

# MORPHEUS TALES

## REVIEWS

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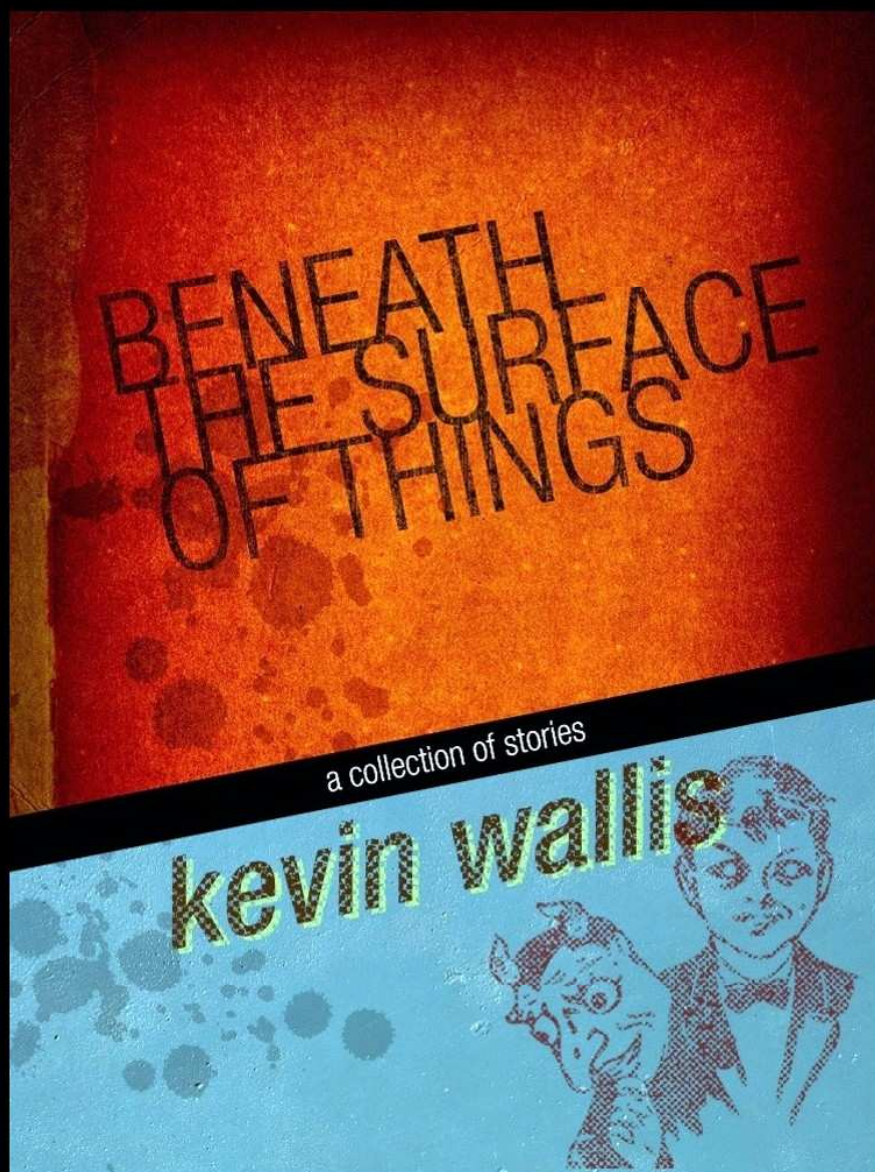
Reviews By Adrian Brady, Jim Lesniak, Stanley Riiks, Christian Saunders, Trevor Wright

Proof-read By Samuel Diamond

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Grisly, terrifying,  
absurd and surreal

Erik Smetana, Founding editor of  
Stymie Magazine.



Look for it  
September 2010

[www.bardsandsages.com/  
kevinwallis](http://www.bardsandsages.com/kevinwallis)

## **LIFE SERIAL: THE SPECIAL DOUBLE SIZED INSTALLMENT! By Trevor Wright**

So to recap: My first attempted screenplay was a miserable failure. End recap.

### EPISODE 4: THE FINAL CHAPTER??

I was done writing. Done. Done. Done.

From this point on I was going to focus all of my attention on working my new day job making power tools on an assembly line.

Yeah, right. I couldn't stop writing if I tried. And believe me, I've tried.

Writing is in my blood. Whether I find the actual act of doing it tedious or not, I can't be without it. I was destined to create... and to make loads of money, which I knew would come. All I had to do was think of a new way to get my scripts out there. Obviously competitions weren't going to work. Nope. I needed to go right to the source. I needed to get a "Hollywood In".

Enter UCLA.

Yep, that's right: the University of California, Los Angeles School of Theater, Film and Television.

"But Trevor," you say. "How can a community college dropout such as you possibly get into a world renowned film school and for writing no less?"

Ah ... I have no idea.

Cue Act of God.

And voila! One day, sitting at home surfing the web, I stumbled across a link to UCLA offering a program for people to learn screenwriting online. It was a fairly new program they were trying out and one that I knew I was destined for. All I needed was a college degree and \$4000.

I had neither.

So, Step 1: I applied for a high interest variable rate credit card with a credit limit of at least \$4000.

Within a week, I was approved.

Step 2: Get college degree. Um, well, that was going to be a little trickier. Especially since I had no desire to ever return to regular college life. The subjects bored me and I failed every test due to lack of studying, and supplies, and tardiness. So I did what I was good at, I begged!

Actually, I called. I called the UCLA office and spoke to the administrator. I explained to him that I didn't have a degree but was destined to be a

screenwriter. I even had a script ready to go that I could submit for his approval.

He agreed to take a look at the script but held no promises.

I immediately printed out a copy of the now infamous *Shades* and rushed down to the post office.

And then I waited... and waited... and waited some more, until one day I got a letter in the mail from UCLA.

A thin letter nonetheless. I tore it open hoping for the best, but expecting the worst, and did I ever get it!

Because of *Shades* I was accepted into the UCLA screenwriting program!

Unfortunately, I was accepted to the actual campus NOT the online program as desired.

And I was a long way and a lot of debt away from Los Angeles!

TO BE CONTINUED... RIGHT NOW!

### EPISODE 5: A NEW BEGINNING

I called UCLA once again and explained that I would love to come out to Los Angeles and take classes in person, but that sure as hell wasn't going to happen anytime in the foreseeable future. So, with a limited amount of fuss, they fixed it and I was on my way to the online program.

A few months later I was sitting in on my first online class.

Our first assignment was to come up with an idea for a script that we were then going to work on for the course of the semester. We would have to write 15 pages every week that our fellow peers and teachers would then read and critique, and then we would continue on.

Obviously, whatever idea I was to come up with had better be something pretty special as I'd be working on it for quite awhile.

But seriously, how could I possibly come up with a better idea than being killed by your own shadow?

Well... I did! At least, that's what I thought until I told my wife this excellent new idea. My wife - who had always been supportive of anything I'd ever done, who has read every script and every idea I'd ever written - *hated* my new idea. In fact, no joke, she hated this new idea so much that she nearly (not in so many words) forbade me from ever mentioning this idea again, much less actually writing it.

But hey, I'm an artist. I know what I'm doing.

So I threw caution to the wind and turned in the idea to the class. It was met with almost unanimous disdain.

I say almost because there was one student in class named Kiara who seemed to love anything and everything I ever came up with. I thought this girl was head over heels in love with me until I found out she was a he. Huh, imagine my surprise.

