Mills. I don't mean that I went with Hayley Mills, I mean that she was in it. Unfortunately there's very little mileage in trying to extrapolate a career from that particular early impression, but if we roll the story along to the second film that I went to see, we get to JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS and we're up and running.

When I look back to my childhood, this is how it always is. The usual memories, of course - beaches and caravan holidays and the weird landscape of the local dump that drew us like a magnet, the time a lizard crawled up out of one of the drains in the next street and a big crowd of kids gathered around to watch it, school plays, the first time I saw snow at Christmas - but there are certain recollections that tower over everything else. I'm talking here not about the things that simply happen to us, but about the things that grab us and fascinate us and open up inner doors whose existence we hadn't even suspected. Key memorable events are a part of our lives, and these we call autobiography. Others are from the realm of the imagination, and these we tend to call influences.

And I can think of plenty of those, some of which you may even share. Like the gigantic Talos, his head creaking as he turns to look down on Hercules and the other wispish little Argonaut who've just boosted a couple of king-sized jewels out of the statue's base...

Or the clockwork flying horse in THE THIEF OF BAGDAD, assembled in parts and then springing into sudden life...

Or - and here's an example of how autobiography and influence can coincide - the way that a family party suddenly ground to a halt so that the TV set could be trundled out for everybody to watch QUATERMASS...

And the same with the first DOCTOR WHO Dalek story, watched alone in my grandmother's front room on an unforgettable series of Saturdays...

And then later on Saturday nights, the first black and white Diana Rigg season of THE AVENGERS...

These, as the song goes, have always been a few of my favourite things.

And there was what I was reading, of course.

Somewhere early along I got hold of THE COMPLETE SHORT STORIES OF HG WELLS, and it never left my side thereafter.

Of that entire weighty collection, two stories made a profound and lingering impression - THE DOOR IN THE WALL and THE MAGIC SHOP. Even then I suppose I was being drawn to the area that I'm most interested in today; that strange imaginative no-man's-land created where the utterly real and the utterly fantastic rub up against one another. I suppose I'd have identified this as 'The Twilight Zone' if only so many of the stories in that series hadn't been so worthy and so pedestrian; five-minute singings padded out with twenty minutes of superfluous dialogue, and mostly peopled

by those dull and two-dimensional beings who seem to live only in television drama and whose offspring now inhabit HOWARD'S WAY. I much preferred THE OUTER LIMITS; I'd lie in bed whistling the theme music until somebody called upstairs and told me to stop. Or a studio-based series of adaptations called OUT OF THE UNKNOWN, transmitted in the early days of BBC2 and seemingly forgotten by most; this has always lingered in my memory as one of the occasions on which Auntie got the tone exactly right, as also happened with Nigel Kneale's THE STONE TAPE. There have been numerous occasions on which I felt that Auntie got the tone completely wrong; I mean, I do have a certain affection for ADAM ADAMANT that time and distance will allow me to admit to, but none for BLAKE'S SEVEN which always seemed to resemble - and here I'm aware that I'm inviting considerable approbrium - like a performance by cargo cultists who once saw STAR WARS and then tried to recreate it dressed in cardboard boxes and tinfoil.

Apart from what sneaked into the house via the TV set, I reckon that I can trace many of these influences to the same two or three sources.

One was the Princes' Cinema in Monton, outside Manchester - now gone, I'm told, and I can't even bring myself to go back and look - while another was a second-hand bookstall that traded on Eccles market every weekend. The former offered the kind of varied Saturday morning children's programme of which the Multicoloured Swap Shops of this world are but pale imitations, and from there I graduated to Sunday double-bills of Hammer and Roger Corman and a sprinkling of William Castle. I graduated kind of early, but it was a family-owned place and they knew me and always used to look the other way when I presented my thirteen-year-old self for the horror shows.

And the bookstall... God, I wish I could find something like that bookstall now. The stuff was all put out in open suitcases under a canvas awning right next to the loudmouth who sold towels from the back of an open van, and you could turn up absolutely anything there.

Nowadays you just don't see an interesting secondhand book until it's been through the hands of half a dozen dealers and its price has climbed to that of a night in a reasonably decent hotel, but on that stall you could pick up an Ambrose Bierce for sixpence. It was here that I got acquainted with Edgar Rice Burroughs - in print, of course, because I don't think he made it around to Eccles very much at the time - and with the prose style of Leslie Charteris, whom I'd take over PG Wodehouse for lightness of touch any day.

Throw all of this in together with Gerry Anderson's 60s output, a few imported copies of FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND (through which I seemed to get to know movies like KING KONG and METROPOLIS inside out long before I ever actually got to see them), and that entire period of DC's BATMAN which collectors now consider the nadir of the character's history (and thank God they weren't around to tell me that at the time), stir in the WILLIAM books by Richmal Crompton and a dash of (yes, I admit it) Biggles, and you'd have a recipe for something I might recognize as a childhood.

