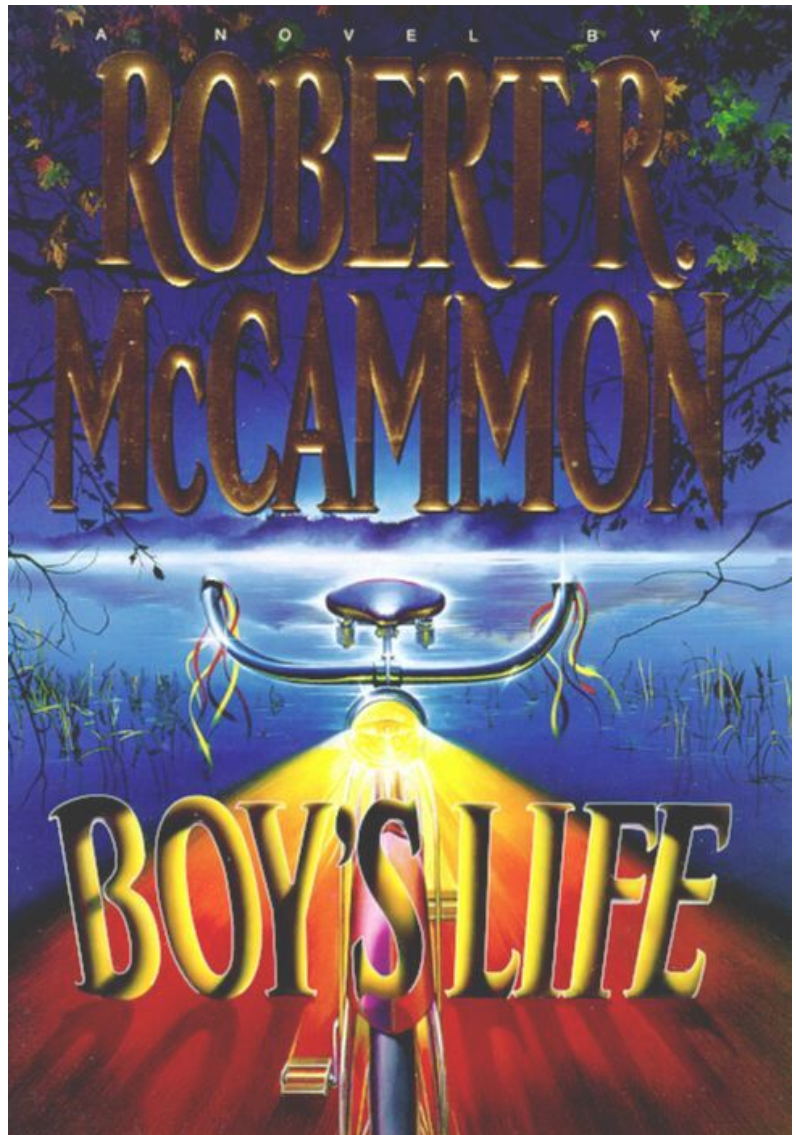


LIGHTS OUT!

The
ROBERT R. McCAMMON
Newsletter

Vol. 2 No. 1
Issue 5
February 1991



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“And Now, the End Is Near...”

A Look at the Future by Hunter Goatley

Well, once again, finally! As you all know, I think, this issue has been delayed because my family and I moved again, this time from Knoxville to Bowling Green, KY. Again, I appreciate your patience and understanding.

Each time I go to press, the issue seems to change from what I originally intended. I've been telling you for awhile that this issue would feature a new McCammon short story—well, it doesn't. It does, however, have an essay entitled “The State of Where,” written by McCammon exclusively for *Lights Out!* The essay describes where McCammon is in his career, and where he's going. I think you'll find it interesting.

Now the bad news. As you probably gathered from the title above, I'm extinguishing the lights on *Lights Out!* Despite my best efforts, finding the time to devote to the newsletter is becoming more and more difficult. The fact that I've only been able to do three issues in the last 13 months shows that something's not right. There are several reasons that I won't be able to keep up *Lights Out!*:

- 1.) Production costs have steadily risen as I've moved around the country. The last issue and this one were more expensive than the previous three issues had been; in fact, much of the subscription renewals went to pay for those issues. I also severely over-estimated the growth of *Lights Out!*—the renewals since June will not cover the cost of four more issues; more on that in a minute.
- 2.) I like my job now. In the beginning, *Lights Out!* was a much-needed diversion from a programming job that had become unbearable—only I didn't realize it at the time. Now that I'm out of the “hell-job,” I find myself less willing to spend my free time working on *Lights Out!*
- 3.) I've been stepping up my writing for the technical journal *VAX Professional*. Since 1986 I've written 16 articles for them; this year I'm to start a series of programming articles that will probably be published as a book.
- 4.) I'm going to be teaching some programming classes this fall at Western Kentucky University.
- 5.) And most importantly, my almost-two-year-old daughter Margaret wants—and should have—more time to spend with Daddy. Lately, between work and *Lights Out!* she and Dana have had to spend too much time without

me—and vice versa.

Since renewals have been lower than anticipated and new subscriptions have been virtually non-existent, I cannot afford to publish four more issues of *Lights Out!*—instead of offering refunds, I've decided that there will be one more issue of *Lights Out!* sometime later this year. This special issue will be longer than previous issues and will be available to *current subscribers only*. Book dealers will not be selling them and I won't have any extra copies for sale.

Rick McCammon has been a joy to work with, and when I told him of my plans to discontinue *Lights Out!* he offered to help me make the last issue very special for you. Therefore, the next and final issue of *Lights Out!* will feature not one, but two excerpts from abandoned Robert R. McCammon novels!

Though Rick once told me that he would never show *The Address* to anyone, he has volunteered to let me publish what he had written at the time he shelved the book. That's about 50 manuscript pages. Rick is also providing me with the beginning of *The Midnight Man*, a novel he started last year. In addition, the issue will feature a brand-new interview with Rick, where we'll discuss *Boy's Life* and more about Rick's plans for the future. I'll be driving to Birmingham in March or April to sit down and talk with Rick, so if you have any questions you want me to ask him, please send them soon.

As you can see, I'm planning for *Lights Out!* to go with a BANG! And since the next issue is for current subscribers only, there won't be very many copies. I've got plenty of back issues of issues 2 and 3 sitting around being a fire hazard; if you'd like extra copies of those issues, send \$1 for each copy and I'll mail them out immediately. The \$1 will cover postage and the envelope(s). There are no limits, except that the offer is available only to current subscribers. I still have some of issues 1 and 4, but I'm not sure how many; let me know if you want those issues and I'll include them as long as they last. Please send all correspondence to the address at the bottom of this page. And thanks for your patience—the last issue will be out this summer.

On the cover: the artwork for McCammon's upcoming novel, *Boy's Life*, and a magazine illustration accompanying a Japanese translation of “The Thang.” ■

Lights Out!	Published by: Hunter Goatley	Thanks to Paddy McKillop, Jodi Strissel, Paul Schulz, Adam Rothberg, & you. Thanks especially to Jeffrey Sackett, Kazue Tanaka, Al Sarrantonio, Joe Lansdale, and Rick & Sally McCammon. Incredibly special thanks to Dana & Margaret Goatley!	This newsletter was typeset on a Digital VAX 6320, using the T _E X typesetting system developed by Donald E. Knuth.
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The State of Where

by Robert R. McCammon

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First things first. I want to thank you for your interest in my writing. If a writer had no readers, he or she would be a voice speaking in an empty room. I am very, very grateful to find my room full of appreciative ears, and I can't tell you how much that means to me.

I presume that if you were not interested in me, you wouldn't be reading this issue of *Lights Out!* Hunter Goatley has done a magnificent job in putting together this newsletter, and I'm proud to call Hunter my friend. The task of doing something like this is often thankless, usually a major pain, and a test of the nerves when the editing and printing deadlines roll around. So: thank you Hunter, you're doing a spectacular job.

Well, I guess that since this is my newsletter it's also kind of a forum for my voice. I feel strange about this whole thing, really. When I began writing professionally, in 1978, I never intended to become a celebrity or "star." I still don't intend to. I am first and foremost a writer, and I am blessed beyond all blessings because I have readers and my books are selling. Which, of course, is the bottom line for the publisher. I have a different bottom line; I've always thought that the success of a previous book means I can write another one. I live from book to book. From child to child, if you please. Each one, I hope, gets a little better. Different, yes. But better, I hope.

You may be wondering about the title I've chosen for this article. It's exactly as it says. I want to tell you where I am, and where I'm going.

I've just finished my new book, *Boy's Life*, which will be out either in July or August of 1991. I'm starting the next book in the middle of January, and hope to be finished with it by the end of May. *Under the Fang*, the anthology Martin Greenberg and I edited for the Horror Writers of America, will be published by Pocket Books in the summer of '91, and the paperback edition of *Mine* will be out, I believe, in May. I just signed a contract for all my books to be published in Japan, and there are all sorts of great things happening in other countries for me. Sometimes—well, very often, actually—I can't believe all this is going on. It seems like a dream, and that someone else is at the wheel and I'm just along for the ride. I am living a life I never could have imagined, when I was ten years old and pounding out my ghost stories on a Royal typewriter my grandparents bought me from a junkshop.

Now, I have to tell you this: I probably won't be writing any more supernatural horror novels, and I want to explain why this is so.