Anyway, the teacher advised me that I could write any script I wanted, but that this one would never get picked up by any studio *ever*.

I told him I didn't care. I'm all for the indies. He told me there was no money in the indies. I dropped the idea.

A week later I was back to Square One. Two weeks after that I came up with a new idea. I called it *Danger Ranger*. My comedic take on the superhero genre involving K-Mart employee Elmore McQueen, who foils a robbery, gains momentary notoriety, and is then hired by an unscrupulous mayoral candidate, who hires Elmore to pose as a



faux superhero, complete with staged battles and “criminals”, in order to make the city feel safe and win the election.

The class loved it. I loved it.

Something big was on the horizon, and I would never be the same...

TO BE CONTINUED... but first...

Did you actually think I would leave you hanging and not tell you what my original “greatest idea ever” was to be?

Well... if you really want to know...

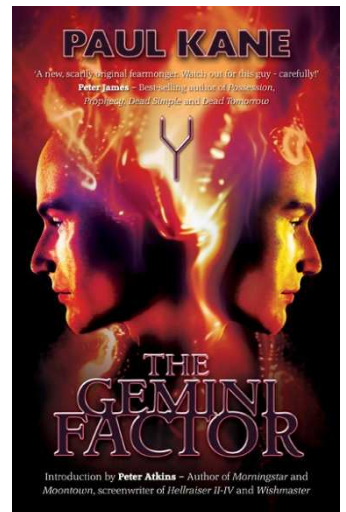
I called it *Pieces* (this is before I realized there was a notorious horror film called *Pieces*). It was about a kidnapper who abducts a small child and cuts off pieces of the child (all the while keeping him alive) and mailing each piece to the parents until they can find out who is behind the madness. The abductor wants the parents to commit crimes just for his own amusement. Every time they fail to do what he asks they receive another piece. It's a race against the clock. Can the parents rescue their child before it's game over? And if they do rescue him, what will be left?

Um, yeah... *Danger Ranger* it is!

NEXT UP: DANGER RANGER GOES HOLLYWOOD! (And becomes a comic book... sort of)

### **THE GEMINI FACTOR By Paul Kane** [www.screamingdreams.com](http://www.screamingdreams.com)

I enjoyed reading this book! Kane's take on the serial killer procedural novel keeps you entertained and enthralled till the very end. Barker is right when he says Kane is a “first rate storyteller.” The book reminds me a little of Dean Koontz's *Odd Thomas* novels, and of Shaun Jeffrey's *The Kult*, which had me jumping up and down in excitement last year.



The city of Norchester is the venue for our serial killer, dubbed *Twinkle* by the newspapers. The killer is searching out twins, killing one of them and taking trophies. Detective Sergeant Deborah Harrison is on the case, and when a man turns up at the first two crime scenes she thinks she may have found her killer...

Kane's no nonsense writing style makes this book read like a modern crime novel, but anyone aware of Kane's previous work may suspect that there is something more going on than a standard

crime thriller, and so there is, although I'll leave what that is for you to discover. The fatal final twists will leave your head spinning.

Okay, so there are two gripes. Only two? Yes, but they are major. I'll completely forgive the page-long sex scene; it's within the context of the story and fits in with the characters, despite my own personal preference against them. The first gripe is that the characters are a little hollow; despite Kane's attempts to flesh them out, they still feel fairly stereotypical, leaving the reader struggling to identify. The second gripe is the denouement, this is a realistic crime thriller and although the ending in some ways fits completely with what has gone before, in some ways it clashes with it. It's this awkward fit, in a book which works so well in general, that is noticeable.

This is such a fun book to read, so easy, it feels like the story just wraps you up. It's like reading those other classic genre storytellers King and Koontz. Kane certainly has the pedigree and this crime/genre novel is marvellously well crafted. I can't wait for his fully fledged horror novel to appear.

By Stanley Riiks

## **SEPULCHRAL EARTH: THE LONG ROAD** By **Tim Marquitz**

Damnation Books

[www.damnationbooks.com](http://www.damnationbooks.com)

The first part of a serial novella: essentially this is a dark fantasy tale set in a nightmarish, post-apocalyptic world several years after a zombie rebellion ended life as we know it. In a nutshell, this segment of the story follows Harlan Cole, a necromancer haunted by his past, and his spirit guardian as they journey across the wastelands offing 'walkers' and seeking a shot at redemption.

With *Sepulchral Earth: The Long Road*, Marquitz has begun painting a picture so bleak its almost tragic. In a world reduced to ashes, what is there left to care about? Marquitz doesn't give too much away here, but you get the feeling this story could go anywhere. If you liked Stephen King's *Dark Tower* series then you'll certainly love this.

By Christian Saunders

## **SEANCES WITH THE DEAD** By **Johnny S. Geddes**

[www.johnnygeddes.com](http://www.johnnygeddes.com)

Reading this book was a chore. And I'm not keen on

chores. Don't get me wrong: this is not a bad book, but it certainly could have been better.

There are twenty five stories in this collection, but the first six should not have made the cut. They detract from what is otherwise a perfectly decent collection. The first few stories ruin the rest of the book by making you feel like you're working hard to get through them. For the first fifty or so pages there's no excitement, no passion, and no depth. By starting with this series of weak vignettes and plodding twist-in-the-tale stories, the book is set up to fail.

The collection doesn't really get started until the longer stories appear. Here, Geddes gets into his flow and starts producing actual short stories, rather than presenting uncompleted ideas. It isn't until we're sixty pages in, and we reach "The Glass Gate" that we finally find something worth reading. The next hundred pages or so are pretty blood good, although by that time you'll likely be losing the will to live and wondering whether its worth continuing. Well, it is.

"Torquemada Town", "One Enchanted School Day", "Core 15", "The Mobius Estate", "Foxhole 18", and "Death Island Dreaming" all work well. They would have made a nice chap ook themselves. Most of these stories are weird, spooky tales with sci-fi elements that make them work. They stand out because they are actually good, despite Geddes' workman-like writing style.

Unfortunately, the other stories aren't up to much; they offer a wide range of plots but little in the way of style, narrative, or feel.

Overall, this is not a bad collection, and towards the end I was looking forward to reading "Chronophobes", the longest story, and hoping that the added length would enable Geddes to show us his best. Unfortunately that's not the case; it's a good story that overcomplicates itself by turning vampires in aliens, and ends up a bit of a mess towards the end.

I would have preferred to be reading and reviewing one of Geddes' novels. From this collection I can tell he can write, and quite well at times, but this mixed bag of stories doesn't do him justice, and I wish the editor of this collection had been harsher and cut this book down to just the good stuff.

As my teachers used to say throughout my school years: Has potential. Must do better.

By Stanley Riiks

## **BLANKET OF WHITE** By **Amy Grech**

Damnation Books

[www.damnationbooks.com](http://www.damnationbooks.com)

With over a hundred published credits under her belt Amy Grech can be considered a quiet veteran of the horror genre. Her second collection, *Blanket of White*, gathers together fourteen stories, most of which have been previously published in one form

or another. For those unfamiliar with her work, Grech doesn't generally go for the blood, guts, and carnage approach. Her writing is much more subtle, though no less horrifying. Written with an engaging tenderness and honesty, most of the stories included here depict the dark side of humanity at its most vulnerable, and the debilitating effects of loss, tragedy, and suffering. It forces you to think about things you really don't want to think about and takes you places you really don't want to go. The constant underlying twin themes of sex and death reflect what are, let's face it, the two driving forces behind life itself. These stories will burrow under your skin and make homes somewhere deep inside, only to crawl out when you least expect it. You have been warned.