I was writing stories by then, but only in the way that all kids do. I'd yet to form any realistic notion of doing the same thing as a career.

So then adolescence hit. I think that's what it was, anyway. Adolescence was when I rediscovered science fiction and focussed on it as my main reading material.

SF for me was a pretty broad definition, from THE LOST WORLD to THE DEMOLISHED MAN; and the cradle of my interest was a number of marked-down, out-of-sequence copies of ANALOG and GALAXY that made their way onto the racks of a local newsagent alongside the aforementioned FAMOUS MONSTERS and DC comics. What I didn't realise at the time was that this stuff was all coming over into Manchester Docks as ballast on the cargo ships and that pure chance had brought it into my hands rather than to a pulp mill or an incinerator; it turned up like flotsam on the beach of a desert isle, incomplete echoes of a far-off culture that I then tried to



integrate into my own view of the world.

This is probably going to sound odd to anyone who knows them only by their more recent work, but the two writers for whom I developed the greatest enthusiasms were Piers Anthony and Larry Niven. Niven for his unSFluke way with character and dazzling ability to flip an idea around to a new angle without making it incomprehensible, and Anthony for the way in which he could invent believable situations with a sense of mythic resonance. Neither was too well-known at the time, to the extent that I could use their names as an in-joke in THE HUMANE SOLUTION, my first BBC radio play, without reaction from anyone. I really don't know what happened to the two of them; both seemed to undergo a radical change of style after A WORLD OUT OF TIME and the BATTLE CIRCLE trilogy respectively, with Niven's books resembling the later works of Alistair Maclean in the was-it-worth-it? nature of their ideas and execution, whilst Anthony turned into something resembling a human laserprinter.

When, at the age of 19 and in my second year at University, I sat down with my old portable typewriter and my hunt-and-peck typing style (whose speed has improved while nothing else about it has altered) in an effort to knock out a story competition entry for SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY, what I was essentially doing was producing a pastiche of all that I'd read and been possessed by in the past few years.

SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY is still fondly remembered by many, and was mainly an excuse to republish NEL book cover paintings in poster format; my story got nowhere in the competition, but about four years later it became the basis for THE LAST ROSE OF SUMMER, initially a radio serial and then my first break into publication (later republished by Sphere under the title DYING OF PARADISE with the pseudonym of Stephen Couper - but that's a long story, and you really don't want to hear it now).

Other SF work followed, including a couple of DOCTOR WHOs and a more-or-less dull novelisation of SATURN 3 that represented a few weeks' paid writing during the long ITV strike of 1979, and through all of it I was slowly beginning to realise that SF wasn't exactly the path that I really wanted to follow.

I looked at my own work and I saw too many recycled echoes and not much of me. I was growing up, I suppose; I was fortunate in that I'd been able to find markets in which I could develop a degree of technical ability, but I still didn't feel that I'd found a voice that was entirely my own.

One problem I had was with the science in SF. I didn't approve of crackpot pseudoscience and yet I couldn't handle the kind of major-league physics that were coming to prevail in the late '70s and early '80s. I don't think it's much of a defence of a story to say that the characters may be cardboard but the maths is all solid.

But where else was I to go?

Straight realism didn't appeal - transitory social values didn't strike me as any more 'real' than invented ones - and to write 'pure' fantasy seemed too much like cheating at cards to win toy money.

It was in this frame of mind that I came up with CHIMERA which, whatever its faults and virtues and the uncertainties of its main character, I could recognise as mine. It had its debts, not least to THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR MOREAU, but it had its strengths as well - some of which I'm only now coming to appreciate after witnessing its surprising durability over the past decade.

CHIMERA sold well, but not terrifically well. But the advance gave me the wherewithal to leave my job and become a full-timer, making it a major landmark in my life.

FOLLOWER, my second novel, has to be one of the best-kept secrets in British publishing. It came out with a whisper, appeared nowhere, received no publicity and no reviews, and for all I know nobody other than STEPHEN LAWS read it (at least, he says he read it. He'll also tell you that Venusians once nicked his bike and that really he's a spy). After that the

relationship with Sphere that had started with SATURN 3 was more or less at an end, and I had nowhere in particular left to go.

Most of my sales over the next three or four years were of radio plays and short fiction; royalties from world sales of the two DOCTOR WHO stories would give the bank account a welcome hike every now and again, but my heart was in the novels and the novels didn't seem to click with anyone. I was pressing on determinedly with my ambition to produce realistic thrillers with fantastic subtexts, but publishers were looking at the material and saying, 'Well, I'm sure it's good, but it's not for us.'

