

MORPHEUS TALES

REVIEWS

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Reviews By Adrian Brady, Stone Franks, Jim Lesniak, Stanley Riiks, Christian Saunders, Trevor Wright

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LIFE SERIAL By Trevor Wright

Shades was my baby. My first screenplay ever. As Robert McKee said in one of his screenwriting books, by finishing a script I had done what 99.9% of people in the world would never do.

So I took the next logical step and did what any professional screenwriter would do (yes, I was now referring to myself as a professional screenwriter): I sent the script to The Final Draft International Screenwriting Competition! And then waited...

Any day the phone would ring, telling me that not only had I won the competition, but that Hollywood was in the midst of a bidding war over *Shades*. I would be flown to L.A. to meet with the biggest names in the biz. They would offer me a cool million, but my agent would force me to turn it down. We were holding out for at least five, he would later tell me.

Entertainment Tonight was knocking down my door just to get a glimpse of the next big thing! And on top of all my accolades and success, my dream girl Jennifer Love Hewitt (this is 2001 after all) was now stalking me 24/7.

I would love to end this column right here and now. Tell you that this will be the final instalment of "Life Serial", because I am just too busy with my billionaire lifestyle and my wife, Megan Fox (me and Jennifer Love Hewitt broke up years ago; Hey, this is my fantasy!).

But here's what really happened...

EPISODE 3: CAREER KILLER

I got an email from Final Draft.

Here's an excerpt:

What cinematic promise (snappy dialogue; teen-appeal; setting) this script holds is undermined by the writer's off-putting needlessly graphic tone and reliance on shock-value.

Hmm...

Here's another:

Things get way too weird, way too fast here. Specifically, things occur that just stretch credulity too much. If the reader is to fall under the writer's spell, it is important not to break the fictional dream in the opening pages.

Ookay...

Here's some more:

The Shadow metaphor is hit a little too on the nose. We get it. The writer doesn't have to hammer the point home unmercifully.

But this is my favourite:

Given the way women are constantly referred to in this piece (bitch, whore, bitch, whore ad nauseam) doesn't make us hate Venton (the antagonist) but makes us hate the writer for subjecting us to such an onslaught of misanthropic menace.

And then he followed it up with one final word:

PASS!

Pass? What the hell does that mean? Did I pass their test and now I'm a semi-finalist?

So I waited to hear back.

They never called. Or wrote. Or spoke to me ever again.

Over the next few days, I read and re-read their review over and over. The guy really seemed to hate it. Even worse, he seemed to hate me!

But that's when I had a thought. A thought of some pasty little troll sitting behind a desk, reading script after script until he gets to mine, then not only does he have a violent reaction to it, but the pot-bellied little prick goes into hysterics about how I ruined his day.

He pushes his chair back, over-turns his plywood desk, goes about the office smashing the photos of all his loved ones. And then, right there in the middle of his bearskin rug, he drops to his knees and cries to the heavens. A complete and utter meltdown. All because of me. All because of *Shades*.

The thought tickled me.

Then one day, I woke up and I was no longer smiling.

The reality was he was right; *Shades* was no good.

This was reality. I wasn't a writer. I was a factory worker at best.

The dream was over.

I turned off the computer, put the screenwriting book and my completed script on my bookshelf, and walked away.

It would be a whole year before my life changed forever.

NEXT: SOMEBODY LIKES SHADES!

APARTMENT 14F: AN ORIENTAL GHOST STORY By Christian Saunders

www.damnationbooks.com

Having previously lambasted publisher Damnation Books for being completely incompetent and potentially ruining what was a decent Jack Ketchum-style novel from Alan Spencer, I was more

than a little worried coming to this short book.

My second encounter with Damnation Books brings me a short novella. At just over 40 pages this really is short and it doesn't entirely convince me that the list of editors on the Damnation Books website actually have anything to do with the finished product. Fortunately, this story hasn't been quite so massacred. There are loads of missing commas, but this irritates rather than ruins the reading experience.

And what a reading experience is it. Saunders speaks from experience as he tells us a subtle tale of Jerry, a young man leaving his life behind in London to travel to the other side of the world, and struggling to make a home in northern China, when he discovers his flat is haunted.

Things develop as you would expect as Jerry goes to see a palm reader who has an attack while he's visiting.

So far so good, nothing exciting or innovative, but this version of *The Grudge* in China works. And actually, it's not the story that makes the lasting impression, but like *Paranormal Activity*, it's the sense of creepy, spooky horror that makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up and makes you feel utterly uncomfortable. It's that haunting feeling, the one that makes you frightened when you're alone on a dark winter night. The one that stays with you long after you've finished reading the story.

Spookily good, and I look forward to reading more of Saunders' work.

By Stanley Riiks

OF DARKNESS AND LIGHT By Paul Kane

Publisher: Thunderstorm Books (2010)

Price: 25:00 (Limited Edition hardback) From: www.thunderstormbooks.com

Set against a bleak Midlands backdrop, this is a tight, claustrophobic novel about an average teenager who is devastated when his childhood sweetheart leaves him for another guy. Just when Lee Masterton thinks his life cannot get any worse, he is coerced into taking a job as a night watchman, and then he meets the beings that inhabit the light... and the dark. It is rare to find a horror story containing such a healthy dose of modern realism in the form of urban decay, unemployment and dissatisfied youth, and this story certainly makes these elements work to its benefit. Though it comes across as being slightly contrived in places the prose is crisp and the plot tightly woven, the characters believable and the style accessible. The author does

a great job of building tension in anticipation of a thrilling climax that cannot fail to move you.

If the hype is to be believed, by the time you read this review this book will already be out of print. Someone somewhere thinks that it might be a good idea to publish a single print run of the hard back, the number of which depends entirely on pre-orders. It is unclear whether this strategy will also apply to the paperback. Maybe it's a sign of the changing face of publishing, but the tragedy is that if it backfires then the vast majority of horror buffs will be denied a great read.

By Christian Saunders

JUST AFTER SUNSET By Stephen King

Pocket Books

www.simonandschuster.com

Stephen King is a legend. I first read his work when I was a lonely teenager, and I still pick up his books with a grin on my face.

His novels are usually epic and magical. Most of the time his short fiction is great, but lacks the impact of his longer works.

Here, King provides us with his usual variety as he works his way through the horror/thriller genre, offering strange and spooky tales for your dread and enjoyment. My favourite of the collection was "N", although the first story, "Willa" was a very close second.

Fans of King will no doubt enjoy the collection, and King has that ability to tell a story in a way few other writers can manage. Although his novels are where he excels, this is one of his best collections, and as always, readers can't help but be sucked into the world's King creates.

Another excellent addition to the Stephen King library!

By Adrian Brady

Interview with James A. Moore

What inspired you to start writing?

I never intended to be a writer. I had plans to be a comic book artist. Sadly, the lack of any artistic talent slowed me down. Because I didn't actually know any writers, I was plotting the things out myself. When I showed some work of mine to Marc McLauren, then of Marvel Comics, he suggested I try my luck with writing after he gently crucified my lack of ability to draw. He also later bought my first story and I really haven't looked back since.

How did you go about first getting your stories

published?

I wrote a story and submitted it. When it worked the first time, I did it again. The previous answer correlates directly.

How did you get your first novel published?



Definitely a matter of being in the right place at the right time. Stephen Pagel of Meisha Merlin publications started his house while also working at White Wolf. We talked a few times and he asked if I had anything

ready to go. As luck would have it, I'd finished *Under The Overtree* around a year earlier.

Do you write in any other genres?

I like to mix genres. So, while I'm normally considered a horror writer, I also like to throw in a little science fiction or fantasy or mystery or even a little romance.

What other writers have influenced you?

Good Lord. All of them, really. Some in a good way and some in a not-so-good way. The biggest influences? Poe, King, Straub, Barker, McCammon, F. Paul Wilson, Thomas Monteleone, Charles Grant, Dean Koontz, H. P. Lovecraft, Ray Bradbury, Stan Lee and a few dozen others.

What are your other influences?

Comic books, trashy horror movies, role playing games, and a plethora of really mediocre fantasy novels with a few really good science fiction novels thrown in for good measure.

Where do you get your inspiration?

I watch the news. After a few sessions of the latest insanity, the rest is easy.

When writing novels for White Wolf, do you approach the writing differently?