By Christian Saunders

## **THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF THE BEST OF THE BEST NEW HORROR: TWO DECADES OF DARK FICTION Edited**

**by Stephen Jones**

[www.constablerobinson.com](http://www.constablerobinson.com)

As a long-time fan of this anthology, reading this best of the best collection was like heaven. Picking only one story from each year must have been hard as all of the *Best New Horror* collections are huge and brilliant, and while I'm not sure I agree with all of Jones' choices, this remains an amazing collection, featuring the top horror authors around, including Stephen King, Clive Barker, Neil Gaiman, Kim Newman, and a lot more. Having read most of the stories before in the original collections, it was still a joy to read them all in this single, even larger than usual volume. Jones produces the definitive horror anthology of the year every year, and this is the definitive anthology of the past twenty years.

Amazing in its scope and astounding in its depth, this certainly is the Best of the Best. Bring on the next twenty years!

By Adrian Brady

## **RED VELVET**

Starring Henry Thomas, Kelli Garner

Directed by Bruce Dickson

[www.redvelvetmovie.com](http://www.redvelvetmovie.com)

*Red Velvet* has been sitting in oblivion in my Netflix save queue for the better part of a year thanks to the rental giant's ridiculous new policy of having customers "vote" for which independent movies they'd like Netflix to carry. If this is news to you,

you're not alone.

Thankfully, there's Amazon.com.

Within the past year Amazon has taken substantial leaps and bounds in the home video market, now offering a video on demand service that you can watch instantly on your computer or download to your television (with the proper equipment, of course). And the prices per film are incredibly reasonable.

Which brings me back to *Red Velvet*. Deciding to kill two birds with one stone, I rented the flick through Amazon's on demand service. In terms of the actual service I received, I couldn't have asked for anything more. The picture playing straight to my laptop was clear and the sound was crisp. You're able to "keep" the movie for up to a week to come back to at any time, as often as you'd like.

Unfortunately, the movie itself left something to be desired. Not to say it's a terrible film. It's not. It's just... well... bad.

Aaron and Linda are next door neighbours in a lofty old apartment building. Aaron is a bit of an eccentric while Linda is the requisite hottie with the oversized rack. They meet, officially, at a laundromat and instantly loathe each other. So, the next logical step in their relationship is, of course, to go on a lunch date, right?

What's even better is that Linda confides to Aaron that she was supposed to be partying with friends at a cabin in the woods over the weekend, but her abusive boyfriend wouldn't let her take the car. Sensing her anger at not going, he decides to tell her a story about... her friends...

Being killed.

At the cabin.

By a masked slasher.

Um, okay.

But this is only after he tries to tell her a story about an obese housewife abusing her husband and ninjas killing their waitress.

Just the brazen absurdity of the premise had me loving every minute, that is, up until the last 20 minutes when things just get way too weird. Throw in a tacked on ending that would confound the likes of David Lynch and you have a hodgepodge of nothing.

Besides the vibrant set pieces in this film, the saving graces for me, are the two leads played wonderfully by Henry Thomas (Elliot from *E.T.* all grown up) and the luscious Kelli Garner. Their banter alone is worth the price of admission.

As far as independent genre films go, I've seen far worse. So, if you're in the mood for a

breezy little flick with some pretty decent acting and the dumbest looking villain ever put to celluloid (part of his face was a Polaroid camera), then fire up the Amazon service and enjoy.

By Trevor Wright

### **INSIDE THE PERIMETER: SCAVENGERS OF THE DEAD By Alan Spencer**

[www.livingdeadpress.com](http://www.livingdeadpress.com)

Over the past few years zombies have become the most popular horror creature, and it feels like they've literally invaded. You can't get away from zombies and this is no bad thing, because the zombie story itself has evolved. No longer are these pathetic creatures simply brain-dead, brain-eating, shuffling creatures, and no longer is each zombie story a simple tale of a confused group of scared people slowly being picked off and overwhelmed by the hordes.



In *Inside The Perimeter*, Boyd Broman is given the task of recapturing serial killer/cannibal Hayden Grubaugh, but that's only the beginning. This book truly has to be read!

Spencer has produced a nail-bitingly tense and horrifyingly brutal vision, which frightens and entertains in equal measure. It's zombie fiction of the highest order.

If you only buy one zombie novel this year, make it *Inside The Perimeter*.

By Adrian Brady

### **THE VARIANT EFFECT (Serial) By G. Wells Taylor**

[www.skineaters.com](http://www.skineaters.com)

As we all know, the publishing industry is going through some major changes. In the current climate the modern writer has to work harder than ever

before to stay afloat, and for many it is fast becoming a case of adapt quickly to this ever-changing environment or sink without a trace. Writers both young and old could learn a lot by studying the methods Wells Taylor uses to market himself, and could do worse than adopt some of his tireless work ethic.

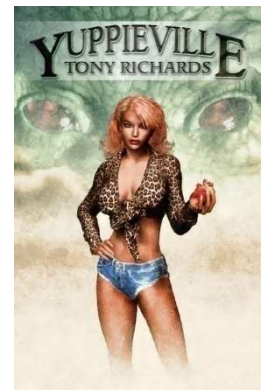
*The Variant Effect* is shaping up to be Wells Taylor's epic: a series of seven novellas downloadable as free PDFs from the website listed above. The final, shocking instalment has just been unleashed, however, to devote an entire review to a single episode would have to be at the expense of the others, and each deserves equal billing. The tightly-woven, cross-genre storyline sometimes lends itself more to classic gum-shoe fiction than vintage horror as it follows Borland, a fading semi-alcoholic cop with a hernia and a whole heap of baggage, in his battle against a species of sub-humans who like to eat the skin off people while they are still alive. Hence the URL. To give anything else away would be an injustice. Just go, download, and enjoy.

By Christian Saunders

### **YUPPIEVILLE By Tony Richards**

[www.screamingdreams.com](http://www.screamingdreams.com)

When Frank and Joannie find a house in Youngesville, Nevada, they think it's the perfect place to settle down and start a family. The peaceful, quiet neighbourhood is a life away from their tiny flat in LA. Frank's little brother Jack calls it Yuppiesville, and suggests that they'll die of boredom in a place where nothing happens. But then an accident wipes out one set of neighbours, those deemed "unsuitable", and Jack begins to discover there is more to this quiet town than meets the eye.



Set up: the perfect town. Check. Lay the groundwork for something evil and twisted to be discovered. Check. It's all very Stepford, and that's the main problem with this 81 page novella: we've been here and done this before. Richards produces a good book with a good plot, and despite the build-up and the clues, the ending is still fairly shocking. But there's nothing really new here.

Screamingdreams continue to produce great-looking books; this trade-sized paperback has a good weight considering its slight length, and is really

nice to handle. But I'm just not convinced by the story within.

At £5.99 for 81 pages it's fairly expensive. Unlike *Different Skins* by Gary McMahon, which was a great collection with two amazing stories, and although short, was still well worth the asking price of £7.99, I feel myself unable to recommend this book wholeheartedly.

It's certainly not bad. Richards has created a disturbingly peaceful town, the story is well written, and the ending is great. But again, there is nothing new, nothing at all that we haven't seen before, no inventiveness and no originality, and for that the book can only ever get at most three stars out of five. It's good, wholesome, middle-of-the-road fun, and definitely worthy of your time if you're a big fan of Richards, but otherwise your money would be better spent on another of the screamingdreams books. (*Different Skins* by Gary McMahon is probably the best collection I've read in years!)