I'm not exactly sure how I kept going. I don't mean financially - my wife kept on working and somehow we steered through the thinnest patches - but in the way that I was driven to refine and polish the same obsessions without encouragement, without approval, without even any particular sense of hope. I seemed to embody the antithesis of the entire study-the-market school of professionalism; I had two novels backed-up, unpublished and apparently unpublishable, and my response to the situation was to start another.

Something weird was happening around that period, and it was happening to me as a reader.

There had been a time, as you've probably been able to gather, that I could read any old crap that came my way and - this is the important part - still get something out of it. I can well remember the day after finishing my final exams, going down to the SF bookshop on Springbank in Hull and buying every Bantam DOC SAVAGE novel in the place, and then taking them back to my room and reading them all, one after another.

I suppose it was a mental reaction to all the heavyweight stuff that my head had been filled with, and the pleasure of it was tremendous. But a little at a time, as I felt my grip on my own output improving, I found that my tolerance was getting narrower. I'm not saying that I was coming to exist on a pure diet of Jane Austen and Gabriel Garcia Marquez; simply that if a book didn't seem to address concerns that I was trying to address, and if it didn't do it in a way that gave me some new kind of insight, then my attention would start to wander.

Which is why, the further along the line we go, the list of influences is added to less and less. I know this is specific to me, but I'm tempted to wonder if it isn't a valid general point about a writer's career. In a way it's a good thing, because it means that you listen harder to the voices inside instead of browsing through the supermarket of everybody else's fiction. But then I think back to the pleasure of reading that I can now only sporadically recapture, and I feel a certain sense of loss; all I can imagine is that it's somehow transferred itself over from the reading into the writing, and so hasn't vanished altogether.

The book that made it no financial sense to write was VALLEY OF LIGHTS, and it broke the pattern. A year later, OKTOBER - rejected by every publisher in town, some of them twice - gave me my first legitimate entry into the top ten bestseller listings. DOWN RIVER followed, then RAIN.

I can no more account for their success than I could for their apparent failure. All I do know is that anything that shaped them can be traced back, not to current fashions or market study or anything half so calculating, but to those things that caught me and fascinated me way back at the very beginning.

Much of the early part of this year has been taken up with meetings and planning, and rewrites for a CHIMERA TV mineries. During one particular week I provided a couple of new scenes to expand slightly the roles of the two children who give the creature shelter on their parent's farm. In response I got an enthusiastic memo.

Love the new material, it said. Very affecting. Just like WHISTLE DOWN THE WIND.....



## THE GINGER BEAR

Guy N. Smith

The villagers called her the Ginger Bear. Few of them knew her real name and to those that did it was of no consequence. Michelle Wildsig had bought the old stone cottage high up on the hillside overlooking the tiny village several years prior to her coming to live there permanently. A huge woman with a mane of bright chestnut hair, she was approaching sixty. Her broad freckled features might have been deemed attractive had it not been for her perpetual scowl of discontentment, her pouted full lips primed to let forth a vitriolic torrent of abuse at any who dared to walk the rough bridle path bordering her dwelling. A daunting giantess, she attempted to turn back hikers and dog-walkers, a Colossus in baggy trousers hitched above her wrinkled ankle socks, her shrill tones echoing across the hills on a calm day. Some chose to ignore her so she piled boulders across the stony track, hammered rotten fencing stakes into the ground, but the stubborn and determined clambered over them. Sometimes the children came to taunt her, threw pebbles up on to the slate roof to bring her charging from her hermit abode, their fleetness of foot ensuring their safety as she blundered after them. Once P.C. McEwan was summoned, parked his small white police car at the end of the hard road and walked the rest of the way. Easy going, he was within a year of retirement, he had no wish to exert his authority in these peaceful surroundings. But this hermit woman had telephoned with a complaint and it had to be investigated for the records. A stern word, it

would go no further because he had no desire to write lengthy reports. "It has got to stop, officer!" Her face was suffused with blood, her hair awry, she was shaking visibly with rage as she ushered him through to the comfortably furnished living room. "What's the trouble, then?" He noted with some surprise the expensive stereo, the television and video, the highly polished antique furniture. "I am not having people walking their dogs daily up here!" She wagged a thick finger, gardening grime beneath the ragged nail. "Nor am I standing for hooligan children using the track as a playground. I don't know their names, but I can describe them to you in a small community such as this..." "The track is a bridle path," the policeman experienced a twinge of nervousness, "a right of way that can be used by the public at any time for..." "Then they can stop using it!" A shrill shout, he saw how her green eyes glistened with liquid fire, her complexion darkened still further. "All I ask is to be left alone, to live my own life. There are dozens of other places in these hills where they can go and foul the grass with their dogs, where those brats can run riot." "I'll see what I can do." McEwan felt a pang of cowardice. He should have laid the law down firmly, but he did not. Instead he departed humbly, hurried back to his car, was glad to be away from this place and approaching the village before it was time to switch on his headlights. It was right what folks said, the Ginger Bear was crazy. More than that, evil: You sensed it exuding from her in the stale odour of her sweat, a hermit who had brooded for too long so that she became sick. Mentally ill. He told himself over and over again, until at length he believed it, that she wasn't dangerous. Just a lonely old woman who refused help and blamed others because they were happy. He decided against making a report; it wasn't necessary, it was a trivial matter. And damn those kids for going up there and stirring it up! If she telephoned another complaint he would tell her, over the telephone, to stop wasting police time.