Not at all. The only real difference is that I have to remember the rules they've created for their world as

opposed to the rules I've created for my own.

What is your writing day like?

Up at 4:15 AM get to work by 5 AM (I have a day job at Starbucks), get home, decompress and read emails, then start writing for anywhere between four hours and eight. Normally I'm done by 7:30 at night and I rest and spend time with my wife. Around eleven, I go to my office to do a little editing, then collapse on the bed for a few hours. Repeat as necessary.

If you could go back in time to when you started writing and give yourself one piece of advice what would it be?

Write a few outlines and maybe even sell a couple of books before you finish writing them. I still don't do much of that.

Do you read reviews of your work? How do you deal with criticism?

I read every review I run across and then I read them again. If they have criticisms that are based on more than somebody having a bad day, I consider those criticisms carefully. I also keep a record of all of the reviews I find, because you never know when one of them might become a blurb on a mass-market edition of a novel.

What's the most exciting thing about writing for you?

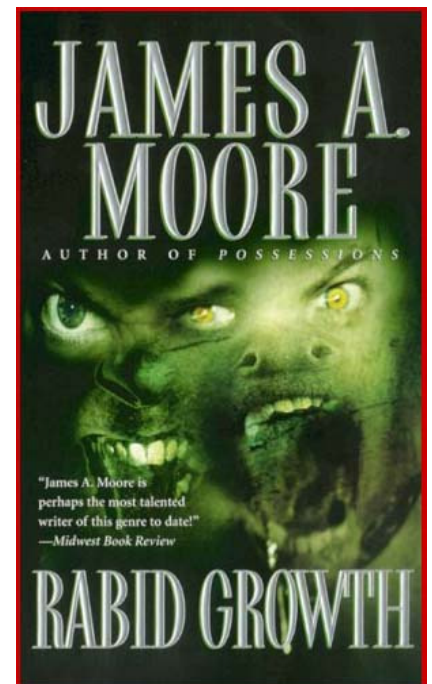
The act of writing itself. I love telling stories.

What's the most frustrating thing about writing for you?

Editing. I can't edit myself. No matter how many times I try, I miss half of the typos. That, and the whole selling part. I'm a fairly patient soul, but waiting to hear back from editors can be very, very taxing.

What is your proudest moment as a writer?

The first time I held one of my books in my hands is



up there. But actually, when I told a fan of White Wolf Games' RPG that I had written a particular section of a book we were discussing and he physically backed away from me - that was sweet.

Are you disappointed with any of your work when you look back on it?

All of them. I look at them again and I always find something I would have done differently.

What's the best piece of feedback that you've had from your audience?

Gah! That's a tough one. I love hearing that something I wrote got a reaction from a reader, but beyond that, there's simply been too much feedback for me to remember any one incident. Though finding a quote on a website from *Under The Overtree* was shocking and amazing. I never thought of myself as particularly quotable.

What is the most important thing when becoming a writer?

Discipline. If you're serious about it, career-serious I mean, then you have to write every day.

Do you write for a particular audience, for yourself?

I always write for myself. If I don't enjoy it, how can I expect anyone else to?

Do you have a ritual or routine for when you write?

Sit down and start writing. That's about it.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

Sculpt, read, draw, watch TV, spend as much time as possible with my wife.

Have you ever tried your hand at other types of fiction or different media, TV or film, etc?

I got my start in comics and I've done several comic scripts. Someday, when I have time, I'd like to try screenwriting.

Who are your favourite authors and favourite books?

Anthem by Ayn Rand, *The Shadow Saga* by

Christopher Golden, *Hellboy* by Mike Mignola, All things *Repairman Jack* by F. Paul Wilson, *The Dark Tower* series and pretty much everything else by Stephen King, and damned near everything Lovecraft ever wrote, because he was damned good at sucking you into a tale.

If you could meet anyone, fictional or real, dead or alive, who would it be?

All those guys I listed as favourite authors and influences? Yeah, all of them. A few I've already had the pleasure with. Oh, and Spielberg.

What are you working on now?

Boom Town, my first ever digital novel.

Do you have any advice for other writers?

Never give your work away. Never refuse advice from your peers. Never give up. Write every day. Read copious amounts of books and news articles from all genres and non-fiction as well. Always write for yourself.

What scares you?

The faltering economy, the news, and losing my loved ones.

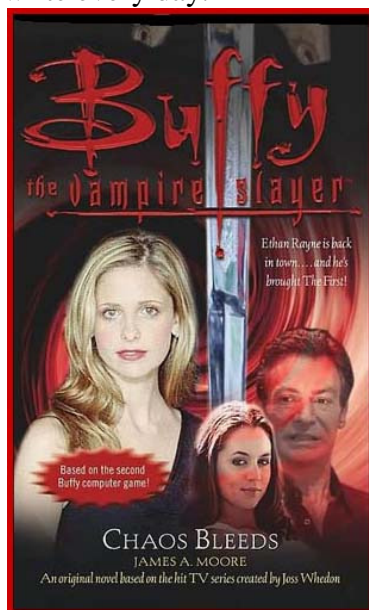
SCULPTURE (18)

www.sculpturethefilm.com

This is a psycho film that starts at the end and shows us how we arrive at this point, or how bad the psycho's childhood was to arrive at this point. At this forensic biography it excels, like *Psycho IV* or *Nightmares In A Damaged Brain*. But if you've seen more than one horror film, once you've seen where it ends, it doesn't take much to realise how we got there.

The main character is a sculptress who grows up in an abusive family where father and son are bodybuilders. It would have been awesome to have approached this from a more humorous retro angle and set the action in the cheesy 80s or early 90s and deliberately gone for a straight-to-video *Grindhouse*-style. However, this opportunity is missed and the film is well-lit in razor-sharp digital, so sharp that the lower budget special effects and CGI are totally exposed to scrutiny and look bad in a bad way.

The character development and acting are good, but the story is just killing-after-killing and not particularly inventive. The two most interesting things in *Sculpture* are Raine Brown and Alan Rowe Kelly. Raine Brown, a classically trained 5'1" no-



nudity teaserama won Best Actress for *Sculpture* at the Dark Carnival Horror Film Festival. Her compact frame and steadfast underwear make her just as alluring as a leggy actress who always takes it off. Identifying as a *homme fatale*, Alan Rowe Kelly is the Pete Burns of horror. Like that other Transylvanian Christopher Biggins, Alan Rowe has a magnetic quality that makes you just want to know more about them and share cocktails. Arriving fashionably late to horror from the world of fashion and commercial make-up, Alan Rowe has done nothing but collect awards and plaudits for directing and acting. Shining in the way that only trans can, even in a bit part like *Sculpture* Alan Rowe is a stand-out.

Unfortunately, while *Sculpture* had the potential to be *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* if it took a different approach, it ended up being as interesting as *The Rocky Horror Slide Show*. Still, hindsight is always 20/20 and hopefully there is more to come from Raine Brown and Alan Rowe Kelly.

Sculpture also has the creepiest kid since Peter Bark in *Zombie 3: Nights of Terror*: "Mother, this cloth, it smells of death!"

By Stone Franks

AND NOW THE NIGHTMARE BEGINS: THE HORROR ZONE Edited by Jeani Rector
www.thehorrorzine.com

I'd never heard of the Horror Zine before, but apparently it's an online magazine. And judging from this collection of short stories and poetry taken from its pages, it's excellent!

If fiction from Ramsey Campbell and Simon Clark isn't enough to wet your appetite, then the rest of the fiction is of such a high standard that neither of those two luminaries produced my favourite piece!

There's also a good selection of poetry, including work by Joe Lansdale, and the dark poetry really sparkles.

Plus there is some really great artwork, although I wish there had been even more, since it really helped set the spooky atmosphere.

The Horror Zine will hopefully continue to provide excellent entertainment for those who seek it out, and this collection brings together such a strong presence that I will definitely be a devotee from now on.

By Adrian Brady

Riding the Wave of Seasteading By Stephanie Kalina-Metzger

For whatever we lose (like a you or a me),
It's always our self we find in the sea.

E. E. Cummings

Unhappy with your government? Judging by abysmal Congressional and Presidential job poll numbers, many of us here in the U.S. are. Want to shed the shackles of the ever-encroaching nanny state? Getting away from it all permanently might be possible in the near future as seasteading makes its way to a dock near you.