By Stanley Riiks

### **DONNY'S DAY By Brandon Berntson**

Damnation Books

[www.damnationbooks.com](http://www.damnationbooks.com)

[www.bloodredtales.com](http://www.bloodredtales.com)

This short novella tells the story of Donny Daniels, a man on the run from his past. A terrible event in his childhood has left Donny traumatised and haunted by demons, both figurative and literal, that wreak havoc in his life. He lives a lonely existence until he meets the beautiful Patricia Wells who offers him a path to salvation. Or does she?

This is Berntson's first full-length novella (whatever that is, there are no universal criteria to distinguish between short stories, novellas, and novelettes, except that they are all shorter than novels) and it is an admirable effort. *Donny's Day* is tight and concise, having been stripped of any unnecessary padding, and is a worthy excuse to while away an evening. I look forward to reading more of Bernsten's work in the future.

By Christian Saunders

### **The Knights Templar By Michael E. Brines**

The Order of the Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon (or Knights Templar) is one of history's most secret and conspiratorial brotherhoods. Founded by French nobleman Hugues de Payens in the Year of Our Lord 1118 as the first military-

religious order in Western Christendom, their mission was to defend pilgrims in the Holy Land.

The knights originally numbered only nine and were so poor they had to share horses. Their original seal depicted two knights riding the same horse.

Placing themselves under command of the crusader King of Jerusalem,<sup>1</sup> they were given quarters in the al-Aqsa Mosque,<sup>2</sup> which at the time was thought to be the temple of Solomon.<sup>3</sup>

Their big break came in 1139 when the order's second Grand Master secured a charter from Pope Innocent II. The charter excused the Templars from paying tithes to the Church and of paying taxes to secular authorities, and even allowed them to receive tithes on behalf of the Church. Their wealth, confidence, and power began to increase. By 1130 there were more than 300 Knights in the order and they had become an elite fighting force.<sup>4</sup>

However, events in the Holy Land gradually grew out of their control. In July 1187 a Templar army was virtually destroyed at the Battle of Hattin. Two months later the Moslems recaptured Jerusalem, which remained in Moslem hands until the First World War. With the failure of successive crusades the Templars were forced out of the Middle East and returned to Europe.

You might think that an order established to protect a temple that was no longer in European hands might just fade away, but the Templars turned to another function.

Not long after they received their Papal charter the Templars began lending money to destitute monarchs. As time passed the Templars became the bankers for nearly every throne in Europe and even some Moslem rulers. By the reign of Phillip II the Templars had effectively become the royal treasury of France and had even lent money to the Church.

With branches of the order in many countries, they developed a system of credit notes whereby a traveller could deposit funds in one branch and withdraw them from another, avoiding

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<sup>1</sup> Baldwin II

<sup>2</sup> Also known as the Dome of the Rock.

<sup>3</sup> The actual Temple of Solomon had been destroyed by the Babylonians eighteen centuries before. A second temple was built during the rule of the Persian King Darius beginning in 457 BC. Falling into disrepair, it was rebuilt by King Herod in the first century BC. The Romans destroyed this second temple in 70 AD. The Mosque had been constructed on the same site in the seventh century after the Moslem conquest of Jerusalem. But most Crusaders were illiterate and less interested in archeology than loot.

<sup>4</sup> *The Knights Templar*, Susie Hodge, 2008

the hazard of transporting large sums of gold across the dangerous roads and seas of that time. They also developed the equivalent of safety deposit boxes and traveller's checks.

At the time, it was forbidden for Christians to charge interest on loans. The Templars got around this by charging "rent" instead of interest. Their powerful patrons winked at this in order to get the funds they needed. However, the Templars soon discovered the danger that lies in lending money to too many powerful individuals.

In 1306 Phillip "The Fair," King of France was in desperate financial problems. As a temporary solution he arrested the Jews of France, confiscated their wealth and expelled them from the country.<sup>5</sup>

By early the next year he turned his sights on his next target, sending a message to the new Pope Clement that the Templars, frustrated at their failure to regain the Holy Land, were plotting not only to seize the throne of France but to turn against the Church itself. The King produced a witness, Squin de Flexian, a convicted heretic expelled from the Templars, now rotting in a French jail. In a deal typical of the sort that often passed for "justice" in the Middle Ages, de Flexian offered to testify in exchange for his freedom.

The Pope and King of France turned on their creditors, arresting the Templars and putting on a show trial after torture produced many confessions, most of which were retracted later. These retractions, however, did not save the accused from being burned alive under the pretext of being lapsed heretics.

The Templars were accused of:

- Being in league with the Moslems and responsible for the loss of the Holy Land.
- Use of the phrase "O Allah!" and worship of an idol called the Head of Baphomet.
- Providing abortion services to pregnant women and murdering their unborn children.
- Despising the Pope and the authority of the Church.
- Being addicted to the most infamous excesses of debauchery. "Their temple houses are the receptacle of every crime and abomination that can be committed."<sup>6</sup>

The order was wiped out, its members imprisoned or executed, but most importantly, its resources were confiscated and split between the French and the Church.

The Pope then called upon the other monarchs of Europe to share in the spoils, and most of them did. On March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1312 the Pope officially abolished the order.

Legend says the Templars were a secret society dedicated to subversion and world conquest, and they survived their Thirteenth Century suppression and continue their wicked plotting in secret to this very day. But is this possible?

There were some places where even the Pope's powers did not extend. Thirteenth Century Scotland had been placed under the interdict; the entire country excommunicated for the excesses of King Robert the Bruce. Many Templars fled there and were granted sanctuary. The final Scottish victory over the English invaders at the Battle of Bannockburn was assisted by a group of Templar knights. After the battle, in an act of gratitude, King Robert the Bruce was made Sovereign Grandmaster of the Templar Order.<sup>7</sup>

In Portugal, where the King himself was a Templar, the order survived by merely changing its name to the Knights of Christ. And many individual Templars escaped the inquisition by joining the Teutonic Knights in eastern Prussia or various orders of knighthood fighting the Moslems in Spain.

It is believed that the original Swiss banks owe their origin to groups of Templars who sought refuge in Switzerland and brought with them the treasuries and financial skills of their local Templar chapter.<sup>8</sup> It is true that the wealth confiscated from the Templars by the authorities was much less than expected and the history of Swiss banking begins at about this same period. So perhaps the Templars do live on. But what about those claims of being a secret power manipulating governments unseen?

The charges levelled against the order seem fantastic and contradictory. They were accused of being both secret Moslems *and* idol worshipers.

The chief witness against them, a convicted heretic expelled from the Templars, had every reason to perjure himself to escape the dungeon he was imprisoned in. If the Templars really were heretics, why would they expel him for heresy?

Another charge levelled against them was debauchery, specifically sodomy. Yet that act was specifically listed in their founding rules as being punishable by expulsion.<sup>9</sup>

It seems unlikely that the charges levelled by

<sup>5</sup> Five years later he arrested the Italian bankers in his realms and did the same to them.

<sup>6</sup> *Secret Societies, a History*, Arkon Daraul, 1989, pp 57-58

<sup>7</sup> *The Knights of the Holy Grail*, The secret history of the Knights Templar, Tim Wallace-Murphy, 2007, pg 185

<sup>8</sup> *Secret Societies, a History*, Arkon Daraul, 1989

<sup>9</sup> *The Knights Templar*, pg23

the demonstratively corrupt authorities<sup>10</sup> had any basis in reality. When the Templar order was suppressed, they were merely an extremely wealthy order of knights who specialized in international banking.