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The ancient stone circle stood on a small hillock above Michelle Wildig's cottage. Once a place of druid worship, perhaps of human sacrifice, too, many of the large stones had sunk into the soil, become hidden by the grass and undergrowth. An oasis on a stretch of farmland, an island wilderness amidst the ripening corn. Tourists trekked up to it, forged a path through the barley to reach it, came away disappointed because there was nothing to see. Just a few weathered boulders that would sink out of sight altogether in a few years, marked on a map but not maintained. A waste of everybody's time. Collette had come to Britain during the college summer vacation. Petite with short dark hair, she would be returning to Paris at the beginning of September in time for her eighteenth birthday. Having studied English, she had become interested in English history, particularly the druids and their circles. A mystery that intrigued her, and it was for that reason that she climbed all the way up to the stone circle on that humid August afternoon that threatened an electric storm. She told herself that it added to the atmosphere, shivered as she parted the long grasses in search of the missing stones, and gave a shrill cry of fear when she turned round and saw the big woman standing there watching her. "I'm sorry if I frightened you," Michelle Wildig smiled fleetingly. "There's nothing left to see here, you know. Just the sacrificial stone over there by that tree!" "Oh!" Collette glanced where the other pointed, could just make out a large square stone amidst the mass of pink wild willow herb. "Oh, I see." "You can't possibly see from here!" There was a note of reprimand in the

older woman's voice, an annoyance that merged into dominance over the student. "Come over here and see for yourself."

Collette followed the woman, her mouth suddenly dry, fought against a desire to turn and flee. That would have been stupid.

"There it is! Michelle stabbed a finger at the weathered stone. "Placed so that the first ray of the rising sun falls on it. And then..." A harsh laugh, a cutting motion with the flat of her hand across her throat.

"There's probably a good many had the chop on that stone!"

"Oh!" Collette's sweat chilled, she stepped back a pace. She had been enjoying herself quietly until this woman had appeared, just like the... she had to be the one the locals called the Ginger Bear, had... crept up on her. The girl's flesh goosepimpled, there was definitely something sinister about this giant of a woman in her soiled working clothes.

"The druids didn't like people poking about in their domain", the Ginger Bear lowered her voice until it was a harsh, threatening whisper, "any more than they like it now!"

Collette swallowed, stepped back a pace. "The villagers say the stone circle is dead", she wanted to sound defiant but her voice quavered, "that there's nothing here any longer. Somebody tested it."

"Peasants!" Michelle spat the word out. "Ignorant peasants just like their ancestors. Witch-hunters, but they won't drive me out with their dogs and their bastard children!"

Somewhere in the distance Collette heard the first rumble of thunder like the old gods were becoming angry at her intrusion, her doubts. The woman's eyes were fixed on her, burning deep into her. Hating her with a frightening intensity.

"I have to be going.", Collette began to back away.

"Why don't you look at the stone properly now that you've taken the trouble to come all the way up here?" Michelle Wildig shrieked. "Go on, look. And if you look hard enough you'll see the bloodstains of the sacrificial victims! Go on, look!"

But Collette didn't look. She turned, stumbled away across the uneven ground, blundered into the waist high corn because she had lost the path. Running blindly, the ears swishing around her, clapping angrily at her, glancing behind her because she feared that the mad woman might be pursuing her. But there was no sign of Michelle Wildig, just a stark clump of overgrowth on the horizon, the dark thunderheads building up in the leaden beyond it. It was as if the ancient place of worship had swallowed up the Ginger Bear, punished her for her blasphemy.

By the time the student reached the stony track the first spots of rain splatted on her bare arms and face. A clap of thunder almost directly overhead, a jagged fork of lightning that seemed to earth in the stone circle. She ran heedlessly, turned her head away from that old stone dwelling as she passed it. Look closely and you'll see the blood of the sacrificial victims.

Collette didn't want to see the bloodstains, did not ever want to come up here again.

\*\*\*

Carl Tweed had eeked a living from this stony hill farm ever since his father had died and left him the hundred acres above the Cwm. At forty he was stooped and weatherbeaten, the living wrinkled image of his father and his father before him. A dying breed that would resist the march of progress whilst there was still breath in their lungs. You grew corn because the government paid you a subsidy so that they could stockpile it; a subsidy on every head of scraggy sheep and cattle. Nobody wanted them, either, but they still paid you for them. You sowed and harvested your fields, tended your livestock and took them to market. A cycle that lasted until you died and then somebody else took over. Except that Carl

had no children, no wife to bear them. He had often thought about thought about finding himself a woman but he was too busy farming. The old combine-harvester had clanked its way up the steep track, threatened to overheat. Carl had borrowed it from Mister Williams at the Guilden, like his father used to do each harvest. The same machine, this might be its last season.