The field of horror writing has changed dramatically since the mid- to late-'70s. At that time, horror writing was still influenced by the classics of the literature. I don't find that to be true anymore. It seems to me that horror writing—all writing, no matter what genre—needs to be about people, first and foremost. It needs to speak to the

pain and isolation we all feel, about the disappointments we have all faced and about the bravery people summon in order to get through what is sometimes a crushing day-to-day existence. Again, I don't find that to be generally true of the horror field as we enter the '90s. Something of rubber stamping and cookie cutters has gotten into this field, and it's an unfortunate fact that even the best writing is judged not by its own merit, but by what the general public understands to be "real horror"—namely, the brutal and brainless garbage that Hollywood throws out as "entertainment" for the "lowest common denominator."

And, my friends, it's killing us.

A sense of wonder and beauty has been drained from our field. It has happened slowly, over a period of years. Without wonder and beauty, our writing and our dreams are lifeless. Without humanity in our work, we are left with senseless rage and violence. Such things are all too common in our world: are we here to try to make things better, or to try to compete with the heavy darkness that is bludgeoning people's minds into Silly Putty? I, for one, want no part in layering more darkness onto that weight, and calling it a "fun entertainment."

It's just not right.

I probably won't be writing any more supernatural horror novels...

ROBERT R. MCCAMMON

I understand the benefits of entertainment and escapism to the society. Such things sell. But it seems to me that the balance is way out of whack now. Horror writing has lost its grace and character, in favor of dumbness influenced by movies. A new generation of writers and readers is advancing. They will think that violence and gore, brutality and meanness sell, and that's what they will write and read. Publishing companies encourage what has worked before, to the detriment of the future. Readers come to expect less and to like it. Writers pocket their cash and outline the next book, which must be like the last because the publishers say this is what people expect and like.

Does this cycle really, truly, help anybody?

No. Not the writers, because if we write by formula we turn off our imaginations and we limit our scope of ideas. Not the publishers, because even though they might make a ton of money in the present, they're impoverishing their futures by advocating a rubber stamp mentality that cripples talent. And certainly not the readers, who may get hooked on the "scare" element of horror fiction but whose very literacy is threatened by the cookie cutter approach to writing. If writers stop taking chances and risks in favor of the "sure thing," writing itself becomes dry and predictable,

all the life and fire sucked right out of it. We are left, then, with mindless slavery to money, with selling not works from the heart and soul, but works that are dictated by the marketplace. And that, my friends, is death.

Oh, you can get rich doing it that way. Sure you can. You'll never be poor selling escapism, but Jesus Christ, there is so much more to life than that! There are questions that need to be asked, and people and worlds explored, and life to be affirmed and death to be examined head-on without the need for shapes in sheets and haunted houses.

That's what I think. Today's escapist horror fiction has become irrelevant in our tortured society. So where do we go from here?

I hear, as you probably do, a lot about "the cutting edge." This means, it appears to me, experimental fiction. That's great. We need more experimental fiction. But why is it that "the cutting edge" means more and more graphic violence, more brutality—particularly against women—and fiction that seethes with rage and meanness? It's a mirror of our society, of course. But as writers, we need to be leaders too. We have voices that touch a lot of people not only in this country but all around the world. Why is it that we don't use those voices to help people instead of simply painting the social mirror darker and darker?

I am weary of celebrating death and evil. I just don't want to do it anymore. If my readers want only a celebration of evil, darkness, and death, then I am a miserable failure.

I'm asked this question occasionally: "What scares you?" I always give this answer: "Confinement." Most times the questioner looks at me as if he or she thinks I'm talking about being locked up in a dark closet or chained in a basement by a slaving madman. No, that's not what I

mean. My fear is of confinement of the mind, of being told I must write this way or that way about this subject and that I have no choice but to do as I'm directed. I find being a "horror writer" has become a confinement. I sense walls closing in on my choices, because of what I've written in the past.

Well, my way of doing things is to start busting down walls.

I don't want to be a "horror writer." I don't want to be a "psychological suspense writer," or a "mystery writer," or a "dark fantasy writer." As far as I am able, I want to destroy those walls of category that try to define what a person is and make him controllable. I don't want to be controllable. I want to be free, and by God I am going to be.

I am not shutting down, you see. By turning away from the strictly supernatural novel, I am walking into the real world. I will always have my own distinct voice and my own way of looking at things. I will always be a kid at heart and I will probably never be as good a writer as I would like to be, but I must walk my own path. I have to. Where I'm going to go I'm not sure, but I do know this: it's going to be one hell of a terrific trip. Because look at all those roads that lead out of the graveyard and into the realm of life. There are so many of them, and so many choices! And that sun is so bright, and those hills are so green! And there are things to be seen and learned, and stories to be written there, away from the shadows of the tombstones.

That's where I'm headed now. I hope you'll go with me. If not, not. I understand. But I have to put the demons, ghosts, and vampires away in their boxes and I have to go somewhere else. It sure is a big world, beyond the door of the house on haunted hill. That's where I have to go. ■

Things Unearthed...

News items of interest

Boy's Life to Be Published in August;
Paperbacks *Mine* and *Under the Fang* Scheduled

Robert R. McCammon's new novel, *Boy's Life*, will be published in hardcover by Pocket Books in August 1991. The novel, a non-supernatural look at a twelve-year-old boy's life in 1964, was completed in November 1990. *Boy's Life's* main character, Cory, was the subject of several short stories McCammon wrote while in college. "I was looking for a new story and decided it was time to go back and write about Cory," McCammon recently told *Lights Out!* The cover for the book appears on the front page of this issue.

Also scheduled for 1991: the paperback release of *Mine*, McCammon's 1990 novel about the search for a kidnapped baby, has been set for May, and *Under the Fang*, the first Horror Writers of America anthology, has been set for August. Both books will be published by Pocket Books. The cover for the paperback edition of *Mine* features a double-cover of the hardcover artwork, with the eye showing through a cut-out on the outer cover. This edition also sports a couple

of review quotes:

- "*Mine* grips you tightly by the throat, right at the start, and squeezes. . . ."
—*The New York Daily News*
- "McCammon at his very best . . . and then some."
—*The Birmingham News*

Following the trend of most "big name" paperbacks, the paperback edition of *Mine* will retail for \$5.95.

McCammon Receives Bram Stoker Award
for Short Story "Eat Me"

Robert R. McCammon's short story "Eat Me," featured in Skipp & Spector's zombie anthology *Book of the Dead*, won the 1990 Bram Stoker Award for Outstanding Short Story. McCammon had also been nominated for Outstanding Novel (*The Wolf's Hour*) and Outstanding Collection (*Blue World*). *Blue World* was also nominated for the 1990 World Fantasy Award for Best Collection.

The Bram Stoker Awards were presented in Providence, RI, on June 23, 1990. The Award recipients were:

- **Novel:** *Carrion Comfort*, by Dan Simmons
- **First Novel:** *Sunglasses After Dark*, by Nancy A. Collins
- **Novella/Novellette:** "On the Far Side of the Cadillac Desert with Dead Folks," by Joe R. Lansdale (from *Book of the Dead*)
- **Short Story:** "Eat Me," by Robert R. McCammon (from *Book of the Dead*)
- **Collection:** *Richard Matheson: Collected Stories*, by Richard Matheson
- **Non-Fiction:** *Harlan Ellison's Watching*, by Harlan Ellison, and *Horror: 100 Best Books*, edited by Steve Jones & Kim Newman
- **Lifetime Achievement:** Robert Bloch

The 1991 Bram Stoker Awards Weekend will be held in Los Angeles, to the delight of the HWA's West Coast members.

Larry King Plugs *Mine*
in *USA Today* Column

On July 9, 1990, Larry King's column in *USA Today*, "Larry King's People," sported the following headline: "A fun summer read and a blockbuster bust." The "fun summer read" was Robert R. McCammon's *Mine*; here's what King had to say:

Notes from all over. . . . Like thrillers? For great summer reading, latch onto *Mine* (Pocket Books, \$18.95) by Robert R. McCammon. A newborn baby in a breaking-up marriage. A deranged former hippie (and a wanted terrorist) steals the baby. An FBI agent shot up terribly 20 years before by the hippie. A wild series of car chases and much mayhem. And what good fun. Really. Enjoy.

The plug was the topic of some good-natured ribbing for McCammon at NECON from authors whose books hadn't been recommended by Larry King.

By the way, the "blockbuster bust" was *Another 48 HRS*, with Eddie Murphy and Nick Nolte.

Miscellaneous
Updates

German Editions of McCammon
Novels Unearthed

German publisher Knaur has published some (perhaps all) of McCammon's novels. The books that I have seen were all trade paperbacks, with some of the most horrid cover artwork I've ever seen on horror novels. The cover for *Bethany's Sin* features a mostly-naked man (?) on a horse that's rearing up. The artwork looks like that I usually associate with Ancient Greek work—very chiseled-looking. McCammon described the German cover for *They Thirst* as "terrible."