This is not to say that the effect of such a massive, unexpected and widespread persecution might not have had the effect of driving the remnants of the organization underground. It would make perfect sense for the survivors to apply their wealth (and their talents for making more) to gaining such power, influence and control behind the scenes to ensure that it would never happen again.<sup>11</sup>

And perhaps they were heretics. Bertrand de Blanchefort, the sixth Grand Master from 1156 to 1169, was from a Cathar family and beginning with his rule the order welcomed Cathars.<sup>12</sup> Even without such an influence, it is logical that once betrayed by the Church, the survivors would turn against it. The axiom “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” would lead to further influence by anti-Catholic factions and their philosophies even if the Templars were not tending that way in the first place.

Many modern concepts trace their origins back to the Templars, who indeed had a hand in many of the most fantastic relics of antiquity.

The infamous skull and crossed bones flag usually associated with pirates was actually invented by the Templars. Used on their war galleys in the Mediterranean as a warning to their enemies, it was originally a white skull and crossed bones on a red background, the Templar colours. The name Jolly Rodger is a corruption of the French “*joli rouge*” meaning “pretty red.”<sup>13</sup>

The Shroud of Turin first came to light publicly some forty years after the suppression of the Templars when one of their widows, Madame de Charney, put it on display. It is thought the Templars obtained it in the sack of Constantinople in 1204.

Wolfram von Eschenback wrote in *Parzival* that the Templars were the guardians of the Holy Grail. Some have speculated that the original basis of the wealth of the Templars was the treasury of Solomon discovered hidden under the Temple

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<sup>10</sup> Especially after what the French King did to the Jews and Italian bankers.

<sup>11</sup> It's not paranoia if they really ARE out to get you.

<sup>12</sup> Cathars were a notorious Thirteenth Century Gnostic group. They believed in reincarnation and the whole gambit of Gnostic thought and rejected the authority of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church exterminated them in the Albigensian Crusade.

<sup>13</sup> *The Knights Templar*, pg 79

Mount during their time in Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> Others believe what they found there was nothing less than the lost Ark of the Covenant.

What is certain is Scottish Freemasonry claims descent from the Templar knights that sought sanctuary with Robert the Bruce.<sup>15</sup> The Rosicrucian Order, an esoteric Gnostic mystery religion similar to Sufism and Freemasonry, also claims a Templar heritage. Considering the fragmentary nature of any such organization that survived the persecutions of the inquisition, perhaps the Templars are the spiritual “fathers” of many more of the existing “secret” societies in the world today.

All such organizations share the same initiatory rank advancement structure originally developed by the Templars. And all these organizations are dedicated to the promulgation of anti-Catholic ideas and principles, just as one would expect from the descendants of such a fierce persecution.

There are currently more than eighteen million known Freemasons, Rosicrucians, and Mormons<sup>16</sup> in the world and all of these organizations are renowned for their wealth and personal connections to those in power. And through Aleister Crowley and his Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn,<sup>17</sup> these modern descendants of the Templars birthed modern Wicca, Satanism and the New Age movement.<sup>18</sup>

The Templars may have started out as an organization dedicated to defence of Christendom but Papal corruption transformed them into its greatest nemesis.

## **IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF DRACULA: A PERSONAL JOURNEY AND TRAVEL GUIDE By Steven P. Unger**

[http://worldaudience.powweb.com/pubs\\_bks/Dracula.html](http://worldaudience.powweb.com/pubs_bks/Dracula.html)

I discovered Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* at the age of fifteen, which is more years ago than I care to

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<sup>14</sup> They did go from being an order of penniless knights too poor to afford each knight his own horse to one of the richest orders of knighthood in barely twenty years.

<sup>15</sup> *The Knights of the Holy Grail*, pp 244-257

<sup>16</sup> The Mormon temple initiation ceremonies and much of the doctrine revealed to higher level initiates is taken straight out of Freemasonry. Both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young were high-level Masons. For details consult *The God Makers*, by Ed Decker & Dave Hunt, Harvest House Publishers.

<sup>17</sup> The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn also claimed Templar descent.

<sup>18</sup> As well as having a decisive influence on the development of the Nazi Party. See my article on *Vril* for details.

mention. I was mesmerised, I'd never read anything like it before, and I immediately began to devour any and every vampire book I could get hold of.

But my obsession with horror started even before that, sitting up when my granddad babysat, watching the old Hammer Horror Dracula films with

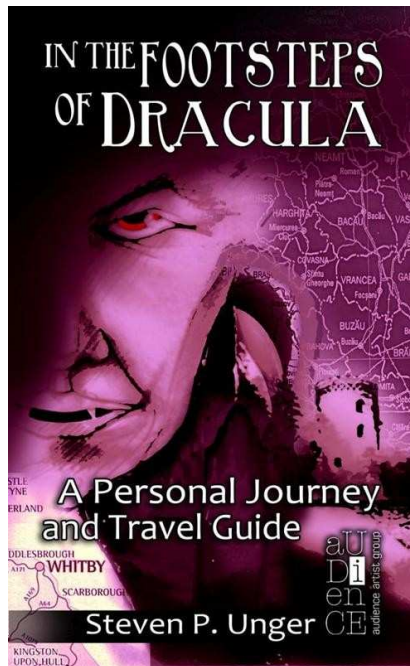
Christopher Lee as our eponymous anti-hero and Peter Cushing as the scholarly Doctor Van Helsing.

The novel just cemented my lust for all things vampiric, which continues to this day. Hence, like Unger, I have travelled to Whitby to see the abbey ruins and where Dracula washed up in the Demeter. I've been to Romania and travelled miles on a motorway that had no lights (nor did some of the cars) or a central barrier and visited Brasov where one of Vlad Tepes (the real Dracula) committed one of his atrocities. Despite knowing that it wasn't the "real" Dracula castle and that it's unlikely that Tepes ever set foot in it, I also visited Bran castle, which the Romanian tourism agencies are intent on peddling. It's a nice enough old castle and is still worth a visit.

Anyway, enough about me!

In this book Unger takes us with him on his journey to London and Whitby to follow in the footsteps of Bram Stoker as he researched the novel, and then heading to Romania to discover the birthplace of their national hero Vlad Tepes, real-life Dracula who impaled thousands and defended his homeland and much of Europe from the Turks.

Unger's concise writing style fits in a mine of information. With so many *Dracula* references, the book has details that even an ardent fan might miss. The book is well set out, first comes a brief description of the book, then a more detailed analysis with the journey and travel guide, then a brief biography of the real Dracula and another detailed analysis and travel guide. You never feel you're receiving too much information, despite the high level of intelligent commentary. It's a nice mix of reminder, analysis, travel guide, and personal



journey.

It isn't until you get to the Nuts and Bolts chapter that you get bogged down with information, some of which is repeated from previous chapters. I much preferred where this information was part of the story of the journey or the history. Here it felt repetitive and dry and far too much like a travel guide list.

Also, there's a part at the back in the places to visit mentioning that Stoker researched at British Library Reading Room at the British Museum. It's no longer a reading room as the British Library moved to St Pancras many years ago. The circular reading room is now used for temporary exhibitions, and contains little of the original room apart from the structure.

While I'm having a moan I might as well mention the description of photos. One paragraph is just a list of the photos and their captions that follow. Come on. That's really not necessary and it's horrible to read, adding absolutely nothing to the book.