The Seasteading Institute (TSI) is a non-profit organization created in 2007 by Friedman and Gramlich "to establish permanent, autonomous ocean communities to enable experimentation and innovations with diverse social, political and legal systems," according to the founders.

Seasteading - creating permanent dwellings on the ocean - is a concept that Paypal Founder, Peter Theil would like to see become a reality. Theil has contributed towards this effort through a donation of \$500,000 in seed money to help create The Seasteading Institute, which will expand on the work of Patri Friedman and Wayne Gramlich, authors of *Seasteading: A Practical Guide to Homesteading on the High Seas*.

And this, folks, isn't just a wet dream. TSI is planning on plopping a prototype into the San Francisco Bay within the next two years. When I questioned Executive Director Patri Friedman as to how he is working with the bureaucracy to make that happen, he responded, "We are seeking to avoid interacting with bureaucracy as much as possible. Baystead will legally be a boat, so that it doesn't need any special treatment or permission beyond the existing rules for boats."

What kind of people, you might wonder, would be interested in seasteading?

According to Friedman, (a self-professed Libertarian and grandson of Milton Friedman), "the initial group of seasteaders will be Libertarian and it's then likely that there will be a Libertarian form of government." However, that isn't to say that all seasteads would be Libertarian. In what Friedman deems a "dynamic geography," some seasteads might be founded by other groups attempting to separate themselves from the broader society. In typical Libertarian fashion, Friedman doesn't put any restrictions on how people would be governed on a seastead. He envisions a system "where small

groups experiment, and everyone copies what works, discards what doesn't and remixes the remainder to try again."

It definitely gives new meaning to "whatever floats your boat." To some this might seem like extreme experimentation, but to others it is a tremendous opportunity for individuals to discover which form of government works for them and to participate in this freedom of choice without coercion. When governments compete, you decide! I like the idea of jumping ship if I don't like the way the place is being run. The way things are now I have to wait for elections and then they give me crummy choices anyway.

When questioned on how a seastead might get food and electricity, Friedman responds, "Think cruise ship." In other words, much of the food would be imported, but Friedman also speaks of hydroponic greenhouses and aquaculture as alternative means of sustaining seastead sustenance.

He goes on to explain, "Floating cities are already real - millions of people take cruises every year, and they're cheaper than the cost of living in some US cities. We have many differences in mind, but cruise ships prove that the idea is possible. Now we just have to make something safer, stabler, more spacious, more modular, incrementally built, cheaper, permanent, and worth visiting even though it mostly stays put!"



Baystead, the first prototype, would borrow from an offshore oil-rig design known as a "spar platform." In the middle would be a reinforced concrete tube with external ballasts at the bottom, which will be filled with water or air to raise or lower the "living platform" on top.

As a Libertarian, I find the idea of floating on a sea of tranquility without the millstone of government around my neck quite intriguing. In fact, I think I could thrive (especially without those pesky taxes), that is, if there are personal trainers

onboard. Just mention the two words "cruise ship" and I pack on 20 pounds. On the other hand, the 300 square-foot-per-person vision scares me a bit. I need to stretch my legs out on occasion, so it might not be quite for me. I have a friend in D.C. who lives in what is essentially a walk-in closet, so he might be more suited to such confinement. Hey, as long as he has that satellite link, I should think he'd be as happy as one of the clams he will be bobbing along with. That too, however, could be a bit cost prohibitive, to the tune of several hundred dollars a month, at least in the beginning.

This might prompt you to ask, "Why would people be attracted to this lifestyle?"

Barry Dively, a fellow Libertarian and hotel manager for an upscale worldwide chain finds the idea intriguing and answers the question this way: "It's really very simple. Anti-freedom legislation is starting to snowball and is becoming more and more oppressive. Seasteading might be the last bastion of liberty available to the free man."

One can't argue with that.

Still, I wonder what type of person would be content to live out life on what is, in essence, a platform on an ocean. My curiosity takes me to www.seasteading.org, where I ask for volunteers to explain why they feel they would be good candidates for the seasteading lifestyle. There are no takers. I guess those who would go to such lengths to be free from government might also find my prying rather perturbing, so I have to be content to draw my conclusions from their banter on the forums.

What I find when I surf on over (pardon the pun), is that many would-be seasteaders hold Master's degrees in various fields such as Electrical Engineering, Spanish, Economics.

There's a physician onboard, a pilot, several divers, computer programmers... the list goes on.

Some hail from the United States, others from as far away as Australia, the Phillipines and the Netherlands. They appear to be a diverse lot, but judging by some of the shall we say "high-end" conversations, Geekspeak seems to be shared by all. (Okay, I'll admit that I didn't exactly feel like Mensa material after visiting.)

Know anyone who wants to get in on the ground, err, sea floor of a exciting project just in its infancy? According to the website, paid positions of Chief Scientist and Director of Engineering are now open, along with dozens of ways that you can volunteer.

Some call it Libertopia, others say it sounds fishy, but the two freedom-loving entrepreneurs who

founded the Seastead Institute are working hard to prove the naysayers wrong as they strive to bring their “sea village” dreams into laissez-faire reality.

NINJA ASSASSIN (18)

From the very first kill it is apparent that *Ninja Assassin* is making a large tribute to Mats Helge’s masterpiece, *Ninja Mission*, a rare (one of two?) Scandinavian contribution to the mid-1980s ninja craze and the most successful Swedish film ever. This offering from Dark Castle entertainment has generally received bad reviews, but is a fun watch, particularly after a few beers, and fills a void that no one else is trying to fill. Like *Ninja Mission*, the film is set in Europe (having been filmed in Berlin), and has the feel of a computer game movie meets Bourne, although the main character comes across as a bit of an emo-ninja at times.

Reviews of *Ninja Assassin* have been scathing and belittling, but the film is entertaining nonetheless. After all, it’s a gory ninja film; how can it not be entertaining? Ninja films can only really be compared to other ninja films. You go to a ninja film to see a particular array of (usually violent) things. Don’t try to compare it to *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Matrix* (by the same producers). Main names in the film are South Korean pop star Rain, who has real grit coming from a background of poverty via the sweat shop exploitation of the Asian music industry; Rick Yune; Naomie Harris from *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World’s End*; and legendary old school ninja Shô Kosugi (*Black Eagle*, *Pray for Death*, *Nine Deaths of the Ninja*). See it for what it is.

By Stone Franks

DUNRAVEN ROAD By Caroline Barnard Smith

www.immanion-press.com

Like vampires? Like cults?

Not the most natural bed-mates, but in *Dunraven Road* the two collide!

When Zach leads a group of his friends in attempts to join the vampiric world things are bound to get out of hand. Despite this seemingly predictable storyline, the plot is secondary to the character interactions. This novel is a study in characterisation; Sapphire, Zach, and Gwyneth are particularly well portrayed.

It’s an erotically charged vampire thriller, which evokes a mood is both intensely emotional and highly relatable.

Anyone interested in erotic vampire fiction

will enjoy this part *True Blood*, part *Twilight*, all love-fuelled vampire action.

Overall, it is an excellent story with an evocative cover to boot.

By Adrian Brady

The Writing Life: This is me By Eric S. Brown

Hello. My name is Eric S. Brown. If you read zombie fiction, there’s a chance you may have heard of me. I’ve signed on here at Morpheus Tales to write about the everyday struggles and rewards of being an author. Before this column really gets rolling with stuff like submitting, hunting an agent, or coming up with ideas, you need to understand who I am and where I’m coming from with my approach to the literary world.

I was born in the middle of nowhere, U.S.A. I fell in love with horror and superheroes before I even started school. In fact, I was the weird kid in kindergarten who spent his time off in the corner with the latest issue of Fangoria, at least until the teachers caught me and took it away. In second grade, we had a “career day” and I showed up in a Green Lantern logo shirt. My baffled teachers argued that I couldn’t be an interstellar cop with a power ring, so I said “Fine, I’ll be a writer.” I actually started writing then, silly things like redoing the script for Halloween 3 since it had no Mike Myers, creating my own tales set in the Alien Legion universe from Epic Comics, and the like. I continued to write as I got older and was even on the high school paper where I wrote about SF and Fantasy movies and books. It wasn’t until I was twenty six that I finally got off my butt and started writing my own serious stories and attempting to submit them at the urging of my wife.