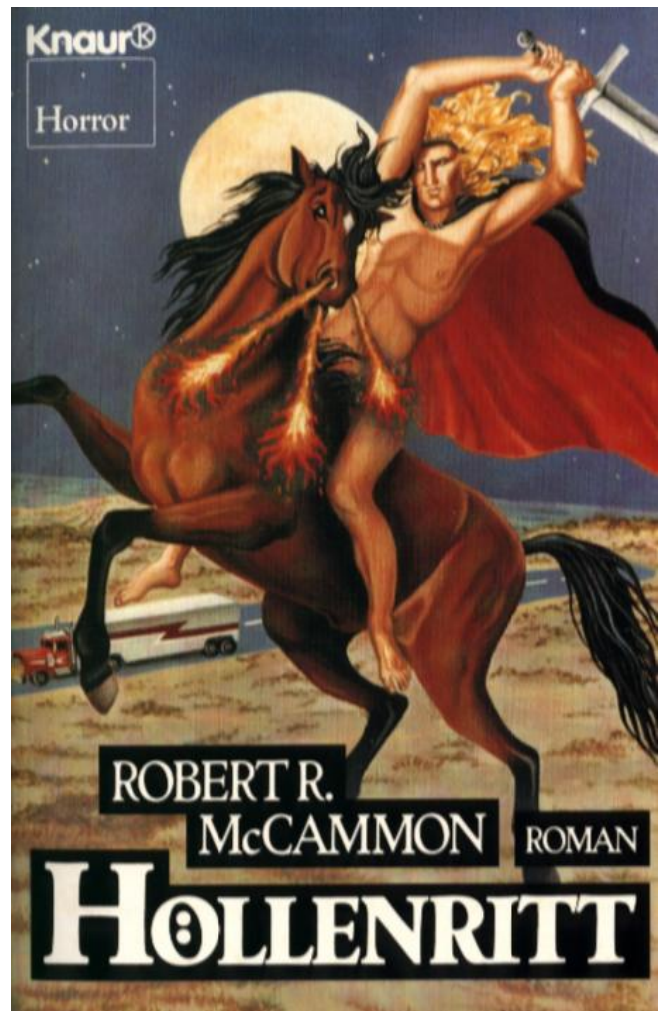
Dark Harvest's They Thirst

The Dark Harvest edition of *They Thirst* is scheduled for release in Spring 1991. Dark Harvest publisher Paul Mikol told *Lights Out!* that the book is being completely re-typeset—the Pocket Books plates will not be used, as we previously reported.

McCammon Writes Short Story
Afterword for *Night Visions 8*

Robert R. McCammon has contributed a short story to *Night Visions 8*, the latest in the series from Dark Harvest. The story is a biting commentary on censorship and those who try to enforce it. The book, which was just released, features 30,000 words of new material from Joe R. Lansdale, Stephen Gallagher, and John Farris. McCammon's short story serves as the Afterword.

Cover Artwork for German
Trade PB of *Bethany's Sin*



British Fantasy Society
Award Winners Announced

Lights Out! subscriber Paddy McKillop writes in with news of the 1990 Fantasycon, held in the U.K. over September 14–16, 1990. The U.S. Guest of Honor was Joe R. Lansdale and the U.K. Guest of Honor was Stephen Gallagher (both authors are featured in Dark Harvest's *Night Visions 8*). The winners of the 1990 British Fantasy Awards were:

- **Best Novel:** *Carrion Comfort*, by Dan Simmons
- **Best Newcomer:** Nancy A. Collins
- **Best Short Story:** "On the Far Side of the Cadillac Desert with Dead Folks," by Joe R. Lansdale
- **Best Small Press Magazine:** *Dagon*
- **Best Artist:** Dave Carson
- **Best Film:** *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*
- **Special Award:** Pete Coleborn

McKillop, who was on the 1990 awards committee, mentioned that the "Best Film" category is being dropped in favor of a "Best Anthology" award.

Fantasy Flea Market
Offers Book-Buying Alternative

Lights Out! subscriber Derek Reigner has formed *The Fantasy Flea Market*, a newsletter "adzine" published for collectors. The publication will be a bi-monthly listing of classified ads about horror and science fiction. The purpose of the publication is to provide collectors with alternatives to buying books from dealers, who sometimes mark books up beyond their actual value. To quote from the announcement letter: "You can buy, sell, or trade anything from books, audios, videos, and comics to movie posters, makeup, spaceships, and coffins."

Interested collectors can place an ad of up to 200 words for \$5. In addition, he also plans to offer contests and reviews and letters from subscribers.

For more information, write to the following address:

The Fantasy Flea Market
151 Penn Street
Pennsburg, PA 18073

Update: Joe Lansdale

Dateline: January 9, 1991

Joe Lansdale has been one busy man. The following list is a non-comprehensive look at what he's working on:

- Borderlands Press is reprinting *The Magic Wagon* in a special signed, limited edition illustrated by Mark Nelson, with a cover by Jill Bauman. Mark Nelson also illustrated Lansdale's short story collection, *By Bizarre Hands*. The edition is priced at \$50, which Joe said was a little high, but he's pleased with the look it'll have. *The Magic Wagon* is Joe's favorite book of his own works.
- *Night Visions 8* has just been released by Dark Harvest, featuring 30,000 words by Joe Lansdale, Stephen Gallagher, and John Farris. Robert R. McCammon wrote a short story on censorship that serves as the afterword for the book.
- *Captured By the Engines* is a Batman novel that should be finished by the time you read this. Joe describes it as a very different book, with elements of many different genres, including suspense, comic book, and film noir.
- A four-part comic book tentatively titled *Blood and Shadows* is scheduled for release by DC Comics.
- Joe is beginning work on a big suspense novel, as yet unnamed.
- Pulphouse will be publishing another Lansdale short story collection called *Stories by Mama Lansdale's Youngest Boy*. The book will contain many very early stories by Lansdale, serving as a look back at some stories written in the 1970s.
- *Cold in July* has been re-optioned for film by the same person who originally optioned it.
- *Dead in the West* is still optioned. If the film actually happens, Joe will serve as co-producer.
- "On the Far Side of the Cadillac Desert with Dead Folks," which originally appeared in Skipp & Spector's 1989 anthology *Book of the Dead*, has been re-optioned. In addition, the story will appear in comic book form in *Taboo*, Steve Bissette's horror comic. Joe received the HWA's Bram Stoker Award, the American Horror Award, and the British Fantasy Award for the novella.
- "The Pit" has been optioned for possible translation to film. Negotiations are under way for a four-part "prestige format" comic adaptation of "The Pit" by a well-known comic company (and it's not Marvel or DC).
- A comic book adaptation of "The Night They Missed the Horror Show" will be presented in a future issue of *Taboo*.
- Joe has a short story appearing in *Obsessions*, a Dark Harvest anthology edited by Gary Raisor. The book should be available as you read this.
- Small-press magazine *Cemetery Dance* is doing a Joe Lansdale special edition. The issue will contain an Off-Broadway play by Lansdale called "Drive-In Date." The play, along with one by Dale Close, offended one of the play's investors so much that he withdrew from the production. Also featured in the issue is a rare Lansdale story called "Bestsellers Guaranteed," a story which has previously appeared in spy magazines.
- *Cold Blood*, an anthology edited by *Cemetery Dance* publisher Richard T. Chizmar and published by Mark Ziesing, will feature a play version of Joe's short story "By Bizarre Hands." The play script features a different ending to the story. Joe told *Lights Out!* that, with the original ending, "the play just sort of laid there." ■

The Tenth Year of Camp NECON

Text and Photos by Hunter Goatley

NECON X (North Eastern Convention) was held over the weekend of July 19–22, 1990, at Roger Williams College, a small Baptist college in Bristol, Rhode Island. The convention was limited to 250 people.

My trip to NECON constitutes the proverbial horror story. Without going into detail, let me say that it involved a closed airport, a missed connection, two airlines, and luggage that didn't arrive until Friday afternoon. By the time my luggage arrived, I think just about everybody at NECON knew what had happened. I want to take this time to express my gratitude to Jodi Strissel and crew, who waited two extra hours for me at the airport without even knowing whether or not I was really coming in that night.

Staying at NECON is like staying at camp; indeed, the name tags were labelled "Camp NECON." Some of the "neat" things about Camp NECON are that you stay in dorms, eat your meals in the cafeteria, and attend the panels



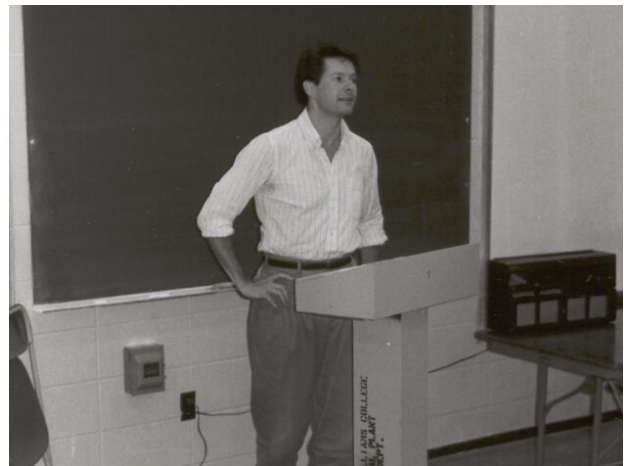
Rick & Sally at the NECON Celebrity Roast

in a college lecture hall. All fine and dandy except when you arrive after it's too late to get into your room, you don't have clean clothes for the next day, you find empty rooms and decide to stay in them, you wash your clothes in the sink, and then put them on still wet the next morning.