But these are minor complaints. Reading this book brings back the youthful fascination for vampires. It contains a good bibliography that I'll likely explore further, and gives some handy tips for visiting Romania, one of the least developed countries in Eastern Europe.

Several black and white photos help add atmosphere, but they would really have been lovely in colour as the thumbnails on the back of the book show. A full-colour reprint is well deserved.

Anyone who has ever been interested in either of the Draculas, Stoker's or history's, or travellers looking to journey to strange and scary places should read this book. It's good fun and an intelligent guide, and would be really helpful for anyone considering following in the footsteps of Dracula.

By Stanley Riiks

## **GREEN IN OUR SOULS By John B.**

**Rosenman**

Damnation Books

[www.damnationbooks.com](http://www.damnationbooks.com)

The title is a reference to an old Thomas Moore poem, the concept of which forms the crux of this clever, little tale about an experimental drug given to pregnant women to supposedly enhance the intelligence of their unborn children. However, one of the side effects of the drug is to make the memories of deceased loved ones so intense that it

sometimes results in a blurring of identities. The reaction is particularly strong in the story's hero, Derrick, ensuring that the shadowy powers-that-be take more than an active interest in him. Can he find a way to use his newfound powers against them and achieve the return to normality he craves?

Overall, this is a good premise for a story and Rosenman's execution does not disappoint. I'm sure he'll forgive me for saying this, but he's been round a while and that maturity and experience shines through. He also manages to keep the plot just the right side of plausible, which is how I like my science fiction. My only gripe is that *Green In Our Souls* is such an intriguing concept that perhaps it could have been fleshed out a little more.

By Christian Saunders

## **THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF APOCALYPTIC SF Edited By Mike**

**Ashley**

[www.constablerobinson.com](http://www.constablerobinson.com)

The Mammoth Books are my bible. I love them. Stephen Jones and Gardner Dozois produce the finest and largest collections of horror and SF, respectively, on the planet. They literally takes months to read and I read them religiously.

Ashley has put together the quintessential SF anthology of the apocalypse and although he's managed to put the stories into three categories, The Nature of the Catastrophe, Beyond Armageddon, and The End of All Things, the stories are so wide ranging is it difficult to give them definitive categorisation.

I loved Stephen Baxter's and Alastair Reynold's stories, but that is hardly surprising as they are two of my favourite SF authors. "Guardians of the Pheonix" by Eric Brown was another favourite, one of the few original stories in the volume.

Overall, a brilliant and unique view of the end of the world.

By Adrian Brady

## **Interview with Joe R. Lansdale**

*What inspired you to start writing?*

I don't know if I can answer this honestly, as I don't remember not wanting to write. I'm sure my mothers influence, her love of books and writers had a lot to do with it. Comic books had a lot to do with it, and boredom had something to do with it. I was always drawn to the written word.

*How did you go about getting your first novel published?*

I wrote a number of short stories, which got me some attention and allowed me to get an agent, who, though terrible, eventually sold my first novel with my name on it. I sold another by just sending it to the company with a letter of recommendation from Bill Pronzini. It was written under the pen name Ray Slater.

*You are well known for your crime novels as well as your earlier horror work. Was the move towards crime a natural progression of your writing or a more publisher based decision?*

I started out being published in crime magazines, Mike Shayne for instance, so horror came second, then back to crime. But I wrote what I loved, and my earliest loves were S.F./Fantasy and Horror, so it didn't surprise me that I went there. When I was in my early to middle twenties I got interested in crime fiction, and so I was always writing what I liked. I also wrote Western related material as well, and things that are not so easily classified. So, I like fiction. Though my earliest sales were all non-fiction, and I do a scattering of non-fiction even now: some for newspapers in Italy, columns, essays, etc.

*What other writers have influenced you?*

Too many to list all, but: Edgar Rice Burroughs, Philip Jose Farmer, Ray Bradbury, Robert Bloch, Fred Brown, Richard Matheson, William F. Nolan, Rudyard Kipling, Homer (loved the *Iliad* especially) William Goldman, some of Keith Laumer, Ernest Hemingway, Flannery O'Conner (she's probably my favourite), Harper Lee (she wrote my favourite novel), Carson McCuller, a little more mixed, but very good. F.Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck, Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, James Cain, Pete Hamill, Glendon Swarthout, Jack Schaffer, some of Larry McMurtry, Jack Kerouac. Too many to list, actually.

*You're well known for both your novels and short stories. Which do you prefer writing and why?*

I prefer short stories, but I love novels as well.

*Where do you get your inspiration?*

Everywhere. I seldom have a problem with inspiration.

*Your have a very unique voice that is immediately identifiable. Did it take some time for you to develop*

*or does it just come natural?*

I started out with some of it, but it took a bit of time to refine it, to let it come through more than affected voices. I still like to experiment with style. But even when I do, I let my voice seep through. I don't know that I write so much in a singular voice, as I write with a singular attitude - most of the time.

*What is your writing day like?*

Mostly I work in the mornings. Three hours at the most, or three to five pages if it comes first. Sometimes I work in the afternoons and at night too but that's rare, more often lately as I have a lot to finish before I leave for a month in Italy.

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

I'm sure there are things I could have done smarter, but I've been pretty happy with the way things have gone.

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

I do, but I'm not bothered by negative reviews unless the reviewer gets personal. You can think what you want, but don't assign knowledge of me to your criticism. Criticize the work, not me. I don't really have trouble with bad reviews, maybe because most have been good. If I got all bad ones, then I might feel differently. Sometimes, I get a good one and I try and read it over and over until the words don't mean anything anymore. This keeps me from taking myself too seriously.

*What book are you reading now?*

I'm reading a giant collection of stories from days gone by. I don't have the book on hand, but it's really cool and has stories by a number of writers, and some of those writers have multiple stories. Sorry. I'm not where I can look at the title. I just finished re-reading Hemingway's *Collected Stories*, and I finished reading *Night And Day* by Robert Parker as well.

*You have a series of Hap Collins crime novels, is it easy to create a series of novels with the same protagonist or is it harder to come up with a new adventure for a familiar character?*

It's easier to deal with the characters, because you know them, harder to do something different with them, without having them so different they aren't doing what these characters would do. It's a hard balancing act, which is why I do other things as

well.

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

The language.

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

The language.

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

They remember the language.

*What is the most important thing when becoming a writer?*

The language.

*Do you write for a particular audience, for yourself?*

Only for myself. Not that I don't care about the audience, but how would I know who they are or what they like. I know what I like.

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

I take the dogs out, get vitamins and coffee, and Karen, my wife, checks the email, and when we've done that, I go to work. I like to wear slip on shoes that you buy at Wal-Mart.

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

Read, watch movies, do martial arts, hang with the family and friends, travel now and again.

*You've also written a number of comics, including the Jonax Hex series. How different is writing comics from writing novels?*

I love comics. It's a different knack. And you have to be able to think in terms of the art work and the pacing and what you can reveal without explaining everything.

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

I've written all manner of fiction. I've written for TV in the animated arena, and I've written and sold numerous screenplays, alas, none of them produced.

*Some of your work has been optioned and been made into movies. How did that come about and how is it going?*

I always seem to have something optioned. Right now *Cold In July*, *Mr. Weedeater*, *The Bottoms*, and *A Fine Dark Line*, are all optioned and *The Big Blow* was, with my screenplay, bought outright. Who

knows if they'll use it? It may be too dark a screenplay.

I've had numerous others optioned or bought in the past. *Savage Season* looks as if it's about to be optioned and I should be doing the screenplay.