My first real effort, a zombie-type horror tale entitled “Night Shopping” was snapped up by two different small press magazines. I went with the larger circulation magazine and quickly popped off another tale to the other, which they accepted as well. I discovered online market listings like Ralan.com and kept right on submitting encouraged by two stunning first acceptances. By my second year, I had over a hundred publications in the small press and some semi-pro ones to my credit. My first two books, which were collections of my short fiction, were also published that year. By the beginning of my third year, I had declared myself a “zombie author”. I love zombie fiction and films dearly and really wanted to give something back to

the genre and hopefully make my mark on it. In 2005, my first attempt at a novel, *Cobble*, was released. I really felt like my career was taking off and the zombie world was finally beginning to learn who I was. The same month of *Cobble's* release, however, my son was born and life threw me a curveball.

With the birth of my son, my writing went on hold as the realities of being a parent set in. I had to work a lot more hours at my "day job" and go back to full time to make ends meet. In addition, I felt so much that I had to be the grown-up that my inner child and inspiration died.

Thankfully, as all writers do, I had pre-sold quite a few things that were pending release. I told myself that by the time they were all in print, I would be back at it hardcore. Sadly, that was not the case. It wasn't until 2008 that I finally picked up the pen with any real heart behind it again, and I doubt I would have then had the zombie world not come to me.

All of a sudden, Jonathon Maberry asked me to be in a book he was putting together called *Zombie CSU*, and Dr. Michael West, better known to the world as Dr. Pus, came out as one of my number one fans and asked to read a bunch of my short fiction on his ever growing show, *Library of the Living Dead*. Things in my family life were calming down as well and my wife had finally opted to go back to work. The next thing I knew, I was back and bigger than ever in the small press. Coscom Entertainment signed me to a multi-book deal, Permuted Press finally decided to release

Season of Rot, Black River Publishing asked me to do a second edition of the book that had immediately preceded the "break" in my writing, and even Dr. Pus decided to start a publishing company and signed me to several books starting with my "best of". The non-fiction side of my writing took off as well, as I decided to use my

addiction to comics to land some gigs. I landed a new column about comics for *Abandoned Towers Magazine* and later went on to land a book deal with their parent company Cyberwizard Productions.

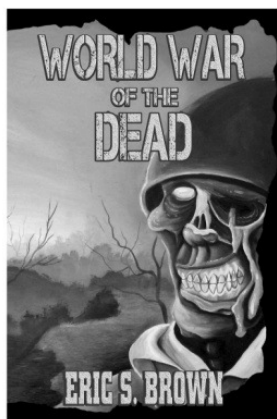
Thus, in 2009, I was living the dream and truly blessed. I was only working part-time at my day job and my writing paid the rest of the bills. I had 8 books released that year including an anthology I edited for *Library of Horror*, which was my editorial debut. The awards apparently noticed me as well with *War of the Worlds Plus Blood, Guts and Zombies* placing as a finalist

for Horror novel of the year in the *Preditors and Editors* awards. Also, *Season of Rot* was nominated for a *Dead Letter Award*. So now, rolling into 2010, I have five books under contract, three of which are completed, and I continue writing several columns for various publications. My son is now four years old and I remain both happily married and a total horror/comic geek. With this column, I hope to be able to share with you the stories of what a writer faces and struggles with every day, from deadlines competing with everyday life to the ups and downs of creativity.

So for the next column, prepare yourself to enter the world of the undead, superheroes, and six-guns.

Wicked ZOMBIE Fiction

by **Eric S. Brown**
 from **COSCOM ENTERTAINMENT**
www.coscomentertainment.com



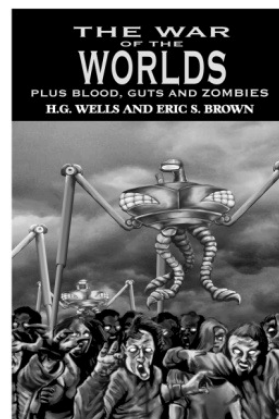
In the heat of World War Two, a threat far worse than Hitler and his Third Reich has risen: the dead are walking and have an insatiable hunger for living flesh.

WORLD WAR OF THE DEAD

ISBN 978-1-926712-00-0



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There's panic in the streets of London as invaders from Mars wreak havoc on the living, slaying the populace. Humanity struggles to survive, meeting fear and death at every turn.

But that's not the only struggle mankind must face. The dead are rising from their graves with a lust for human flesh. It's kill or be killed, if you want to survive, otherwise you might become one of the walking dead yourself.

THE WAR OF THE WORLDS PLUS
 BLOOD, GUTS AND ZOMBIES

ISBN 978-1-897217-91-7

THE HOUSE OF THE DEVIL

www.darkskyfilms.com

Starring Jocelin Donahue, Tom Noonan, Mary Woronov

Written and Directed by Ti West

Just like 95% of every independent horror film made in the past 10 years (my completely factual figures, of course), *The House Of The Devil* is another contemporary movie made to look like a flick from the glorious sub-par VHS boom of the 70s and 80s.

In capturing the crackling Grindhouse aesthetic and choice costuming of the day, *The House Of The Devil* succeeds. In keeping the ADD generation of the 21st century awake, it fails miserably.

College sophomore Samantha Hughes, played by up and coming hottie Jocelin Donahue, is leaving the dorm and her slutty roommate behind to become a boarder in the spacious home of one Dee Wallace (you know you can't have a 70s homage without E.T.'s mom, just ask Rob Zombie). Samantha needs \$300 in 5 days for the deposit.

Enter the Ulmans (played with scene chewing panache by horror icons Tom Noonan and Mary Woronov), rich strangers in need of a babysitter for Mrs. Ulman's elderly mother!

Yep, that's right; the couple are going out for a night on the town in the midst of a lunar (or solar) eclipse and can't leave Grandma home alone for fear of - well, who knows. After all, Mr. Ulman swears that she is self sufficient and keeps to herself. All he needs Samantha to do is watch TV and order pizza. He even gives her extra money on top of the \$400 he's already giving her to watch the old hag just to - you know, order pizza. He really pushes that pizza too! No joke.

So the couple is off and poor Sam is bored out of her mind, so she does what any respectable babysitter getting paid more than a high priced hooker would do, she goes through their things. She goes through their desk drawers, their kitchen drawers, their closets, their photo albums, then in positively Kevin Bacon-esque fashion, dances, jumps, and swings through their house, 80s pop music blaring.

This goes on for about, oh, 30 minutes. To top it off, the scene right before all of this snooping and dancing takes places is one of her ordering the pizza which will be there, as the pizza guy states, in, you guessed it, 30 minutes! I guess the director was going for that "real time" gimmick here.

Finally, twenty minutes or so before the movie ends the flick shifts gears out of the blue to

become some sort of satanic sacrifice pic complete with some witchy demon woman and voodoo chants.

As for the ending, suffice it to say, it is the most implausible ending I've seen in a fortnight. Seeing as how I have no idea how long a fortnight actually is, I can just assume that it means a really long time.

Speaking of a really long time, that is exactly how long it's going to take before I decide to take another stroll through *The House Of The Devil*.

By Trevor Wright

THE VOICE OF MANY WATERS By John B Rosenman

Publisher: Blue Leaf Publications (2009)

Author Website: www.johnrosenman.com

There's science fiction, and then there's science fiction. Stories as far-out as this are not to everyone's liking, but nobody can deny that there is a great imagination at work here. *The Voice of Many Waters* concerns itself with a race of peace-loving (but very shallow) people called the humana who live in an alien version of Eden, and the efforts of a neo-Catholic priest named Peter who endeavours to show them the way of the Lord. Along the way he is helped by an insect-like creature called Xanthu, and together they attempt to educate the masses. However, as they soon discover, change usually comes at a cost. Bizarre? Yes, very.

By Christian Saunders

ETHEREAL TALES #6

www.etherealtales.co.uk

This is such a great little magazine. And it is filled with great little stories, each of them nice and short. As always, Editor Teresa Ford provides a nice mix of stories, including one of her own entitled "Night Visitor", a simple horror vignette that gets the pulse racing.