OK. Enough griping. I was too busy trying to track down my luggage to attend many of the sessions on Friday, but the primary topics were women horror authors and the small press. One of the panels I actually sat in on was "Publishing and You: Starting Your Own Company," moderated by Stanley Wiater and featuring *Taboo* publisher/artist Steve Bissette, *Weird Tales* editor Darrell Schweitzer, Kathleen Jurgens, and others. Steve Bissette elaborated on the difficulties he's had publishing *Taboo*, a horror comic that is published in trade paperback format. As the name suggests, *Taboo* goes where a lot of people wouldn't want to go by featuring some of the weirdest sexual and violent comic

images produced today. Bissette told of his problems getting the second issue of *Taboo* printed, which included trying a number of printers and binders before finding someone who'd work with the material. The first few printers and binders objected to the contents and felt it was their moral right to do whatever they could to ensure that the books were not printed and made available. Bissette also revealed that issue 3 of *Taboo* was banned in both Canada and England; customs officials in those countries confiscated shipments of the book.

Near the end of the panel, *Weird Tales* editor Darrell Schweitzer stirred things up by suggesting that the only horror magazines that would survive for any length of time were *Weird Tales*, England's *Fear*, and a third title that I can no longer remember. His reason: they pay the most, so naturally all authors would want to be published there and would not submit work to the smaller magazines



Rick's NECON Roast rebuttals

because they wouldn't profit as much. Needless to say, this reasoning provoked audience and panel alike. Kathleen Jurgens described an artist who makes several thousand dollars per painting, but contributes artwork to her magazine free of charge simply because he wants to. An audience member also questioned the validity of the statement when she pointed out that each issue of *Weird Tales* spotlights an author and includes several stories by that author, cutting down on the number of authors who could be represented in any given issue. All but Darrell seemed to agree that there is plenty of room for all the different small press magazines.

The traditional autograph party was held Friday night in the college's pub. At about 7 PM, people started filing in and hanging out until some of the authors in attendance sat down to begin autographing. Authors and artists in attendance included Robert R. McCammon, Joseph Citro, Rick Hautala, Charles L. Grant, Christopher Fahy, Steve

Bissette, F. Paul Wilson, Thomas F. Monteleone, Alan Rodgers, Alan Ryan, R. Patrick Gates, Charles and Wendy Lang, Elizabeth Massie, and more. Books by many of the authors were offered for sale at the party, giving attendees the chance to buy a book and have it signed (a somewhat questionable practice since only one dealer was represented). Robert R. McCammon had the longest line of fans, most of whom had literally stacks of books to be signed. One dealer in line had boxes of McCammon books he thought he would have signed. The McCammon signing lasted for almost two hours; near the end, the NECON officials limited people in line to no more than three books so that McCammon would have a chance to enjoy himself and talk to people. After the signing, a lot of people retired to the "rec room" for talks and drinks until early the next morning.

Saturday's panels featured the more well-known authors and business people attending NECON. One of the heaviest-attended panels of the weekend was one entitled "The State of Modern Horror: Threat or Menace?" Panelists were



Elizabeth Massie, Rick Hautala, Joe Citro

Douglas E. Winter, Robert R. McCammon, Berkley editor Ginjer Buchanan, Thomas F. Monteleone, Steve Bissette, and moderator Les Daniels. The discussion covered a number of topics, centering on the conflicts between author and publisher. The authors discussed the covers produced for their books, including the infamous Zebra Books "skeleton" covers, and whether or not categorizing horror fiction was helpful to sales. Virtually all of the authors didn't care for the covers of their books, including McCammon, whose next few books will not fit the sun/moon motif adopted by Pocket Books. Things heated up at the end as the writers squared off against the editors in a fascinating showdown that was cut short by lunch. The panel easily could have lasted longer than one hour (and should have, based on the lunch that was served).

Other heavily-attended panels included "My Home Town: Regionalism in Horror," featuring Charles L. Grant, Rick Hautala, R. Patrick Gates, Elizabeth Massie, and Joseph Citro; and "How to Write a Novel," a mistitled panel

Classifieds

HORROR & FANTASY. New and used 1st editions, paperbacks, and magazines. Latest from McCammon, Barker, and King. American, Canadian, and British editions. Send \$1 for latest catalog to: THUNDER BOOKS, 144 Cox Cres., Thunder Bay, Ontario, P7A 7K8, Canada.

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with F. Paul Wilson, Steve Spruill, Morgan Fields, Paul Hazel, and Craig Shaw Gardner. The latter panel was more of a discussion on the writing practices of each author and some suggestions for would-be writers in the audience.

Throughout the weekend, artwork by various artists was on display next to the dealers' room. The artistic highlight of the weekend was an artists' wine and cheese reception held at 4 PM Saturday.

The traditional main event of NECON is a celebrity roast, where one of the guests is roasted by some of the other authors in attendance. The roast is normally the last event of NECON, taking place before lunch on Sunday. This year's roastee was Robert R. McCammon, who unknowingly (?) threw a wrench into the plans by leaving early Sunday morning. When NECON organizers discovered McCammon's travel arrangements, they scrambled to get everything changed so the roast could be held Saturday night.

The McCammon roasters were Les Daniels, who played a ditty on his banjo and offered some "practical" advice to McCammon on how to have movies made from his books; Charles Grant, who talked about how he and McCammon had never been to a convention together before this year's NECON; Chet Williamson, who was unable to attend, but sent a hilarious tape supposedly featuring a stripper from an Atlanta club McCammon, Williamson, and Dan Simmons visited on a "purely-for-research" trip; Doug Winter and Craig Shaw Gardner, who performed a McCammon-specific rap tune as "2 White Crew"; and Tom Monteleone, who performed an uproarious stand-up routine telling the tale of McCammon being captured by natives on a trip to South America. After the roasting was complete, the burnished McCammon took the stand and delivered his witty comebacks for all of his roasters. Despite the sudden scheduling change, the roast was an unqualified success.

Saturday night's last event was a "horror game show,"

hosted by Craig Shaw Gardner and Doug Winter, with Lynne Winter serving as “Vanna White.” The “show” featured various trivia questions about horror novels, movies, and movie soundtracks. Overall, it was an enjoyable hour—the prizes were fun (including a torrid romance novel and Piers Anthony’s *Total Recall*), and it was amazing to discover just how many really *bad* movies Steve Bissette has seen.

After the game show, most people stayed up too late enjoying pizza (provided by Craig Goden and Dave Hinchberger) and late-night talk about all kinds of things. It was a nice, if somewhat crowded and smoke-filled, atmosphere for

meeting authors, dealers, and other fans.

The NECON weekend was capped off Sunday with a panel entitled “Dead Puppies Write Again,” featuring Bob Booth, Chet Williamson, Alan Ryan, Lucius Shepard, and F. Paul Wilson. The topic of censorship was hotly debated during this session. Finally, a NECON Tenth Anniversary Celebration introduced the people behind NECON.

NECON XI will again be held in July at Roger Williams College, though I’m not sure of the exact dates. The scheduled guests of honor are Ramsey Campbell, Graham Masterson, and Bob Eggleton. ■

The 1990 World Fantasy Convention

Text and Photos by Hunter Goatley

The 1990 World Fantasy Convention, subtitled “An H.P. Lovecraft Centenary Celebration,” was held over the weekend of November 2–4, 1990, near Chicago. This year’s hosts were Bob and Phyllis Weinberg, owners of Weinberg Books, who had previously organized the 1983 World Fantasy Convention. The festivities took place at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Schaumburg, Illinois. This year’s Guests of Honor were F. Paul Wilson, L. Sprague de Camp, artist David B. Mattingly, and editor Susan Allison. The Special Guests were Robert Bloch and Julius Schwartz, with Raymond E. Feist serving as Toastmaster.

Being a mere eight hours’ drive, my wife Dana and I drove to Chicago—and made the mistake of driving through downtown Chicago because we wanted to “see Chicago,” not just drive by. Well, even driving on the interstate at 60 miles an hour, downtown Chicago is a pretty scary place. We locked the doors, “just to be safe.” Needless to say, when leaving the convention we took a different route.

This year, the attendees of the World Fantasy Convention were just about the only ones in the hotel, eliminating the crowding from non-conventioning guests—and *most* of the stares at all of the “strange people.” Things got off to a start in the Hospitality Suite on Thursday night, giving early arrivals a chance to unwind and talk to people. As is usually the case with parties held in hotel rooms, the air quickly turned hot and smoky.

After opening ceremonies on Friday morning, the panels got under way with one entitled “200 Years of Experience & Still Going.” The stellar panel consisted of moderator Julius Schwartz (editor of *Superman* and many other comics for many years) and guests Robert Bloch, L. Sprague de Camp, Lloyd Eshbach, and Jack Williamson. The panelists, all near or over 80 years old, told about their experiences writing science fiction and fantasy beginning in the 1920s and ’30s. They also discussed some of the other prominent writers of the day, including H.P. Lovecraft and John Campbell. Of the few panels I attended, this one was by far the best—and also the most heavily-attended.

The other heavily-attended Friday panel was “Vampires: Why Do We Love Them So?” moderated by Ellen Datlow, who edited the critically-acclaimed vampire anthol-

ogy *Blood Is Not Enough*. The panel members were supposed to be a virtual “Who’s Who” of vampire “experts”: Robert R. McCammon, Fred Saberhagen, Nancy Collins, Elaine Bergstrom, and Annette Klaus. From the number in attendance, it was obvious that interest was high—except from the panel members themselves. Most of them looked as though they’d rather have been somewhere else. To make matters worse, Ellen Datlow arrived late at the convention and had no questions prepared, leaving the panelists pretty much on their own. Allowing questions from audience members didn’t help much. Interest in vampires seems to be high, but everybody knows why they like them; a boring panel won’t shed any light on it.