The storm had been a bad one, large areas of the golden barley lay flat and battered. It should have been combined last week but Williams was using this machine to harvest his own grain crop; when you borrowed farm implements you had to wait in the queue. And the grain was going to be poor this time, it was going to be a lean winter.

Carl started on a swathe that would take him in a direct line to the old stone circle. The contours of this topmost field were such that one had to begin at the top, and work downwards. And that damned circle was in the way, without it you could have combined systematically, taken the upper half in crosswise sweeps. Carl's father had tried to plough up the obstructing wilderness, thought that nobody would miss it and, anyway, once it was gone they couldn't put it back. But those damned "outsiders" were spying on him, two of the trust wardens had appeared on the scene and threatened the old man with prosecution if he so much as bulldozed out a single boulder. So the circle remained untouched, Carl would not risk interfering with it because the snooping buggers were sure to be watching him.

All the same, he hated the place. Not because he was scared of it, simply that it robbed him of half an acre of corn or pasture. He drove the combine as close to it as possible so that not a single row of ears should go unharvested. And that was when he saw the girl.

His first reaction was one of embarrassment, averting his gaze because she was stark naked. Her body was draped across the big square stone, legs lewdly spread and dangling, head back as though she was poised to mate with a lover who skulked in the tall weeds out of sight.

Then a second, sideways glance prompted by a voyeuristic instinct. And that was when Carl Tweed noticed the blood splashed on the smooth white skin, dried by the fresh westerly breeze. Even then, he did not scream until he saw the gaping wound in the slender neck.

Leaping from the combine harvester, leaving the old engine ticking over jerkily, he fled downhill to summon help.

\*\*\*

"'Er wouldn'a open the door", Carl told a stoic-faced plain clothes detective for the third time down at the small village police station. "'Er shouted to me to bugger off because it weren't none o' my business, so seein' as I don't 'ave a phone at 'ome, I 'ad to walk all the way down to the village. 'Er's queer in the 'ead, you ask anybody 'ereabouts. And if you asks me, it's 'er what done it!"

"Thank you for your help, Mister Tweed", the policeman appeared not to have heard. "Now, if you'll be good enough to sign this statement...here, use this pen. Thank you", he glanced at the notepad as he took it back. "We may need to talk to you again but in the meantime you can go and finish combining your barley."

"No bloody fear!" The farmer stood up, a bow-legged caricature of his ancestors, replaced his ragged cap on his shock of iron grey hair. "I ain't goin' up there agin, no, sir! That corn can stop, whether they pays me for it or not. That woman's crazy, 'er done the kid in, whatever you lot says, and I ain't takin' no chances of 'er doin' me in! You ask 'em in the village, they'll tell you. They calls 'er the Ginger Bear and..."

"Thank you, Mister Tweed, you've been most helpful", the detective flourished his hand with an air of finality. "I'm sure P.C. McEwan is aware of all the local gossip. Good day to you."

George McEwan was fully aware of the rumours that were spreading from the village to the outlying farms and crofts. Michelle Wildig had threatened all those who had 'trespassed' close to her cottage. A variety of threats that ranged from court action to physical violence. And she was big and strong... The French girl had gone walking up there and the Ginger Bear, in the act of either slicing bread or carving meat, had rushed outside in one of her uncontrollable rages, bread or meat knife in hand, to remonstrate with the student. And in the heat of the moment the older woman had cut the other's throat, carried the body up to the stone circle and hoped to pass it off as a human sacrifice by the spirits of the druids. Crazy. But the Ginger Bear was crazy! And now she had gone missing from her home!

The CID men had called at the cottage three times since the day before yesterday when the body had been discovered. They had knocked the door, tapped the windows, but nobody had answered. Maybe the old coot had gone away on holiday. Or perhaps she had suffered a cardiac arrest or a stroke following one of her rages, and was lying dead on the floor. The curtains were always kept closed so it was impossible to see inside.

"Go on up there, George, see if you can make her hear. If not, you'd better force an entry."

"Jesus Christ, the honest copper on the beat always got the lousy jobs! All right, I'll see what I can do."

Michelle Wildig did not answer to George McEwan's authoritative knocking. The constable stood listening, heard only the mewling of a circling buzzard over the distant stone circle. He sighed, knew what he had to do, and snicked the lock with a piece of plastic.