*Bubba Ho-Tep was very cool, and Bruce Campbell was excellent as Elvis. How much involvement did you have with the film?*

Don was kind enough to ask my opinion on a few things, and had me on the set, but he mostly followed the story, and where he didn't, he didn't have the resources, or he felt it played better another way. I was very pleased with it.

*What parts of being a writer do you like best? And least?*

I like the work itself, and the lifestyle. Waiting to get paid, dealing with that end of it can be frustrating sometimes.

*Do you get writer's block? How do you cope with it?*

Never had writer's block. I've had a day where nothing was happening, but that was just a blip, too tired, mind somewhere else, not ready to proceed because I'm ahead of or behind the story. But no writers block.

*If you could live in any fictional world or time other than now, which one would it be?*

I like it here just fine.

*What are you working on now?*

Screenplays. One of them for my novel *The Bottoms*, the second draft.

*Do you have any advice for other writers?*

Put your ass in a chair and write.

*What scares you?*

Stupidity. Hatred. Racism.

*What makes a good story?*

A good writer makes a good story.

## **WINTERCRAFT By Jenna Burtenshaw**

[www.headline.co.uk](http://www.headline.co.uk)

[www.wintercraft.co.uk](http://www.wintercraft.co.uk)

Artemis Winters is warned of the coming of the Wardens, he grabs his niece, Kate, and tells her to run, when there is a knock on the door. They are too

late. Kate hides the secret space in the cellar with her friend Edgar as the Wardens take her uncle. Then they set fire to the bookshop where Kate and Edgar are hiding.

What started off as a bad day in Morvane is going to get even worse. Kate finds out what happened to her parents ten years earlier: they were also kidnapped by the Wardens. Chased by the Collector, Silas Dane, and finally caught, Kate finds out she has special magical powers and those in the High Council will stop at nothing to use those powers for evil. All Kate wants to do is escape the evil clutches of her captors, find her uncle and Edgar, and get home. But as Kate uses her powers to dip into The Veil that separates life from death, returning home will be the least of her problems.

This is quite an accomplished debut from Burtenshaw. The world of Albion in which the story is set is well realised, particularly the capital city of Fume, built on top of the former graveyard and therefore having, literally, hidden depths. There is much to explore, including the magically enhanced peoples known as the Skilled, of which Kate is one of the dying breed. The High Council which rules Albion is full of the petty intrigues of most political life, and the book is imbued with the plots and machinations of the Council and its many servants. We get to witness these first hand as Kate becomes a pawn in a power play between Da'ru the only Skilled on the High Council (the rest are in hiding after being persecuted and blamed for the war), and Silas Dane, a half dead warrior known as The Collector. There's also the war backdrop, one of the many threads of this world that has been so well crafted.

The ending plays out nicely and suggests there is much more of the story of Albion and Kate to come.

No book is perfect, but *Wintercraft* is bloody good. Having recently exhausted myself with the marathon that was Barker's *Imagica*, reading Burtenshaw's *Wintercraft* is a lesson in efficiency and simplicity in terms of style, plot and character. Nevertheless, it's this efficiency in character and plot that lead to the two major problems, although both of them are minor niggles. The first being the sometimes lengthy explanations used to give us a sense of the epic back-story, a mild-enough niggle. The second gripe is with the character of Kate, a nice enough young girl who finds herself lost in a magical world, attempting to remain alive, and struggling to save her friend and uncle from the evil clutches of Silas and Da'ru. For me, Kate developed rather slowly, and the real anti-hero of the novel was

Silas, an evil undead truth-telling friend. You can't help but love him; he smacks of Malus Darkblade and I just wanted more.

I'm sure this is the first in a series of *Wintercraft* books. Kate has a long way to go, but she shows great potential, and as long as Silas Dane continues to appear in the novels I will be a lifelong fan. Despite Silas stealing the show slightly, Kate does develop well after the slow start, and coming to terms with her magical powers will be an adventure that I for one would like to be a part of.

Wonderfully realised, I can't wait for the second book.

By Stanley Riiks

## **STORIES Edited By Neil Gaiman and Al Sarrantonio**

[www.headline.co.uk](http://www.headline.co.uk)

Take two world-renowned genre experts, one a best-selling author (Gaiman), the other a cutting-edge editor (Sarrantonio), throw in fiction from world famous authors that defy easy categorisation and you get *Stories*. This is a master class of an anthology, bringing together mainstream fiction and genre material, not with a bang but with a subtle merging that makes you beg for more.

This is a collection of the fantastic, not really horror or fantasy or mainstream, but a combination of all three. And what a marvellous collection it is. From the first story by Roddy Doyle it just gets better, as we discover tales from the likes of Joe Hill, Dianna Wynne Jones, Joe R. Lansdale, Walter Mosley, Chuck Palahniuk, Tom Powers, Michael Marshall Smith, Peter Straub, the editors themselves, and lots more, twenty seven in all.

It is a brilliantly devised collection that will give readers the perfect introduction to the world of the fantastic, and for fans of the fantastic it is a collection unparalleled.

This is only book with the potential to usurp the crown of top genre anthology title from Mammoth's *Year's Best Horror*.

Exceptional, riveting, brilliant.

By Adrian Brady

## **From the Catacombs: Music to drown out the world** By Jim Lesniak

Of course, when a new tome arrives at the catacomb, I make the journey to the study: a book-lined, sound-proofed island in the madness of the world. It is complete with appropriate lighting, a comfortable

chair, and a perfectly louche glass of absinthe. Here, the newest journal can be devoured. Then reality sets in and the fantasy world fades into the ether. With a world full of family, neighbours, and all sorts of electronic detritus it is a challenge to be able to focus on the printed word since none of us has a hermetically sealed refuge (if you do, I'm coming over to read).

Music can enhance the mood as well as block out the world. We have become conditioned to a soundtrack in films, TV shows, and even in stores. The lack of a soundtrack can feel conspicuous as well: watch (or listen) to *Dracula* (1931) or *Ringu* and the lack of music is odd, if not disturbing. At least while reading, we should be able to choose and direct auditory experience. Some care should be taken. Otherwise style clashes reduce the enjoyment of book and music. Like Slayer's "Reign in Blood" with a chick flick, some things just do not work well together.

Unlike previous reviews or columns, all the albums reviewed here are highly recommended. All are coherent musical expressions that stand on their own as well as assist in drowning out the world while reading. The deliberate choice of selecting instrumental albums was made, so that the lyrical content does not distract. Similarly, no movie soundtracks or pieces that are regularly identified with films (i.e. Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* or Fantomas' *The Director's Cut*) are included. As of this writing, all the albums are in print or available from downloading services, but most are from non-mainstream artists and thus, may go out of print at any time.

Robert Rich and B. Lustmond: *Stalker*  
Hearts of Space

<http://robertrich.com/>

This album is reminiscent of synth-heavy 80's horror soundtracks. It differs from a soundtrack as it is not broken up into "cues", but the seven tracks do form a coherent,



unbroken whole of a continuous soundscape. The suite is a minor key, dark ambient piece, with echoes of John Carpenter. There is excellent sound design with many items buried in the mix: voices (in Russian?), rain, etc. This album gives the sense of being in the wrong place and the unease of being unwelcome and watched. *Stalker* has a very ominous feel, somewhere between minimal and lush in its arrangements. This is not some New Age

blandness to shop to at the mall; this is a soundtrack to a creeping, Lovecraftian nightmare.