Friday night is, traditionally, the night of the Autograph Party. Unlike the Seattle WFC, which held the party in a dimly-lit room better suited for slow-dancing than meeting people and signing books, this year’s party was held in a very large hall, with practically every conventioning author in attendance. The lines for some, like Robert Bloch, were long, but everyone seemed to get most of the autographs they set out to get.

Other Friday panels, which I missed, included “Splat-terpunk: The Extreme Horror,” featuring moderator Paul Sammon, Joe R. Lansdale, Nancy Collins, Wayne Allen Sallee, Ed Bryant, and Phil Nuttman; “An Interview with Fritz Leiber,” conducted by his son Justin; and “HPL Meets the Editors,” which discussed what H.P. Lovecraft might be writing today and if he’d be able to sell it.

A number of horror-related panels were slated for Saturday, beginning with “Deep Dish Fantasy & Horror,” with Brian Hodge, Paul Olson, and others who spoke out on being writers from the Midwest. Other panels included the following:

- “What’s Really Scary?” moderated by J.N. Williamson, featuring Matthew J. Costello, Steve Rasnic Tem, Hugh B. Cave, David Morrell, Nancy Holder, and Kathryn Cramer;
- “The Never-Ending Sequel,” with experts Jack L. Chalker, Piers Anthony, Philip José Farmer, Jo Clayton, and Gordon R. Dickson;
- “Agents Speak Their Mind,” with Richard Curtis, Lori

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Perkins, and others;

- “The Art of Collaboration,” with Pat LoBrutto, Raymond E. Feist, Janny Wurts, Bill Ransom, Suzy Hartzell, and Dawn Pauline Dunn;
- “Lovecraft’s Legacy,” moderated by Bob Weinberg and featuring Mort Castle, Joe Citro, F. Paul Wilson, Chet Williamson, and Graham Masterton;
- and “A David Mattingly Slide Show,” featuring the artist guest of honor.

The only panel I attended was “Monsters of the Mind,” with moderator David Hartwell and panelists Robert Bloch, Chet Williamson, T.M. Wright, and Karl Edward Wagner. Answering the question, “Are the most horrifying monsters locked within ourselves?” it sounded great, but wasn’t—I didn’t even stay for the whole hour. As with the vampires panel, there wasn’t much to be gleaned from the panel—except that they can all say “Robert ‘Psycho’ Bloch,” as if the man has written nothing else in his life.



Robert Bloch, Julius Schwartz, David Mattingly
Susan Allison, L. Sprague de Camp, Raymond Feist, F. Paul Wilson

Bob Weinberg told me before the convention that he was planning some different panels, and two of them were held Saturday. “Famous Faces from the Pulps” was a slide show featuring rare pictures of some of the “great” names of horror and fantasy from the collection of Julius Schwartz. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend, but it sounded very interesting. “The Fans Take the Heat” put the fans and critics on the panel and the pros in the audience. Panelists included Stefan Dziemianowicz, *Lights Out!* contest winner Paul Schulz, Peter Infantino, and Nancy Ford.

H.P. Lovecraft was a big lover of ice cream, so Saturday night featured the “HPL Centenary Ice Cream Social.” Several flavors of ice cream were available—and it was good ice cream. This was the highlight of the weekend for some. The social was combined with the authors’ and artists’ receptions, giving them a chance to mingle without signing autographs.

The last day of the convention got under way with “What’s Wrong with Fantasy & Horror,” which discussed

the problems with the field today; “HPL Endures”; and “Epic Adventures,” about the problems and pleasures of writing long fantasy novels, featuring Stephen Donaldson and Patricia McKillip.

The WFC Awards Banquet was held Sunday afternoon, with excellent food. The winners of the 1990 World Fantasy Awards are:

- **Best Novel:** *Madouc*, by Jack Vance
- **Best Novella:** “Great Work of Time,” by John Crowley
- **Best Short Fiction:** “The Illusionist,” by Stephen Millhauser
- **Best Anthology:** *The Year’s Best Fantasy: Second Annual Collection*, edited by Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling
- **Best Collection:** *Richard Matheson: Collected Stories*, by Richard Matheson
- **Best Artist:** Tom Canty
- **Special Award (Professional):** Mark V. Ziesing
- **Special Award (Non-Professional):** *Grue*—Peggy



Robert Weinberg, Jack Williamson, Lloyd Eshbach
Julius Schwartz, Robert Bloch, L. Sprague de Camp

Nadramia

Finally, the art show featured exhibits from about 50 artists, ranging from pen and ink work to sculptures. As I usually find with art shows, the work ranged from the horrific to the horrible. Among the best work were pieces by Larry Elmore, Jill Bauman, and Nashville-native Alan Clark. Clark’s work consisted of several “skeleton” paintings—except they weren’t skeletons. Four of the five paintings featured dead trees and limbs whose shapes resembled skeletons (human and otherwise); the fifth was an overturned garbage can, whose spilled contents formed a human skeleton. You’d have to see it to really appreciate it, but his work seemed to me to be the talk of the weekend. Virtually everyone who passed it commented on it. As a matter of fact, Rick McCammon and I each bought prints of Alan Clark’s work—marking the first time I’ve ever purchased a print (and Dana didn’t even object to my buying one of the skeleton-that’s-not-a-skeleton prints for our living room!). Alan Clark’s work was also featured in

the first issue of *Iniquities* magazine.

I'm ashamed to admit that I've forgotten the names of a couple of artists whose work I thoroughly admired. One had several paintings from the *Alien* and *Predator* movies and the other featured paintings on crumpled paper—rather, the crumpled paper was part of the painting. It was an

interesting effect, and very well done.

The 1991 World Fantasy Convention will be hosted by Tucson, Arizona. Future conventions will be held outside Atlanta in 1992 and in Minneapolis in 1993. *Lights Out!* will have more information in the next issue. ■

The Long-Awaited Letters Column

Submitted by you

Dear Hunter,

Having been a collector of fine books for some years now, I must agree with Joe R. Lansdale that something needs to be done in the field to correct what is happening. I have set a limit for myself to not spend over \$100 per book. This has kept me from going into debt over my habits many times. Witness the limited of *The Stand*, by Stephen King, that has just recently been published. I have seen a copy of the book and it is truly a beautiful edition, but \$325 for something that is basically the same as the \$24.95 version, only that it is more elaborate and has a signature? I must admit, I thought about charging a copy on my Visa, then turning around and selling it at a much higher price (which is what a lot of people have done), taking my profit, and flying to Hawaii, but that just goes against my ethics. I'm not in it for the money; I only want to have editions of books that I like that are going to last awhile, not like the crap they send out of New York these days that won't even hold up after two readings!

Charging \$40, \$50, or \$60 more for a signed/limited edition of a book is wrong if there's nothing to it other than the signature and a cardboard box. I must say that I think Dark Harvest is doing a great job. I own trade editions of all the *Night Visions* series, plus a few others by them, and I don't think the typos are as bad as it was made to sound. These guys are putting out a product that is a great value for your money.

Like I said, something needs to be done with the situation of limiteds; what that could be, I'm not sure. I only go up to my limit if the manufacturing is good and it will last, it isn't available in any other published form, and it must be or contain work by an author or artist that I admire. I think we need to get back to only having two states of the books.

What are we doing here anyway? Collecting, or reading? If it's collecting, then perhaps Robert R. McCammon or Stephen King ought to publish a 600-page novel, with nothing but blank pages and their signature and call it a limited edition! For crying out

loud, let's get back to the basics and *read!*

Dan B. McMillen
Lynnwood, Washington

Hi, Hunter!

I am in total agreement with you on the currently ridiculous state of limited editions. Mark Ziesing told me once that the only reason he even does a signed edition is to help finance the trade edition. And he is totally up front about it. So you buy a Ziesing limited on that basis: to help finance his projects. All the other variants floating around now are for the birds. In my narrow world-view, there should only be two editions, period, and the limited edition should exist for these reasons only:

- There is no hardcover edition about.
- It's a unique version (i.e., containing additional material, like the Charnel House *The Stress of Her Regard* or the Kerosina editions from England).
- The limited edition helps subsidize the trade.

Paul Schulz
Casper, Wyoming

Hunter,

First of all, let me congratulate you on your fine publication. I find it to be an excellent source of information and enjoyment, and hope that you continue to publish it for years to come!

I was extremely interested in the transcript of your conversation with Msrs. McCammon and Lansdale regarding limited editions and the like. Both authors complained, as you had in an earlier issue, about the number of typos and misspellings which pop up in the Dark Harvest books. I enjoy most of the books Dark Harvest puts out, but am also annoyed by these errors.

A short while back, I offered my services as a proofreader to Dark Harvest. In my proposal, I included a list of errors which I had found in their (then) latest release, *Night Visions 7*. I elaborated on my qualifications

(college education, journalism experience), and promised quick turnaround, thorough reading, and *cheap* services (free, with my perq being that I got to read their stuff earlier!). I never heard back from them, so I hoped that they had acquired someone else for the position they so clearly need filled. Now, I can only hope that these complaints from two of their talented authors will motivate them to take some action in addressing this problem.

Thanks again for the great mag.