The other tales in this sixth issue are similar, but all different, if you take my meaning. All are fantastic slices of stories, short and sweet. Those longer tales, such as Andrew M. Boylan's "The Butterfly on a Wheel" are cut up and given to us in instalments - which is a bit of a shame really, I would not have thought it would be that long. I prefer my short fiction served in one sitting but I suppose it provides incentive to read the next issue and find out what happens.

My favourite story is "Adeline" By Chris Castle, a subtle epistolary tale of loss.

Ethereal Tales continues to provide a great mix of fiction. This is what the small press is about.

By Adrian Brady

Falun Gong: The Force is With Us By Mike Brines

Falun Gong is a Chinese sect that claims to be an offshoot of Buddhism. It was originally founded in 1992 by Li Hongzhi, a clerk in the Jilin provincial grain bureau of China. Li combined elements of Buddhism and Daoism with a bizarre leavening of UFO-ology into his own variant of *quigong* (energy cultivation.)

*Quigong*¹ is a system of exercise and meditation whereby a practitioner is believed to increase their spiritual or psychic energies, increase vitality, improve their health and well being, and even gain paranormal powers. According to the teachings of Falun Gong, practitioners can undergo a transformation and gain supernormal powers such as levitation, psychokinesis, and “fixing power” or the power to command those with a weak mind to obey.²

If those powers sound like the sort of thing you’d see practiced by Jedi in a Star Wars movie, you’re right. What Falun Gong teaches is nothing less than mastery of The Force. Known as Chi or Qi or Vril, an inner energy “force” present in all living things, the concept has been around since ancient times. George Lucas just dressed it up in science-fiction trappings.

From a humble beginning in 1992, Falun Gong has multiplied in the spiritual vacuum of Communist China at a fantastic rate. In only sixteen years they now number over 100 million members worldwide. According to the CIA³ this would make the Jedi religion the fifth largest in the world and the largest religious group in China.

Originally, the Chinese government supported *quigong* because it seemed to promise savings in state medical costs. A government memo quoted Premier Zhu as saying that such groups “can save each person 1,000 yuan in annual medical fees... If 100 million people are practicing it, that’s 100 billion yuan saved per year...”⁴

But the growing popularity of the movement alarmed the authorities, who saw in it the potential

for rebellion, especially after membership totals in Falun Gong rose above that of the Chinese Communist Party and began to include senior members of the government.

The final straw was publication of an article critical of Falun Gong in an obscure magazine, *Science and Technology for Youth*. In an article published on April 11, 1999, a Chinese physicist who scorned the group’s “unscientific” claims called it a “superstitious cult” and warned that adherents might suffer health consequences by forgoing modern medical treatments. Local followers wrote to the editor demanding an apology, which was refused.

On April 19th ten members of the group began protesting outside the offices of the magazine. Within three days the protest had swelled to more than 6,000. When the local police arrested one (!) of them, the rest took their grievance to the local magistrate. They were thrown out of court and beaten by the police. Ten were arrested and events continued to escalate.

Less than a week later, ninety miles away in the heart of Beijing, 16,000 Falun Gong peacefully assembled outside the Communist Party’s headquarters to ask the government to grant them official recognition, and to release those arrested the day before. That thousands of citizens had managed to coordinate such a mass demonstration, with little notice, such a distance from the source of the trouble, at such a politically sensitive location, stunned the Communist leadership. Worse, it was discovered that the demonstrators included intellectuals, party officials, and even members of the police and security forces.

Panicked, the government outlawed the organization and began a campaign of ruthless persecution that reminded some of Stalin’s purges, even establishing an organization, Office 6-10⁵, with the expressed mission of destroying the cult.

Their publications were seized and destroyed. Public practice of *Quigong* meant arrest. The government even employed informers to ferret out those who practiced in the privacy of their own homes. “Ringleaders” were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Li Hongzhi fled to America. But the sect continued to grow.

He question remains why would the Chinese Communist Party become so obsessed with the destruction of a peaceful group that had no political aspirations and didn’t even consider itself a

¹ Not to be confused with Qui-Gon Jinn, Obi-wan’s mentor.

² Falun Gong: The End of Days, Maria Hsia Chang, 2004

³ CIA World Factbook, www.CIA.gov

⁴ Falun Gong: The End of Days, Maria Hsia Chang, 2004, pp 3-4

⁵ Named for the date it was established: June 10th.

religion?⁶

In Chinese history, the appearance of religious movements is closely tied to massive peasant uprisings and the collapse of the ruling dynasty. Beginning with a revolt against the first dynasty, the Qin in 209 BC,⁷ if one considers Communism to be a secular religion, then the last such uprising occurred in 1949 and put the present dynasty in power.

The 19th century saw many revolutionary social upheavals, stretching from the French Revolution to the original communist uprisings of 1848, and from the American Civil War to the Paris Commune of 1870. But the most violent such uprising was the Taiping Rebellion in China. Little known in the West, the revolt was initiated by a religious cult led by Hong Xiuquan, who claimed to be Jesus Christ's younger (Chinese?) brother. The rebellion engulfed half of China's provinces, laid waste to 600 cities and took 20 million lives. The CCP⁸ fears the same thing might happen again and cost them their power.

In 2001, in referring to the way the Chinese government was treating Falun Gong as a rival, the British magazine the *Economist* observed, "It takes a cult to know a cult."⁹

The Chinese government has claimed that Falun Gong is supported by foreign powers seeking to change the government of China. The *People's Daily* called the sect "A cheap tool... of anti-Chinese forces in the West."¹⁰ Politburo member Luo Gao claimed Falun Gong had "degenerated into a tool used by hostile foreign forces."¹¹

But through intense persecution, the government of China has created the very nemesis it fears, as the Falun Gong has become increasingly politicized. In a message to his followers, Li Hongzhi said the Chinese government is "... utterly inhuman and completely without righteous thoughts. So such evil's persecution of the *Fa* (law) can no

⁶ Falun Gong denies they are a religion because they lack any form of clergy, being loosely organized with disciples who are merely "ordinary people" fully engaged in society. They insist they are only trying to promote the cultivation of spiritual and moral rebirth in common people. (Just like the followers of Jesus did before the Church hijacked his teachings into a gravy train for the clergy.)

⁷ Falun Gong: The End of Days, Maria Hsia Chang, 2004, pg 50

⁸ Chinese Communist Party

⁹ Falun Gong: The End of Days, Maria Hsia Chang, 2004, pg 59

¹⁰ *People's Daily* newspaper, January 9, 2001

¹¹ Falun Gong: The End of Days, Maria Hsia Chang, 2004, pg 16

longer be tolerated. ... If the evil has already reached the point where it is unsavable and unkeepable, various measures at different levels can be used to stop and eradicate it... "¹² a clear call to revolt.

Why should we be concerned? Shouldn't we be rooting for the Falun Gong? Wouldn't a revolution leading to a non-Communist China be an improvement?

Consider this: the Falun Gong shares a remarkably similar world-view with another religious "cult" that turned to politics.

Both the Vril Society and the Falun Gong believe that the present world civilization is only the most recent of a series of such civilizations. Each successive civilization was destroyed when they became degenerate.

Li Hongzhi referred to an earlier civilization "on the periphery of Europe" that "sank under water during a continental change" as the punishment of the gods upon their degeneration. The Vril Society would have simply said that Atlantis perished because they let their bloodlines become contaminated.

Both societies believe that people in the Himalayas were spared destruction and managed to preserve some of the writings and lore of Atlantis. Other survivors went underground establishing the twin cities of Agartha and Shamballah. Both groups also believe in cultivating ones inner *qi* or *vril*¹³ energy.

And while both believe that "race mixing" by interbreeding¹⁴ will lead to spiritual disaster for a nation, they differ on who is scheming to pollute the gene pool. While the Vril Society blamed it all on the Jews, the Falun Gong (what with Jews being pretty scarce in China) blame the inhabitants of flying saucers who are carrying out a systematic breeding program with abducted humans.

Similar worldviews lead to similar responses. This is why communist parties the world over have performed in the same miserable, repressive way when they gained power, no matter where that might be.

In the same way we should expect the Falun Gong to follow in the footsteps of the Vril Society. That society established several offshoots, including the better-known Thule Society. Their combined membership in 1918 was 1,500, including many

¹² Falun Gong: The End of Days, Maria Hsia Chang, 2004, pg 15

¹³ They're both the same thing; just different names for The Force.