Robert Rich is twenty years into a recording career of dark ambient music and has a significant body of work available. B. Lustmord, a.k.a. Brian Williams, has done sound design for major Hollywood films in addition to his experimental compositions. *Stalker* is an essential meeting of the sonic minds.

Boris: *Boris at Last: Feedbacker*

Conspiracy

<http://homepage1.nifty.com/boris/top.html>

An hour long suite that opens with warm, saturated feedback and distorted guitars before building slowly with a shoegazer-type structure (i.e. My Bloody Valentine). The occasional dreamy Japanese vocals do not distract, but feel like another instrument in the mix. *Feedbacker* works up to a cacophonous climax, devolving into Einstuerzende Neubauten levels of noise and feedback before drifting back down through the denouement. *Feedbacker* feels like being a jam session that was structured into a composition; a series of congruent and organic themes arranged as a whole.



Boris is known for experimentation in their compositions and have had some fascinating Collaborations with artists such as Sunn O))) and Merzbow. Their catalogue varies between short rock-based songs, album length suites, dreamy psych and noise. *Feedbacker* was selected in lieu of *Absolute Ego* or *Drone Evil* due to the (ironically) greater melodic basis, as opposed to a feedback or noise-based composition.

Earth: *The Bees Made Honey in the Lion's Skull*

Southern Lord

[www.thronesanddominions.com](http://www.thronesanddominions.com)



Although considered a "metal" band and the inspiration for Sunn O))), do not expect a Motorhead or High on Fire type of riffage. Earth's stock in trade is sloooooow and low grooves, allowing for extensive exploration of a theme. This album has more "swing" to it than previous Earth releases, but bear in mind that Black Sabbath's "The Wizard" sounds like speed metal in comparison. The arrangements

are solid and contain some surprising instrumentation (oboe!) as well as atmospheric touches.

Earth is not as bombastic or overwhelming as Sunn O))), preferring to find a melody rather than bludgeon with sheer volume. The limited edition *Live Europe 2006* is highly recommended if you can find a copy; many of the tracks on this album are extended into the 10-15 minute range. In general, Earth is moody and contemplative and a fertile foundation for genre excursions.

OM: *God is Good*

Drag City

[www.omvibratory.com](http://www.omvibratory.com)

OM is a duo with Al Cisneros (Sleep) on bass and vocals; *God is Good* is the first full-length release with drummer Emil Anos. OM believes in letting the melody and groove determine the length of the composition, leading frequently to 15-20 minute songs. The tempos are generally slow to mid-tempo with a middle-eastern feel due to the scales and percussion used. When there are vocals, Cisneros' trance-like meditations on faith and the universe melt into the arrangements and can be quite relaxing. It's a major change from his work in Sleep, but presaged by the Dopesmoker album. Echoes of Cisneros' work in Sleep and Shrinebuilder can be heard in these four tracks, but OM is its own beast; the contemplative nature of the songs lends itself well to psychological horror or subtle tales of terror like those by Gary Braunbeck.



Orrin: *all.things.are.numbers*

Future Recordings

<http://futurerecordings.bandcamp.com>

Orrin has produced an album of (mostly) quiet, ambient-type compositions. Not as ambient as Brian Eno and less sound design than *Stalker*, this provides a solid sonic background containing interesting themes. The tracks are driven mostly by piano or guitar and have a solid mid-tempo beat. Unlike traditional ambient music, these songs have traditional structures and beckon attention to the melodies and hooks. There is surprisingly insistent percussion and electric guitar on several tracks



working to keep the work as a whole varied. The songs do not bring specific environments to mind, and therefore do not tie themselves to specific locales or time frames.

It was difficult to pick a single album from the Future Recordings roster, as the different artists have similar musical directions, albeit with varying themes and executions. As the majority of the artists with within the ambient genre, lyrical content rarely appears amongst the label's catalogue. A plus with this label is that the majority of its releases are available as a free download, so there is no risk in testing out a new artist.

Pelican: *What We All Come to Need*  
Southern Lord

An excellent soundtrack to a travel-based novel or a paranoid thriller, Pelican's album is a hard rocking, driven collection. An aggressive, yet isolated mood is conveyed by many tracks herein.



*What We All Come to Need* was obviously written in a big city; it contains the heartbeat of the streets, the psychic weight of unseen people, and the feeling of being in constant motion. This is an aural companion to Warren Ellis' *Crooked Little Vein* if you will. Even in its quiet moments, *Need* feels urban.

Russian Circles: *Geneva*  
Suicide Squeeze  
<http://russiacirclesband.com/>



*Geneva* is an instrumental album in the hard rock mould. Unlike Boris' *Feedbacker*, *Geneva* feels deliberately composed with structures and themes fleshed out consciously.

In other this is no expanded jam session. Russian Circles does not hit with an all-out assault; instead, the contrast between dark and light are allowed to be felt, giving more emphasis to both. As anyone who has spent time listening to metal can attest, the lack of breathing room within compositions can make an album difficult to listen to repeatedly due to audio fatigue. Despite being less organic than Boris, *Geneva* is not composed and compartmentalized to the point of robotic repetition.

Like Pelican, this is modern hard rock with interesting arrangements. There are no slouches amongst the musicians here. *Geneva* would make an

excellent soundtrack for a modern or urban horror tale. There are no pastoral valleys or gothic castles hidden in this album.

The preceding selections are just a starting point for some sonic sanity whilst reading or writing. Many of the bands listed are gateway drugs to other, more obscure but fascinating recording artists. Russian Circles and Pelican lead to Red Sparowes; Oriin leads to *We All Inherit the Moon* and *Good Night, Sleep Well*; OM leads to Tinariwan or Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. Most of these artists have sample tracks available on their websites, or there may be times when Amazon or iTunes offers "deals" on indy artists. The great thing about the internet for music is the same caveat: *anyone* can put their music out there for the world to hear. Try to find samples before buying so you do not get stuck with unlistenable crap like Nekrasov or Aderlating (there is a reason they only pressed 300 copies of the vinyl...). Until the next journey into the catacombs, may your headphones drown out the world and books chill your blood.

**LITERARY REMAINS By R. B. Russell**  
[www.pspublishing.co.uk](http://www.pspublishing.co.uk)

I find myself confused by this book. On the one hand it contains a couple of very weak ghost stories that are so subtle they fall flat, leaving me feeling that I've missed something. On the other hand it has some very worthy *Twilight Zone*-esque weirdness like "Another Country", which makes you want to read more.

The fact that there are only ten stories in this nearly two hundred page collection actually works against it. These stories would read much better if separated by a few carefully placed shorter pieces. Russell's writing style, similar to that of the original ghost story writers that he mentions in the title story Machen and James, adds to the limited appeal. Russell's traditional, even antiquated style doesn't vary throughout the book. A little more variety would have been nice, or could it be that Russell is just a one-trick pony?

Having had a good moan, the stories that do work are good. The aforementioned "Another Country" is my favourite, but "Loup-garou" and "Blue Glow" also show what Russell is capable of. Subtle and spooky, they work at drawing the reader in and then twisting reality.

The book is beautifully produced; this hardback is a high quality product, and the understated cover suits the contents therein. Subtle

can definitely describe the contents, if not the writing style which shouts Victorian Ghost Story, lending a strange edge to the more modern tales.

For a traditional ghost story fan this book is a marvellous thing, but for me it was too much of homage to those old tales and there weren't enough newer and different stories to balance the book. Even in a single author collection I prefer a bit of variety. The good stories are very good, but there are too many others that don't hit the target.

Definitely shows potential, but ultimately fails to deliver... mostly.

By Stanley Riiks

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