Len Johnson
Grand Rapids, MI

Hunter,

I liked the article on limited editions and stuff between Joe and Rick. No doubt you will know of the stampede to get the limited of *The Stand*. I have a friend who was lucky—or unlucky, as the case might be—to get one. He paid over \$600, and it had some pages bound upside down, others were duplicated, and other were missing altogether. Way to go Doubleday.

My theory on limiteds is that the publishers don't expect the purchaser to actually open the book. Sad to say, in some cases they may be right.

Michael Yates
Bolton, England

Dear Mr. Goatley,

I've purchased and read books for 40 years, but I am a relative newcomer to the horror and sword/fantasy fields. In the early fifties Donald Grant had a specialty bookstore in Providence, and I had occasion to go there very infrequently to look for Talbot Mundy and E.R. Burroughs. It was through the Robert E. Howard books published by Grant and others (I was completely ignorant of the Gnome Press and Arkham House publications) that I became aware of the serious output of the pulp writers. I've exhausted the Howard material, and so I am relying on the Weinberg catalogues and publications like yours to provide me with

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inspirational reading tips. For example, I've read about four of the Robert McCammon books (all I've been able to find) with great interest and pleasure, and I expect there are other writers out there for me.

You solicited letters from readers and collectors regarding collector's editions of books, and I have very personal feelings about them and their place in the book market. For a very long time authors and publishers have collaborated to print "special" editions of their books, usually in small numbers, perhaps a special format or binding, for the author's use to give copies to relatives and contemporaries. The English Lake poets were great at this, and the little privately printed pamphlets of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning, et. al., became extraordinarily valuable and were sought out by the wealthy collectors and libraries of the early 1900s. The demand for inscribed copies became so great that Thomas Wise, a scholarly bookseller, began forging them even to the point of creating editions that had never existed. He was so successful that even when Robert Browning proclaimed a small pamphlet of his own work a fraud, the experts of the day authenticated it as genuine.

The concept of special editions has persisted to this day. I am very familiar with the works and various editions of the American author, Hamlin Garland. A rich variety of author's editions exist for many of his books. Some, like *A Pioneer Mother*, appeared in a large paper edition of 25 copies and are found inscribed to his relatives and aunts. The same work appeared in a small paper edition of 500 copies. It is clear to me that these editions were created at an extra expense solely for the pleasure of the author

to give to his friends and to return similar favors from his colleagues. Although they command a premium in the used-book market today, it is nothing like the premiums attached to more famous authors when such editions exist.

It seems to me that with this background in the book-collecting environment, auction records existing for "review" copies, "limited" editions, "galley proofs," etc., to say nothing of manuscript material, that enterprising publishers see opportunities to realize instant income from the deliberate creation of these properties. We "collectors" do not seem to mind paying considerable premiums for editions of books that we feel will be comparable someday to, for example, *Lyrical Ballads*, by William Wordsworth, inscribed to his sister Dorothy. Somehow it seems to me, as I conjure up a vision of Stephen King sitting down to what surely can only be described as a chore when he autographs some 800 books for Donald Grant, that there is a fundamental difference.

And yet, I get a lot of pleasure from the Grant limited editions of Stephen King and others. It is not that the extra illustration or different title page contributes so heavily to the enjoyment of the volume, but in the Grant volumes you do get the impression that a great deal of thought and effort has gone into the creation of the finished product. I purchased the "limited" edition of *The Drawing of the Three*. I also purchased the trade edition in case the former was not available. In the event, both arrived. The trade edition is still in the shrink-wrap, and I broke open the limited edition and read it, leaving "eye-tracks" on every page. I don't care if some bookseller, in settling my estate, values it less than an

unopened copy, for my purpose in buying it was simply to read a carefully crafted book. I'm perfectly aware that for the same price I could have purchased a dozen paperbacks of contemporary authors with ten times the reading value, and against that argument I have no defense.

How would I feel about paying \$200 for a book readily available for \$35 at the same time, and \$8.95 if I could wait about six months, if there were no resale market above \$50? We all have the perception that the \$200 book will still have its "value" to someone, and if this is a delusion, it is carefully perpetuated in the trade. Otherwise, the noble pleasures alluded to of a signed title page and a few illustrations that your less wealthy collector friend cannot afford might become less fulfilling.

I believe that an early edition of a Robert McCammon novel, for example, genuinely inscribed to a fellow author with some sentiment of substance, will have value to future generations of collectors. An artificially limited and signed edition, otherwise indistinguishable from the trade edition, cannot be placed in the same literary category. However, the vested interests of the authors, publishers, used book dealers, and collectors who have purchased these limited editions will combine to insure and reinforce the conception that they are shrewd investment properties.

I look forward to the next *Lights Out!* issue and your insights into the fascinating business of horror fiction.

Keith H. Thompson
Bellport, New York

Interview: Kazue Tanaka

Conducted by Robert R. McCammon; transcribed by Hunter Goatley

Editor's note: Ms. Kazue Tanaka is a Japanese writer/translator who has translated Robert R. McCammon's stories from Night Visions IV into Japanese. The following interview was conducted at the 1990 World Fantasy Convention, where Ms. Tanaka finished up a month-long visit to the United States. Ms. Tanaka is currently at work translating McCammon's 1981 vampire epic, They Thirst.

RM: I'd like to know how you go about translating, say, one of my books. Do you read the book first?

KT: Yes. Usually I read the book a couple of times and then I start translating. Maybe you know that we have a completely different grammatical diction from English, so we

can't put a word in the same order in Japanese. Usually I read a sentence and grasp the meaning of it and reconstruct it in Japanese.

RM: I would think that would be very difficult to do.

KT: It is!

RM: I'm sure it is, because there's such a great difference in the grammatical form. You have to be very careful, I guess, in terms of reading in English and translating to Japanese. That seems to me to be very difficult. How did you train to do this?

KT: Usually we have some kind of mentor or teacher.

RM: Were you like an apprentice, and someone teaches you

to do this?

KT: Yes. We put the original stories [beside] the translations and compare the sentences.

RM: How long would it take you to translate *They Thirst*?

KT: It depends on how long the story is. *They Thirst* will take at least three months. How long did it take you to write it?

RM: Well, it took about six or seven months to write.

KT: Maybe I'll need that kind of time, too!

RM: But it's almost like, if you're interpreting, you're almost doing some writing yourself. If you're making something more concise, or—do you do that? Are you abridging? Do you think anything gets changed in the translation?

KT: We try not to change, but sometimes a little change is necessary. We don't have some things that you have here in America. For instance, some brand names. We don't have the culture of your country, and the Japanese readers don't know if I translated correctly, but it is impossible for Japanese readers to understand that culture. Maybe, in that case, things get changed sometimes.

RM: Do you feel that you interpret the story more so your countrymen can understand what's going on in the book? Do you think you add more of your culture to the story?

KT: Basically, we don't add anything, we don't take away anything. But in that case, we explain [the cultural differences] after the story in an afterword.

RM: How many books have you translated?

KT: Maybe twelve, or something. Among them, *Brain Child*, by John Saul, and some mysteries. I'm going to translate some stories of Orson Scott Card's.

RM: I think it would be very interesting, if I could read Japanese, to read my book and see what the changes are. Or

how it's geared toward that culture.

KT: Conversation—when people talk—is very difficult to put into Japanese. If the character is a woman, a man, a boy, or a girl, Japanese has a very distinctive way of speaking. Especially between a man and woman. English does not have as much difference.

RM: Well, that's fascinating. I think it would be a very tough thing to do—to translate something into an entirely different culture and still have the flavor of the American version, at least. I wouldn't want to do it—I don't think I could do it very well.

KT: Your stories are very American—that may be why they appeal to Japanese readers.

RM: Really? I was going to ask you why my stories appeal—if they do appeal—to Japanese readers. Well, first, I didn't know that horror fiction was so popular in Japan. Is it? Is it becoming more popular? What do you think the situation is?

KT: Your [novels] have not been translated at all yet. So, apart from you, Stephen King and Dean R. Koontz are very popular—they are as popular as other big writers. Other horror writers are not so well-known. Some very keen fans like American horror.

RM: Why do you think that is? King and Koontz are definitely very American writers. Do you think that's their appeal—the American style?

KT: Yes, I do.

RM: Not necessarily because of the story being told, but because maybe it's told in an American voice?

KT: Yes, sometimes. I'm still trying to [learn] the American voice—it's very hard to do.

RM: Well, I know that's very tough to do, and I'm looking forward to seeing the books when they are translated.

KT: I'm looking forward to it too! ■

Kazue Tanaka & Robert R. McCammon



Hunter Goatley (at last!), Kazue Tanaka, & Robert R. McCammon



Exclusive Interview: Jeffrey Sackett

Conducted by Hunter Goatley

*Editor's note: Jeffrey Sackett is the author of five horror novels, all published by Bantam. In each novel, Mr. Sackett has re-worked a traditional horror theme, while mixing in large doses of historical fantasy. His first novel, *Stolen Souls* (1987), was about Egyptian mummies and a curse; *Candlemas Eve* (1988) mixed rock'n'roll with witchcraft; *Blood of the Impaler* (1989) was an interesting update of the Dracula Harker family; *Mark of the Werewolf* (1990) told of the curse of a 3000-year-old werewolf; and his new novel, *The Demon*, is about a shapechanger.*

Mr. Sackett is very knowledgeable in several fields, including history and the classical Greek and Latin languages. For a more entertaining description of his early life, read the author biography in the back of any of his books. In addition to writing, Mr. Sackett is a full-time high school teacher, husband, and father of two girls, Victoria and Elizabeth. The following interview, which was Sackett's first, was conducted by phone on July 8, 1990, just a few days after his daughter Elizabeth was born.