¹⁴ The Falun Gong calls it *hunza renzhong*.

influential members of the German government and society.¹⁵ By 1933 they had spawned a multi-million strong political movement and their leader, Adolf Hitler, had become undisputed ruler of Germany. Everybody knows what happened next.

Could this happen in China?

Alvin Toffler, futurist and author of *Future Shock* and *The Third Wave*, in his latest book¹⁶ anticipates just such an outcome:

“Imagine, as some in Beijing no doubt do, the ultimate nightmare vision in which a future Mao arises... not a communist Mao, or even a capitalist Mao but in a country hungry for something to replace the near religion of Marxism, a Mao who gathers workers and peasants and young Third Wave elements together under a religious flag ... Now imagine *Zhongnanhai* [the government compound in Beijing] in the hands of new, potentially fanatic management – and in control of China’s nuclear weapons and its missiles.”

Nor is his the only voice expressing such a view. Ross Terrill in, *The New Chinese Empire*,¹⁷ spun seven possible scenarios for the future course of events. In the two most likely, he foresees an economic downturn (similar to what we are now experiencing) leading to civil disorders as the miserable populace rises against entrenched corruption of the Communist elites. He postulates either the People’s Liberation Army will stand with the party and restore a Stalinist police state, or that the army might side with the people, as the Rumanian army did in 1989, starting the chain of dominoes that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of Soviet communism. In that case he foresees China coming under control of a Fascist ideology. And what ideology could prove more Fascist than one whose symbol is this?



The above is the official symbol of the Falun

¹⁵ *Unholy Alliance*, a history of Nazi Involvement with the Occult, Peter Levenda, 2005

¹⁶ *Revolutionary Wealth*, Alvin and Heidi Toffler, 2006, pg 329

¹⁷ *The New Chinese Empire*, Ross Terrill, 2003, pp 331-334.

Gong taken directly from their web site.¹⁸ The swastika is an ancient symbol from Hindu and Buddhist mythology. The Falun Gong have it turned around into the leftward-looking “benign” version. But since their worldview is just a Chinese version of the same occult beliefs that motivated Hitler, Hess, Himmler, and the other true believers of the Nazi Party, can the results be any different?

Al-Qaeda may turn out to be the least of our worries.

EDEN FELL By Lily

Publisher: Damnation Books (2009)

Author Website: www.lilyauthor.com

Blurb: A dark and modern fairytale that chronicles Eden’s life as she falls from grace...

Lily (aka Lily Dark) produces some extraordinary work. Her stories are intricate, multi-



layered dreamscapes that are definitely not for the faint-hearted. She pulls no punches whatsoever and doesn’t even try to. This short novel, her latest book, is the story of a quite-obviously unhinged and perpetually strung-out artist named Eden

and her ceaseless battles with her inner (and outer) demons. It can best be described as a modern fairytale with a healthy dose of realism and psychological horror, and is by turns tragic, moving, insightful and deeply, deeply unsettling. For all her bad habits and character faults, you just can’t help rooting for the tragic figure of Eden as she faces her constant daily struggles and becomes increasingly detached from reality.

The story is exquisitely written, but the author’s heavy use of metaphors can be slightly distracting at times. That said, she writes with such unbridled intensity that you find yourself striving to understand the complexities of the story just so you

¹⁸ www.clearwisdom.net

can catch a glimpse of the bigger picture. Lily, the great talent that she is, makes everything clear in the end. This is chick-lit with bloody razorblades attached.

By Christian Saunders

Interview with Editor of *Ethereal Tales*, Teresa Ford

You've been editing and publishing Ethereal Tales now for well over a year. What prompted you to start a small press magazine? What was your aim for the magazine?

The idea to create *Ethereal Tales* came when I was chatting to my other half one night, and I said 'Wouldn't it be cool to make a magazine'. You know what it is like when you get an idea and it seems great at the time, but the next day you forget all about it (or is that just me?), however, on this occasion I was as enthusiastic the next day and the zine was born.

My aims were to enable as many writers to have their work in print as possible, and this is one reason why I ask contributors to try and keep the word count to 2000 words or under. I am also honest enough to admit that I relished the idea that I could include the occasional piece of my own writing within its pages. Lastly, I wanted to get to know other writers and make a community of creative people - which I have followed up by starting a website, www.etherealcontacts.co.uk where all types of creative folk can sign up, let others know about themselves, and advertise for help with their projects.

For those not familiar with the magazine, how would you describe it?

It incorporates creatures and themes from dreams and nightmares. The stories can make you laugh, or give you the chills...but hopefully they all stimulate the readers imagination and give them a little peek into the world of the weird and wonderful.

If you like vampires, werewolves, fairies, witches, and mermaids, you have a chance to find them and so much more within the pages of *Ethereal Tales*.

What makes a good short story?

A good short story needs a proper beginning, middle, and end. The characters in the tale need to make the reader care what is going to happen. After all, if you can't connect with them why would you

bother to keep reading. Oh, and of course a twist is always a good addition to keep the reader on their toes.

What stops a story from being good enough to be published in Ethereal Tales?

Even if a story is on theme and interesting, it won't make it into the zine if it is full of grammatical errors and typos. Of course, it is possible for the odd mistake to be left in most peoples' writing and if this happens I will let the writer know and they can change it. However, I am not here to proofread the entire story and there have been occasions where I have had to reject stories as there was just too much that needed correction.

There are also times when a story starts off with promise, but then just fades rather than having a proper ending or meanders for pages and pages without anything much actually happening. I want stories that hold my interest and keep me entertained; that way I hope the readers will also be satisfied with what the zine presents to them.

Do you send personal rejection emails or standard ones, and why?

I do have a basic template, which I base rejection letters on and on top of that I usually try to expand on my reasons for rejecting the piece, as I feel a writer who chooses to send work for inclusion deserves some constructive feedback. However, sometimes there is nothing constructive I feel I can offer in which case the standard letter has to suffice.

What writers/editors have influenced you?

Adam Bradley, Editor of *Morpheus Tales* has provided inspiration and some great practical help and advice. It was a great help to have someone who had 'been there and done that' to talk to when I was still feeling my way with this editor lark.

I love many, many writers including Anne Rice, Poppy Z. Brite, Terry Pratchett, and Storm Constantine (to name just a few). As to whether, and how much, they have influenced my writing... I would have to leave to my readers to decide.

What is the hardest part about running a small press magazine?

For me, one of the hardest parts has to be rejecting people's work. I am by nature a nice person and so it can be very difficult to say no to writers who have chosen to send their work to me. All I can hope is that those rejected know that it isn't personal when I turn something down and it really does hurt me

almost as much as it hurts them.

But, I guess in practical terms the hardest thing is trying to get the word out about the zine and to bring in readers. After all, a publication needs contributors, but without readers to read the work they provide, it can all seem rather pointless.

Ethereal Tales



Issue Six January 2010

What has been your proudest moment so far?

When I held that first issue in my hands and it had become a reality, which was a very proud moment. I have been known to get crazy ideas and then not actually do anything with those ideas, so to know I had gone from thought to finished publication was extremely gratifying.

You've also produced an audio book of stories featured in Ethereal Tales. How did that come about?

Well, when I first created the zine I thought it would be fun to create video adverts for the stories. So I

got the writers, where they were willing, to record the sneak peeks (which are on the website to let people see what is in each issue) of their stories and put the audio into ads, which can be seen on YouTube (just look for *Ethereal Tales*).

I loved hearing the extra dimension that the readings gave to the stories, and I thought it would be great to have full stories to listen to, so the idea for an audio book was born. I put together some of my favourite stories from the first years worth of issues, some read by the writers and the rest by volunteer voice artists, and it resulted in nearly four hours of audio entertainment.

Are there any plans for more Ethereal Tales products? A collection, perhaps?

I have thought about creating a collection with the best of each year's issues, but at the moment it is still in the thought stages.

People wishing to read the zine, but who are on a budget, will soon be able to download back issues from my online shop for £1.00 each. At present Issue One is available, but all other back issues will be available soon from www.cutencreeper.co.uk.

I am also planning to produce accessories including key rings and pocket mirrors with the front cover artwork.

There is also a standalone audio story and booklet in production: one of the longer stories I was sent which I felt would make an idea audio project.