The cottage was empty, he had no doubt about that as he stepped hesitantly inside. An odour of mustiness greeted him as if the place had been empty for months. He shivered, embarked upon a hurried check of all the rooms and breathed a sigh of relief when he was back outside in the late summer sunlight with the door closed behind him. Wherever the Ginger Bear was, she certainly was not at home.

He had no reason to walk through the field of uncut storm-lashed corn up to the stone circle. The Scene of Crime detectives had spent the whole of yesterday there, there would be nothing for a village constable to find. Nothing at all. All the same, George McEwan went, unwilling, almost shying away from that area of undergrowth and partly buried stones on the brow of the hill. It was like something was calling him on and he was unable to resist, sweating profusely inside his uniform.

Perhaps, subconsciously, he was killing time so that he did not have to go back to the police station and run any more errands for those two detectives. He slowed his pace but even so he was nearing his destination. Maybe the locals were right, Michelle Wildig had murdered the girl. A moment of madness and then the woman had fled. They would find her. Eventually. It wasn't his problem directly but he could have done without a murder on his beat. Blaming it on dark spooks was the easy way out, he shuddered and wished he could have gone along with the idea. He parted the tall weeds, eased his way up on to the ancient place of worship. And that was when his brain refused to accept what his eyes saw, when he tried to scream and couldn't.

For from the age-old sacrificial stone the gashed throat of the Ginger Bear grinned up at him.





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The British Fantasy Society was formed in 1971 to provide coverage of the fantasy, SF and horror fields. To achieve this, the Society publishes its Newsletter, packed with information and reviews of new books and films, plus a number of other booklets of fiction and articles: *Winter Chills*, *Mystique*, *Masters of Fantasy* and *Dark Horizons*. The BFS also organises an annual Fantasy Conference at which the British Fantasy Awards are presented for categories such as Best Novel, Best Short Story and Best Film. Amongst those who have enjoyed the benefits of the British Fantasy Society are:

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# A GUY WITH A TALE TO TELL

*by David Phillips*

In recent years' several publications have run articles on Guy N. Smith, which have uncovered his writing career. From the early beginnings of short stories being published in the LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE; through the successful paperback publications; and onward to look at the future for Guy N. Smith in the genre. Most notable in this category are the Nov/Dec 1988 issue of FEAR, and more recently, the June 1990 issue of BOOK AND MAGAZINE COLLECTOR. So it would be a waste of time for you to read (and myself to write) an article completely retracing the areas already covered both thoroughly and competently by the above, and other, publications.

Yet although most articles are very defined with their facts, they are devoid of any reasoning behind them. Tending to skim lightly over the surface rather than delving deeper to search out answers. So here, in this article, I wish to attempt at answering one simple question:

Why has Guy N. Smith achieved such a phenomenal impact with novels like NIGHT OF THE CRABS, THE SUCKING PIT and BATS OUT OF HELL?

A great number of critics have blasted Smith's horror novels as 'bad taste trash'; featuring characters with a two-dimensional feel that have more in common with the outer packaging of breakfast cereal compared to the real world. That his plots for stories are too far-fetched for belief; and that titles such as THE SLIME BEAST, KILLER CRABS and THE WALKING DEAD are too 'pulpish' for this modern era of publications'.

Yet surprisingly, it's this unique blend of eye-catching 'pulpish' titles, fast moving action instead of lengthy pages of character building, and wildly outlandish plots that have made Guy N. Smith so popular in this country and abroad.

Reading a Guy N. Smith novel can be compared to the feelings experienced on a roller-coaster ride at the fairground: You want to be scared, exhilarated and have fun at the same time; to see what's coming and know that you cannot prevent it from happening. Your not there to meet and greet all your fellow passengers and find out their most intimate secrets before the journey ends. And this same basic principle can be applied to explain the style behind a large number of Guy N. Smith novels. They contain lots of action with just a minimum amount of explanation. Why detail a character's feelings when they're probably going to die at a later stage in novel anyway. No, a Smith horror novel was written more for entertainment, not education. It may not be the most popular style of writing, but there is a market of avid readers out there buying and reading Smith's novels. And, at the end of the day, that's what publishers are always interested in.

You have to also consider what I can only describe as - 'the Guy N. Smith production line'.

Since 1974 almost sixty Smith novels have been published by an assortment of publishers, but mainly New English Library. In 1977 and 1981 five books were published, though 1982 still holds the record with no less than six books appearing for the first time on the shelves. And only one

year since 1977 has Guy N. Smith failed to produce more than two books for publication (1985 - THROWBACK). Whether this constant writing and publication of novels is a deliberate policy is unknown. But it does mean that a new paperback will be found on the bookshelves, on average, every four months, thus giving the avid reader a new tale to consume.

Some publications, however, have failed to make any impression. They've quickly disappeared into obscurity; and onto the 'most wanted' lists of the true Guy N. Smith collector.