HG: What are your degrees in?

JS: I have a Master's degree in European history, a Master's degree in East Asian history, and a Master's degree in Education. I'm a high-school teacher of English and History in Long Island.

HG: Wow. Heavy-duty stuff. . . . Was *Stolen Souls* the first novel you wrote?

JS: It wasn't the first one I wrote, but it was the first one I sold. I'd been writing pretty much continuously since I graduated from college. I had a few nibbles, and some encouragement, but no substantial success until *Stolen Souls*.

HG: Were the other stories and novels in a similar vein—steeped in history. . . .

JS: Well, yeah, most of them really were historical. I wrote a historical novel that I thought would be a good book, but nobody's interested in it. It's based on a true story of a love affair that Adolph Hitler had with his niece, Angela Raubal. That novel is the one that got me an agent—I sent out letters of inquiry and synopses and [was noticed by an agent]. He never sold that one, but when I wrote *Stolen Souls* it was marketed within a few months.

HG: That's interesting. I know it's not unusual for authors to write several novels before they get one published.

I have several vague questions that I'll just spit out at you at once and let you answer them however you want. How do you write your novels? How do you do your research? With your studied background, is the research difficult for you?

JS: The research, in specifics, is somewhat time-



consuming, but not the basic stuff. For better or worse, when it comes to historical, linguistic, philosophical trivia, I have a mind like a steel-trap—I don't forget anything. When it comes to anything important, like how to change the oil in my car or fix a faucet, I can't do a thing. In terms of which Egyptian king reigned during which part of which dynasty, or what province of ancient Iran Zoroaster was born in, that kind of stuff I just know. Because I am, after all, a history student and a history teacher, so it's the kind of thing I would know, really. But when it comes to—for example, in *Stolen Souls*, there's an awful lot of transliteration of ancient Egyptian language—that's certainly not the sort of thing that I'd know off-hand. That I had to do quite a bit of research in. And also to be able to construct sentences in hieroglyphs, to have them say what I wanted them to say, that required research as well.

It does vary. *Blood of the Impaler* is about—partially, anyway—the historical characters of the *Dracula* story. All I knew going into it was that he was a 15th-century Rumanian prince who was rather well-known for his cruelty. So I had to do a lot of research about that historical character—that was kind of time-consuming, as well. So I guess it varies in that regard—it varies from the general to the specific. In the generalities, I'm pretty well grounded just in terms of my general knowledge, I think. But that, again, is a part of me and what I do for a living.

HG: Have you visited any, or all, of these places you write about?

JS: I've travelled kind of extensively in Europe. I haven't been to the Middle East or East Asia at all. But I've been to Germany a number of times, Britain, France, Scandinavia, Italy, the Balkans, Hungary—I never got to go to Russia, but someday. . . .

HG: I'd call that well-traveled, I think.

JS: Well, yeah. That's one of the [benefits] of marrying

late—I got to go places.

HG: How did you get into writing horror, given your history background? What attracted you to trying to mix the horror and the history?

JS: Well, there are three things. First thing is that, even though academically I've always been centered on history and literature, I'm a certified English teacher also. But despite that, ever since I was a child, I've always had an interest in horror stories. I was one of the few people I knew who belonged to the Dwight Frye Fan Club—Dwight Frye was the guy who played Renfield in Lugosi's *Dracula* and the assistant in Karloff's *Frankenstein*. So I was always interested in film—and always interested in the literature. I read Stoker's *Dracula* when I was about 12, so I've always been interested in it—it's not something that just came out of the blue.

The second thing is that I was in an airport—I think I was flying to Buffalo to see the Moody Blues with my cousin—and I just picked up a novel in the bookstore just to pass the time on the plane. I can't remember the name of the novel (and even if I could, we probably shouldn't print it, because I'd get sued), but I thought it was terribly written—terribly written and not particularly interesting, and yet it was in print. Having had no success with my historical novels or my forays into social criticisms—which *nobody* was interested in—I thought to myself, “Well, if this can get published, I know I can write a horror story that's better than this one.” That's when I started thinking about *Stolen Souls*.

The third thing is—this all kind of happened at the same time—I was reading an interview with Stephen King, I think it was in *Playboy*, and he made a very interesting comment, I found, about the film *The Shining*. He said something like, “I thought it was a very interesting film, but I wondered what happened to the book I wrote.” After that, he said that what he found different between the film and the book was that Stanley Kubrick, who directed the film, was an atheist. And Stephen King, presumably, by the basis of what he said, is not an atheist, and King said that if you are an atheist, you really can't believe in the existence of evil. There has to be some rational explanation—like insanity, or psychoses, or cabin fever—when bad things happen. That started me thinking that there is a vast opportunity in the horror genre to go beyond the simple transcendent evil, and bring in the concept that there is transcendence which is either evil, neutral, or good. I don't want to talk just in terms of God and the devil, but supernatural transcendence *is*, indeed, supernatural transcendence—you can't have one without the other. You can't have up without down, or right without left. So, I started thinking in terms of horror as an agency for the good vs. evil struggle, which is at the basis of not only most, or a lot, of great literature, but also a lot of important periods of history.

HG: I think you're right about bad fiction. Just as a reader of horror fiction, I'm amazed at some of the stuff that gets printed.

JS: I don't think lousy books are just in horror—I'm sure

there are an awful lot of lousy Westerns and lousy romances. I don't know if this true, I'm just saying this off the top of my head, but I think there may be a mistaken perception on the part of the publishers, or reviewers, or whatever, that the horror audience is relatively unsophisticated, which is not true. But they may think it is; it may affect their decisions on what to publish and what not to publish.

HG: Have you written any short stories, or do you plan to try?

JS: I think I'm less comfortable with the short story format than I am with the longer novel format. I started a couple of times to write short stories and I've found that they either become so long that they turn into short novels, or else if I make a conscious effort to keep them short enough to maintain the designation of short story, then I don't find them satisfactory as pieces of written work, and I don't even send them out. I've written about two or three dozen, I guess, and I don't like any of them. I write them, I revise them, I re-read them, I re-revise them, and I throw them away.

HG: Do you enjoy teaching, or would you like to get to the point where you wouldn't have to teach—where you could make a living just from your novels?

JS: Well, that's a good question. I do enjoy teaching—

There is a vast opportunity in the horror genre to go beyond the simple transcendent evil....

JEFFREY SACKETT

I enjoy my students; I teach high school, and I have, on occasion, taught interesting elective courses. In fact, there's a 12th-grade English elective course in the school where I work titled “Literature of Science Fiction, Mystery, and the Supernatural,” and I have a lot of fun when I get to teach that.

If I had enough money that I wouldn't *have* to teach, I might very well not stay where I am, but I don't know if I would ever want to not teach at all. If I didn't have to think about the money, I think it would be a lot of fun to get a job in some small country college someplace for \$6000 a year and teach English or something like that. Because it is fun—I find teaching to be a lot of fun and very satisfying. It's very difficult, and frequently very frustrating, but overall I think it's very satisfying—I don't know if I'd want to leave it forever.

HG: What's a typical work day like for you? When do you find time to write, since you're a teacher too?

JS: Well, that's one of the advantages of being a teacher, that I do have a large break in the summertime when I can get a lot of work done, and I do have a shorter work day than some people—you're at work right now, for example. Basically, it's getting up early on a lot of weekends and foregoing a lot of other vacations. I find it easier for someone

in my position to write than someone who, for example, has a 9-to-5 job, or someone who runs his own business, or something like that. For the life of me, I really don't know how people who are putting in long conventional work weeks—50 weeks a year—get time to write. I really don't know how they do it; they have my admiration.

HG: I'm having a hard enough time just doing *Lights Out!* which only comes out four times a year. I can't imagine trying to do more than that.

JS: Oh, I'm sure you are.

HG: I have a couple more questions. . . .

JS: Sure, take your time. This is fun!

HG: Do you have a favorite among your own works?

JS: Yeah, I think *Blood of the Impaler* is my favorite book. Well, it's hard to say. There's a book I have coming out in February called *The Demon*, which will also be published by Bantam, and an awful lot of that book is autobiographical. I haven't read the galleys yet—I haven't even looked at [the book] for about a year now. I think when I sit down and re-read the galleys and start making corrections, I might say, "Yeah, this is my favorite." At the moment, I think it's *Blood of the Impaler*.

HG: Getting back to another typical question, did you have any specific literary influences?

JS: Well, it's hard to say. For a long while, I read very extensively and deeply in Herman Hesse, and I try to capture some essence of lyric prose in the way I write. I don't know if I succeed, and it maybe sounds like kind of a high-falutin' thing to say, because I don't know if I'm able to do it. But I think Hesse has influenced my style, in terms of the types of things that I write, you know, historical fantasy, which I loved as a child. . . . Certainly Stoker's books. Edgar Allan Poe—the sheer bizarreness of the things that he thought of writing about always struck me as reflecting a very interesting and peculiar mind.

HG: To say the least. That leads into another question that is commonly asked, the dreaded "Where do you get your ideas?" But specifically, all the historical tie-ins you had with Janos Kaldy in *Mark of the Werewolf*. Do you read about these things and that just sparks an idea, or did you sit down, in that particular case, and look for places in history where you could place him?