What is your favourite part about running a magazine?

My favourite part would have to be the fact that I produce something that contributors are proud to be part of and readers enjoy reading. I create it alone; I choose the stories, put together the layout, print and assemble the zine, and finally package and send out *Ethereal Tales* entirely by myself from home (though of course I couldn't do any of this without the input of the contributors). It is extremely satisfying to know that people think the end product looks professional, and that so many writers wish to be involved with it for more than just one issue.

If you could choose any writer to appear in Ethereal

Tales *who would it be?*

I suppose it might be expected for me to give the name of a famous writer in answer to this, but in truth the writer or writers that I would most like to appear in the are any talented writers who want to be a part of *Ethereal Tales* as more than just a notch on their writers bio 'bedpost'. Anyone who can not only entrust a great story to me, but also wants to help promote it and be a part of our little family, is a treasure and would be my choice to appear in the zine.

What advice would you give to writers who want to send a submission to Ethereal Tales?

Read the submission guidelines (it is surprising how many people don't seem to do so) and check your work thoroughly for typos and grammar errors.

Think magic and myth, mystical creatures and strange worlds. Ideally what I would like to receive are fairy tales for adults, and if you feel you can send me that then what are you waiting for... get submitting.

KELL'S LEGEND By Andy Remic

www.angryrobotbooks.com

How do you create a possible successor to one of the greatest fantasy characters to ever live? I'm obviously talking about sword and sorcery legend Conan. The Cimmerian Barbarian has entertained readers for eighty years, and film goes for thirty. There hasn't been a new Conan novel for a long time, but if you read any of the Tor novels you'll find them remarkably similar - a plot on rails with very little imagination.

Conan is a prototypical fantasy barbarian, with well-known characteristics that many have tried to emulate.

Kell's departure from these characteristics is what makes this story work so well. He's a grumpy old man, a warrior past his prime and discarded by society, hiding away in a small northern town where he makes soup and is visited by his granddaughter, Nienna. After one such visit, the ears of the old warrior prickle as he hears screams. His door is kicked in by albino warriors who bleed white blood when he kills them using his trusted blond-bond axe, Ilanna, and the fight is on to save Nienna. It soon becomes clear that the albino soldiers are part of an invading army, and Kell is joined in his cause by a seducer and popinjay Saark, who's more interested in saving his own skin and bedding Nienna or her friend Kat.

The invasion is led by General Graal, a leader of the Vachine, a race part vampire part machine. Graal is a cruel and twisted warrior who will stop at nothing to capture the entire human race, so that he and his people may feed.

Kell is a hero for the modern era, complete with idiosyncrasies, a deep and troubled history, and dealing with his own set of problems whilst struggling desperately to survive. The other characters in the novel are also very well drawn, and as the world gradually expands on their voyage, so too does the world become more detailed.

This book isn't read as much as it is experienced. It draws you in deeply in the first hundred pages and then, as more and more dangers are thrown at our band, you feel you are surviving with them. Remic isn't afraid to kill off a great character or throw in another challenge to spice things up and ramp up the tension. You can't help feeling like you have to hold on tight just to stay on for the ride. It's that tension and excitement that make the book stand out. There is real danger here. In most fantasies you know that the main characters are always safe because they have to appear in the next book, but although this is Book I of the Clockwork Vampire Chronicles, it's not the Tales of Kell chronicles and you really do believe that at any moment another character could be killed. There's an evil and twisted streak to Remic, which not only gives us added danger (and a little torture), but also provides the grim humour that is sadly lacking for many modern fantasy novels.

Okay, so it's not perfect. For a start, you have to wait for the second instalment. (Grr! I have no patience.) There are far more typos than you would expect from a major publishing house and this can be bothersome, but not overly so. Also, the start of the story is a little slow, but only for the first couple of chapters and then it's full speed ahead!

Kell's Legend is a rare book. It's one of those reads that makes you sit up and slaver with excitement. It has the page-turning quality of a thriller, the depth of an epic, the kind of protagonist that comes round one in a lifetime, and a story that twists and turns like a snake. It's imaginative, brilliant, exciting, amazing, and truly inspiring. Yeah, I really did fucking love this book!

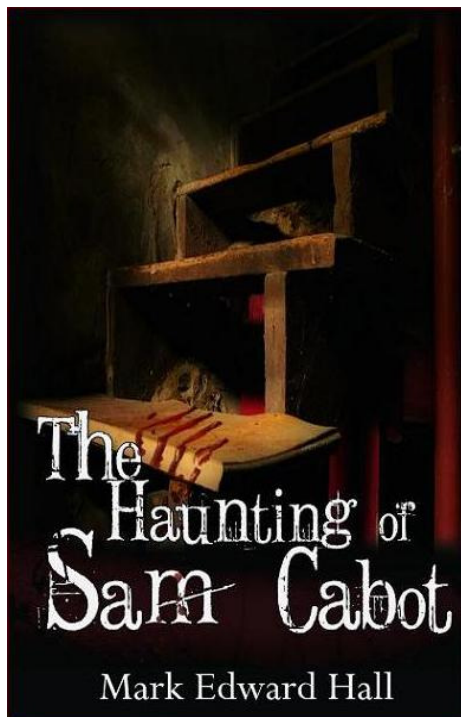
The cliffhanger ending will leave you on the edge of your seat begging for the next instalment. This series has the potential to be truly legendary and I really can't wait for the next chapter.

By Stanley Riiks

THE HAUNTING OF SAM CABOT By Mark Edward Hall

Publisher: Damnation Books (2009)

Author Website: www.markedwardhall.com



Blurb: There are places that hold evil, houses so vile, so tainted, that people refuse to live in them.

Farnham house is one of those places...

When writer Sam Cabot and his family move into their dream house in the Maine countryside they soon settle into an

idyllic lifestyle. However, a few strange discoveries and some startling revelations later, things begin to fall apart as the resident evil in the house begins to flex its muscles. There are echoes of the Amityville Horror and a few Lovecraftian overtones in this latest offering from Mark Edward Hall, previously issued as part of a collection but now seeing a stand-alone release. So is the story strong enough to stand on its own? In a word, yes.

Haunted houses are pretty standard fair, and on the surface this book appears to tread on all-too familiar ground. However, there is much more going on here than the basic premise suggests and you'd be making a huge mistake if you took this book on face value. It is very cleverly written with some neat plot twists. The tale suckers you into believing that you *think* you know what's going on, but do you really?

The story is told in first-person narrative flashback form and the odd sentence is slightly more complex than it needs to be, but you wonder if much of this is intentional as Hall skillfully charts the protagonist's slow descent into madness. It may just be an illusion provoked by the unreliable narrator, but at the story's conclusion the reader is left with the distinct impression that parts of this book are autobiographical. One can only speculate *which* parts...

By Christian Saunders

THE OCCULT FILES OF ALBERT TAYLOR By Derek Muk

www.occultfilesofalberttaylor.wordpress.com

This book collects eleven reprinted tales concerning the investigations and adventures of Albert Taylor, a fictional anthropology professor. The first story of the collection concerns a séance at the Birchwood Asylum where Taylor is called in to remove a ghostly presence and gets more than he bargained for - a vampire.

Think low-budget *X-Files* and you have a good idea of what's going on.

Taylor's adventures are entertaining and the presence of the protagonist throughout each of the stories helps give the book a cohesive feel. The adventures, although all supernaturally based, are far ranging and different enough that you don't get bored with them.

It is difficult to pick a favourite story, but the longer stories such as "The Exhibit" and "Psychic" have a bit more of an impact.

A good collection of short stories; Albert Taylor is a solid protagonist and anyone missing the *X-Files* or the *Twilight Zone* will be able to fill the void.

By Adrian Brady

From the Catacombs: Lovecraft as Protagonist By Jim Lesniak

H.P. Lovecraft. The name alone conjures up the unknown, unnamable, cosmic terror of the universe, and "Lovecraftian" has become a shorthand phrase within the genre of weird or horror fiction. With one word a certain mood and sense of pacing can be evoked, surrounding oneself with an image of eldritch horrors that cannot be described (but probably shall). This is not new and has been commonplace for years, if not decades. However, we have seen multiple graphic novels of late featuring the gentleman from Angell Street himself (both in boyhood and as an adult) cast front and centre as our faithful protagonist.