Included in this list are: The four books of the 'SABAT' series from New English Library between '82 and '83; THE LURKERS and THE PLOTTO PACT, published by Hamlyn in 1982; and the TRUCKERS series issued by Mews Books in 1977. Another two books were due to be published in this series, but Mews Books folded after TRUCKERS 2: HI-JACK!

Of course, there have been the certain publications that have achieved great success, as well as a great many reprints.

THE SLIME BEAST, THE SUCKING PIT, THIRST and Guy N. Smith's most popular, NIGHT OF THE CRABS have each sold many thousands of copies. Though it's interesting to note that the earlier works have given Guy N. Smith greater fame compared to his vast number of publications issued throughout the eighties.

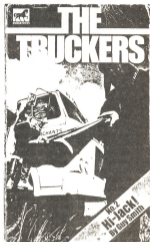
The mid-seventies saw an upsurge in the reading of horror literature when New English Library published debut novels by two aspiring writers: Stephen King and James Herbert. Suddenly the public appetite had been whetted, and their desire to read other stories of a similar nature increased. And there, on the shelves, with several books already published, was Guy N. Smith. You could even say he was the 'third' member of New English Library's 'horror' literature of the seventies.

Nowadays, the number of books been published and new writers' trying to break into the field has increased enormously. So gaining success in this particular genre is far more difficult compared to the seventies when demand suddenly outstripped supply.

Maybe, if Guy N. Smith had been trying to break into the field of horror now, the journey would of taken a different course. I'm not saying that he wouldn't reach the same position within the genre that he holds now. It's just the hurdles to accomplishment are now higher and of a greater number (sounds like any new writer is entering the 'Grand National', but, in some ways, that's exactly what it is). And anyway, this is all pure conjecture on 'what could have happened', and no consolation for the Guy N. Smith reader.

Whatever your own thoughts are on Guy N. Smith's novels, you cannot deny that he is not popular. During the earlier part of this year, Guy himself put many of his old manuscripts, copy typescripts and proof copies up for sale. The whole collection sold out within a fortnight.

Included amongst this collection were: STARLITE, Guy N. Smith's first handwritten and unpublished thriller from 1966; REBEL STAR, another unpublished novel with a football background written a year later; and



PULP. A collection of horror/sf stories, privately duplicated and published as a 'one-off' issue by Guy N. Smith in 1972. These three items alone sold for £50-00, £30-00 and £15-00 respectively. What price they would achieve now, if they appeared on the market, is very difficult to calculate; though you can at least expect them to double in value.



Other collectable items include all early first edition paperbacks, with WEREWOLF BY MOONLIGHT, Guy N. Smith's first published novel in 1974, being the most sought after. And also, the very rare DER RUF DES WEREWOLFS (NIGHT OF THE WEREWOLF), which was only issued in Germany during the mid-seventies by Erich Pabel.

Another aspect to Guy N. Smith's early success has been the quality of the front covers.

For all writers, the front cover is a vital part of their publications as it's the first visual image any potential reader will see. A bad cover can have an adverse effect on the overall sales of any book. A here again, apart from certain exceptions like ACCURSED and CRABS' MOON during the mid-eighties, it's the earlier front covers of Guy N. Smith's novels that have received greater acclaim.

Indeed, Guy N. Smith has been far from happy at the quality of the covers over recent years. He even describes the cover to THE CAMP (Sphere 1989) as "the most diabolical".

"It's just a guy in bed," remarks

Guy. "I presume he's supposed to be screaming. He could be yawning for all I know."

Because of this, Guy has recently taken total control over the front covers to his novels. So if a cover of similar inferiority to that of THE CAMP appears, you now know who will be blameworthy.

There's no doubting that the most successful series of published stories by Guy N. Smith has been the 'Crabs'. From the original appearance of NIGHT OF THE CRABS in 1977, no less than five sequels and a number of short stories have transpired. And, most recently, it's these tales that have taken America by storm.

It's interesting to note that Dell, the American publishers, would like more mainstream horror novels written. Personally, I believe this could be a step in the wrong direction for Guy N. Smith. He has developed a style that is appreciated by his readership and always given him enough scope to cover new areas and ideas. To drift away from this renowned style toward tales more appealing to a greater audience could produce one problem.

With Guy N. Smith you either like what he writes, or you loathe it. And this leaves very little 'middle' ground through which readers and critics can be influenced when taking a new direction. Unless, of course, he decides to write under a pseudonym.

Whatever happens, there will always be a place on the book shelves for Guy N. Smith and his style of writing. And as long as readers still want it, then Guy will continue to produce for the foreseeable future to such an extent that, even as you finish reading this article, another new Smith will be coming soon to your nearest bookshop.



## DREAMS FOR SALE

Michael Reed

It all started in the old market place. It was a dusty old square, full of bustle, barter and bargaining. Vendors of food, jewellery and innumerable other commodities called out an exciting cocktail of shouts:

"Vegetables!"