The usage of H.P. Lovecraft as a protagonist hits similar beats in practical usage; much like the term "Lovecraftian" insinuates certain stylistic choices. With differing arrays of historical accuracy, we tend to see known family members: the insane father dying in the asylum, the overbearing mother, the maiden aunts, and the dotting grandfather. Frequently, Winfred Lovecraft's madness is described as caused by possession of the

Necronomicon rather than a more prosaic cause; invariably his instruction to young Howard to destroy the book is ignored, leading to a good time for all. Howard's childhood predilection for classical antiquity and study, which contributes to his awkward and introverted adult state, is a fertile field. His imaginative fantasy life tends to have a more ominous source than *1001 Arabian Nights* or *Bulfinch's Mythology* in his fictional meanderings. Of course, the mundane details of HPL's childhood are open for wide interpretation due to the dearth of detail available from primary sources; Lovecraft even destroyed the bulk of his juvenile fiction as it did not meet his standards.

It is easier to draw a picture of the mature Mr. Lovecraft with the aid of S.T. Joshi's definitive biography, *Lovecraft: A Life*, and the overwhelming amount of correspondences Lovecraft maintained during his life. As with his childhood counterpart, authors using adult HPL have certain points that are commonplace. Adult Howard disdains his writing, lamenting that the hackwork he is doing for the down market pulps will never reach the heights of Poe. His reclusive, bookish nature minimizes the amount of face-to-face companionship he has and exacerbates his attempts to communicate with anyone outside of the written word. The overbearing mother of his childhood made him unable or unwilling to have a relationship with women. Another useful portion of HPL's life is his brief, doomed marriage to Sonia, although this is addressed in only one of the graphic novels reviewed below.

A major convenience of using HPL as protagonist is being able to insinuate that the mythos, in whole or in part, is real. As a child, HPL uses a gateway to explore strange shores. The Necronomicon is an extant book within the author's possession. As an adult, HPL is either fighting the intrusion of the elder gods or is driven mad by the gradual cognition of the indescribable horrors that exist in the cosmos. The main value of HPL the protagonist is that his literary output can be absorbed into a new endeavour without creating from whole cloth. Hence, the efficacy of HPL as a protagonist depends on the integration of the mythos with the man. A cardboard cut-out can be used and fall flat, but the best will attempt to find the humanity in the meme.

Furthermore, we must always recall that HPL is doomed. There are no happy endings in his fiction, just as there was not a happy ending in his life. No matter the brief, fictional victories, he will die penniless, alone, and nearly forgotten as an

author. This mood, in addition to the dread encompassed by the mythos itself, colours any educated reader's sense of the graphic novels reviewed here.

Lovecraft (Vertigo, SRP US\$24.95) adapted by Keith Giffen from a Hans Rodionoff screenplay, art by Enrique Breccia.

This is an entertaining, if historically flawed adaptation of an unproduced screenplay. The broad strokes it paints of H.P. Lovecraft's life are at the expense of the plot. This graphic novel follows HPL from boyhood through the dissolution of his marriage. The plot concerns HPL's attempts from childhood on to fight back the intrusion of the strange, old gods from Arkham that drove his father mad. Conversely, we suspect these gods to be the workings of a diseased mind; a history of familial madness and the absence of other observers of any phenomena would evidence such. The primary conduit of these "other" creatures and places comes in dreams or at times of great stress for our stalwart author. The creatures themselves cast doubt in HPL's mind: did he send Sonia away for her safety and sanity, or was she driven away by his creeping madness? Was his grandfather's death caused by a malevolent shoggoth, or a simple heart attack made phantasmagoric by a grieving boy?

Despite the excellent artwork from Breccia, the "Lovecraftian" mood does not envelope the reader, but we see elements of the mythos. There are several scenes that allow Breccia to stretch out with the fantastic and horrific in a style reminiscent of Rick Geary's work in his Tales of Victorian Murder series, with less of a caricature aspect to the people. The weakness herein is the attempt to cover too much time in H.P. Lovecraft's life in short order. Knowing Giffen's work in the past and his skill with dialog and pacing, he must have followed the screenplay closely as this graphic novel does not have his "voice," unless that was a conscious choice to enhance the oddness of HPL's conversations. Despite the litany of famous fans on the cover blurbs, browse this one and see if it catches your fancy before making the purchase

Strange Adventures of H.P. Lovecraft 1-4 (Image, SRP US\$3.95 each) by Mac Carter, Tony Salmons and Adam Byrne.

This mini-series foregoes the trajectory of following HPL from childhood into awkward adulthood. Rather, we have a prolog featuring Abdul Alhazred and his fatal quest to pen the Necronomicon. This is a fast-paced story, covering only a few days in the life of HPL without sacrificing the mood or the horror of the elder gods.

Our bookish writer friend sees his dream girl slipping away as an uncanny, unnamed tome selects him as “the gate.” Horrific dreams come to Howard, featuring phantasmagoric creatures committing atrocious murders of people who had recently wronged him. Unfortunately, the murders are true and HPL becomes a primary suspect, despite his frail nature. Our hero must close the gate, clear his name, and try to save the girl in fine pulp fiction style.

Throughout the adventure, the detailed, moody art maintains a consistency between the mundane and the fantastic. The dialog rings true for our antiquarian protagonist, assisted by judicious quotes from his written output. This is as tightly plotted as *Lovecraft* is loose; there is no wasted space. Using HPL set a baseline level of knowledge that the story drew from and expanded on quite well. A personality is developed within these pages, built up from the framework of historical knowledge of HPL. We get to know our protagonist outside of the stereotype. A collected edition of this mini-series will be released by Image in the coming months, and it’s worth seeking out.

Howard Lovecraft and the Frozen Kingdom (Arcana Comics, SRP US\$12.95) by Bruce Brown and Renzo Podesto.

Designed as an all-ages adventure, this graphic novel focuses on HPL as a boy, using the now-standard conceit of his father being in possession of the Necronomicon as guardian. HPL is given the book by his worried mother after an unfortunate visit to the asylum. Despite his father’s warning, Howard chooses not to burn the book and discovers that it is a gateway to the titular Frozen Kingdom. After saving a Deep One who grudgingly befriends him, they embark on their adventure within the kingdom. This is an interesting take on HPL as a boy; one that mixes the mythos with a touch of *Lord of the Flies* and distils it all down to a boy and his dog (the Deep One, a.k.a. “Spot”) wandering through adventures. As he is in the adventurous state of his life prior to his grandfather’s death, there is a sense of wonder in Howard’s journey and so the excitement outstrips any fear.

There is a lot of material to be mined here; unfortunately it feels rushed in the final third. From the structure (and the “chapter” covers), it appears that this was initially intended to be a series, but then shoehorned into a graphic novel format. A six issue series would have fleshed out the ideas presented in the first two chapters. As it is, the denouement feels desperate for closure, yet sets up

the possibility of sequels. *Frozen Kingdom* is an entertaining read despite the compressed ending, and the creative team shows potential to bring a series in the vein of *Leave It to Chance*. A confident publisher should give this series room to grow and breathe. With the far-reaching publicity it is receiving in this early stage, there is the possibility for a broad appeal series here.

Young Lovecraft (KettleDrummer Books, SRP US\$14.95) by Jose Oliver and Bartolo Torres.

Here we have HPL as a boy in a newspaper-style comic strip, which originally came to life as a Spanish language web comic. The use of HPL is not a crutch, but a springboard for mythos related humour, of all things. Because HPL appears as the protagonist, the target reader already knows something of the story’s background and expects appearances by elder gods and eldritch tomes. Young Howard is more frightened of hippie hitchhikers, little girls, bullies, and craft emporiums than the strange creatures he evokes. The party with Poe and Baudelaire is a showcase for the wry humour that translated quite well from the Spanish. Treated as a gag strip with minor amounts of continuity, new readers can jump in almost anywhere.

Without the need for continuity, the usage of HPL helps this strip hit the ground running; there is no need for exposition explaining who this boy is. The lack of parents is mentioned in passing and the off-camera aunts are a thorn in HPL’s side. The noted awkwardness around girls does not seem odd for a nine or ten year old boy since we were all there once. Crisp, clean art in a cartoony style make this an easy reading collection, although not for all ages. For those needing a break from cosmic horror, read this to laugh away your night terrors.

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