"Chickens, plump and fresh!"

"Girls, see this! Sparkles at low prices!"

Shouts in the dust.

Hardly a place to meet such a quiet old man, I thought.

He was sitting behind a large wooden box, on which lay several interesting-looking old books. I noticed a singular quality in his eyes; a sparkle, a vitality that I had never seen before.

"Dreams," he said, watching me, as his voice cut calmly through the clamour of the market.

Intrigued, I walked over to his stall. He watched me as I approached, through the bustle of huge-breasted women, children with chocolate mouths and haggling men. His eyes danced, and I had the queer feeling that even in death, this old fellow's eyes would sparkle.

"Dreams," he said again, his voice perfectly audible in the din. Something odd was happening, I felt.

He seemed to be suppressing some inner laughter, and though his mouth remained a thin line, some of the mirth seemed to be escaping through his eyes, like air hissing through the pinched neck of a balloon.

"Dreams are older than the enigmatic Sphinx, more ancient than the gardens of Babylon. Where do they come from? To where do they go? What are the creatures that lurk in the shadows of a nightmare? Nobody knows, Sir, nobody knows."

He appeared to be speaking to himself, as if reciting a strange personal catechism. Indeed, I might have believed this, were it not for those mesmerising eyes, which gazed intently into me the whole time. Not once did I see him blink.

The raucous market sounds were forgotten.

"What price for a dream?" he asked then.

Price? What could he mean?

I smiled unconvincingly.

"Why, are you selling?"

"Oh, no, Sir. I buy."

I frowned. 'Buy dreams?' Was he mad?

"I am a collector, you see."

He was making me a little nervous, but by now I was sure he must be quite mad, and I decided to humour him.

"What would you pay for mine?", I asked.

"Well that would depend on what you dreamed. What was it last night? - Do you remember?"

As a matter of fact, I did.

"I dreamt that I was the Commander of an army, and all my soldiers were before me, on a wide plain. Then, suddenly, I was in a ditch, and all the men were standing over me, raising knives. I tried to cry out, but my mouth was full of sawdust. I awoke just as the knives began to descend. It disturbed me a little, I must say."

He nodded, seeming to contemplate it, then said:

"It is a good dream. I should like to buy it."

"Very well," I answered, "how much?"

"Fifty guineas, I would say."

Fifty guineas! If I could get fifty guineas a dream from this poor insane fellow, I could make a small fortune!

"Do you have that much?" I asked, for I could not believe it.

"And more," he said, and produced a small purse, which he opened to reveal over seventy gleaming coins. I gasped; instantly agreeing to his offer.

"Good," he said, standing up and folding his small stool.

"Where are you going? I asked.

"Come," he said, and made an annoyed gesture at the crowds. "We will do business in a quieter place."

He led me to a small house and we climbed a rickety staircase up to a dim top room. There was a small table, draped with a dusty cloth; two chairs and an oil lamp.

He lit the lamp and the shadows flinched back, as if scalded. Then he motioned for me to sit, and I obeyed. He sat down opposite, his face pale yellow in the lamps glow.

"Give me your hand," he said.

I did so, rather enjoying the eerie, mystic atmosphere.

"Look into my eyes."

I obeyed.

"Do not let your eyes leave mine," he said. "Now, remember your dream."

- Do you have it?"

"Yes," I said, recalling my soldiers.

He studied my eyes.

"Do not look away from my eyes. Ignore everything else."

I did not look away, but I remember all that happened as if I had watched it directly.

The lamp blazed up, and a grinning face appeared in the glass.

"It is the Dream!" he said, "Do not look away!"

The table dissolved, leaving our hands and the lamp suspended in mid-air.

"My eyes!" he cried, "my EYES!"

Then his face melted away, slipping off like hot tallow, to leave his eyes, staring from the glow. Fire gouted from the lamp, splashing across the ceiling, which now stretched into infinity.

The face laughed silently in the glass, and the soldiers of my dream marched across the room, with skeletal faces. A man whose face was a blank canvas ran by, and blood dripped upwards from the floor. Huge sounds exploded all about us.

And I looked into his eyes.

A whiteness surrounded us, and I glimpsed something vast and dark.

Then it was gone, all gone.

He relaxed and let go of my hand. I realized that it ached.

I leapt up, looked about us. The table was back, and no face marred the glass.

"Dear God," I said.

"I now have your dream," the old man said softly. "and here is your money."

He gave it to me and I ran down the stairs, into blinding sunlight, into reality.

"It's over," I said to myself, listening to the market row. "It was awful, but it's over."

I stared at the coins in my hands, and realized that I didn't want them.

I was back, and wanted no reminders of that hellish episode.

I threw the money high into the air.

And it flew away.

The market stalls became piles of sand, and I was standing in a river of blood.

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