JS: I can give you some specifics with *Mark of the Werewolf*: my original idea for that book was to draw a connection between werewolvary and Zoroastrianism. As you may know, I also studied for the ministry for awhile—my first two years of college I was in the pre-seminary program—so I've always been interested in the history of and developments in religion, and Zoroastrianism has always struck me as a very interesting faith. The Zoroastrians emphasize the struggle between good and evil as the motivating force in the physical universe, and the struggle goes on inside every human being. That struck me a long time ago, long before I ever thought of writing a book, as an interesting werewolf metaphor. After kicking

that around in my head for awhile, I came up with this idea for a Zoroastrian priest who, for one reason or another, had been cursed to have this struggle between good and evil be physically and visually present in him. So from that point on, the book kind of developed itself in terms of the historical elements of it. If 3000 years ago this Zoroastrian priest were so cursed, what would occur over the ensuing 3000 years that would be interesting before I bring him up to today. So, find some interesting points in time and, you know, put him in there.

HG: It worked for me. I got a lot more than I was expecting out of *Mark of the Werewolf*. I was fascinated with, what I assume to be, the accuracy of the historical situations, yet showing how he was Barrabas and the way that was so logically done—it was a real pleasant surprise.

JS: That's good to hear. It's nice to hear that people read my stuff and go, "Oh!"

HG: You've been able to "re-work" a lot of the traditional horror staples without relying on a given subject. . . .

JS: Yeah, the mummy, the vampire, the werewolf, and the witch. . . .

HG: But you don't have this underlying theme to all of your novels, like the Barbara Michaels books. Is this something you planned, or is that just the way it worked out?

JS: That's just the way it worked out. I mean, if anybody was interested in me writing a sequel to something I've already written, I'd be happy to! I really hadn't thought consciously in terms of one or the other—that's just the way it has worked out.

HG: To wrap things up, can you tell me a little more about *The Demon*? You mentioned that it's autobiographical. . . .

JS: Well, it's autobiographical to a degree. It takes place in the 1960s and is actually based upon—well, how should I put this? There was a fellow named Grogo the Goblin, and he was in a number of side shows and freak shows around the turn of the century, 1930s, 1940s—a while back. He was horribly deformed, horribly deformed and he was billed as the Goblin and people'd come look at him. After he retired, he left the circus and moved to a small town in upstate New York. All of this is true—this isn't something I made up. He lived in a little house off in the woods. About 20 years ago, a friend of mine found this guy's house, and I dug up a whole lot of stuff in his house—it had been abandoned for years, he had been dead for years—about his past. A lot of stuff happened up there which can very easily be related to some sort of malevolent supernatural force. The story is basically about a shapechanging demon from Hindu mythology and a bunch of stoned-out, drugged-up college kids in the 1960s who come into contact with this thing.

Jeffrey Sackett's latest novel, *The Demon*, is Bantam's February horror title and is in the bookstores now. He is currently working on his sixth novel. ■

Interview: Al Sarrantonio

Conducted by Robert R. McCammon; transcribed by Hunter Goatley

Editor's note: Al Sarrantonio is a former editor for Doubleday who is now writing for a living. His short stories have appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies, and his werewolf novel from 1989, Moonbane, brought a lot of attention to his work. He has a number of horror novels to his credit, including Campbell Wood, The Worms, Totentanz, and his most recent novel, October, published by Bantam in October 1990. He also has a regular column in Mystery Scene magazine, mixing humor with updates from his fellow horror writers.

Mr. Sarrantonio is always interesting to talk to; having seen both sides of the publishing fence, he knows the ins and outs of "the business" better than most. This interview was conducted at 2 AM one morning during the 1990 World Fantasy Convention.

RM: What have you been working on? What's been going on with you?

AS: OK—I've got a new book coming out next spring—in May—called *House Haunted*—it's a haunted house novel! [It will be published] by Bantam. After that, I have to write two more for Bantam. The next one's going to be called *Skeletons*—it's gonna be an apocalyptic, broad-canvas type novel, so I'll be working on that soon. I have a Western coming out this fall, in November, from Evans.

RM: Is this your first Western?

AS: Yeah. It's called *West Texas*. It's about buffalo soldiers—the black soldiers at Fort Davis in Texas.

RM: How did that come about?

AS: I spent about a week in the town of Fort Davis. The last three years I've been out there for a week in the summer, visiting a friend of mine named George Proctor, who's a Western writer. We're both telescope buffs and we go out to a thing called the Texas Star Party, which is held in the Davis mountains. They are the clearest skies in the whole United States—the Milky Way stretches like a ribbon across the sky. Out there you can read by it—it comes up, and people think it's a cloud.

RM: That must be fantastic.

AS: It's unbelievable! One night George Proctor and I went through about 50 galaxies—*galaxies!*

Anyway, I got to stay in Fort Davis, which is where the buffalo soldiers, who were the black Cavalry, were stationed after the Civil War, and I wrote a novel about one of them who's a Sherlock Holmes freak. And there's a serial killer in the 1890s—this is about the time of Jack the Ripper—killing people in the desert, and [the soldier] tracks the guy down. I had a ball with that!

RM: That's different.



AS: Yeah. They want a sequel to that already. It should be out this fall, in November—which I guess is now, since this is November! I delivered it to them in July, and they're publishing it in hardcover in November, which is very fast.

RM: That's great. Now you work pretty quickly, don't you?

AS: No—this book I did, but usually it takes four months—it depends on the book. A book for Bantam, I'll take a little bit longer.

RM: It seems like most writers take about eight to ten months to do a book.

AS: I used to, but I've tightened it up because I had to.

I've got one more for you. I've got a side career going with Simon & Schuster where I do humor anthologies. I've done two collections with pieces by Woody Allen and Bill Cosby. I've got a book that'll be out next summer called *The Treasury of National Lampoon Humor*—it's the best of the *National Lampoon* magazine—twenty years of it. I edited [the book]—it's about 75 pieces.

RM: So you do a lot of different things.

AS: Yeah, you've gotta diversify. I think that's one of the keys to the business. Last year I did a science fiction novel, this year I've got a Western and a horror novel, and the humor stuff. You've gotta be open to doing different things.

RM: It seems like that's important now, because it seems like many writers are finding limits on what they can do in the horror field. There's a general feeling that horror is—

AS: It's not a dead-end. I wouldn't call it a dead-end, but there are limits. If you're really serious about a career, you have to be ready to do other stuff. I won't say you *have to*, but you have to be ready. I still think the horror field needs good books. There are too many bad ones published—there's still room for the good ones.

RM: Do you think those bad ones have hurt at all?

AS: I don't know. It's almost a futile question. I was in

the science fiction field for a long time—I edited books—and I saw so much bad work, and it didn't seem to make much difference. Books are getting published anyway; whatever the publishers decide they can fit into their lines, they're going to publish that many anyway. I *do* think there are too many bad horror novels now, and I think— Actually, your question is more valid than I thought to begin with, because the preponderance of bad ones—the lower price spread, the lower lines. . . . There are just too many of the supermarket-type ones; I think they're clogging the arteries.

RM: I think they are too. There's nothing that can be done about it. . . .

AS: If the readers are buying—I don't know what the readers are.

RM: Yeah, but does that mean that the readers have lowered their expectations?

AS: I don't know. Whenever I try to think of what an ideal reader is, or what *any* reader is, I still get a fuzzy image after all these years, because I don't know who they are.

RM: You kind of approach writing from a different avenue than a lot of writers, since you have been in the business—in the publishing end of it—as an editor.

AS: I was lucky to be able to experience that end of it. The awe that a lot of writers have for the New York publishing establishment, I don't have. I know that a lot of them are just people.

RM: And they don't know all the answers.

AS: No; no they don't. The good ones will admit it, and the rest of them. . . .

RM: It's almost like a crap game, isn't it. I guess you have the market research, and the benefit of experience, but a lot of it is—

AS: Yeah, a lot of people seem to think my background is kind of special, but to me it's just. . . . I worked at Doubleday with people like Jackie Onassis. Isaac Asimov was the first guy I worked with. It's awe-inspiring to me now to think about it—I met Ray Bradbury there, and a lot of other people, but it was just a *job*. I was always writing on the side, and I started to sell the short fiction, and I was able to break away from the editing side. Editing is not easy, it's not as easy as a lot of writers think.

RM: Well, I'm sure it's tough. That is something that I just could not do: edit somebody else's work. That would be very difficult to do.

AS: Well, the key to editing is to let them do their own thing, and be savvy enough not to try to change it. I knew a couple of editors who liked to change things around, and they weren't the good ones. I have not been jerked around—I've been kind of lucky.

I don't hold much awe for the business because I know what it's like on the inside. It's a wonderful business, but it kind of saddens me to see newcomers who are completely cowed by these people. They're just people. Some of them

are very good people, some of them are very good at their jobs; the peer principle works in publishing too.

RM: I was talking to Sean Costello today, and he said that it always amazed him that one year the publishing business was an impenetrable fortress, and the next year they were calling him. All of a sudden, it's like he has his entry.

AS: He's been sucked in, like a vacuum. Some of us tend to forget how far we've come sometimes.

RM: I know, and I think that's amazing—that we *have* come a long, long way. And we're in situations where most people just—

AS: They have no conception of it. Sometimes I think of it as a job, and my wife keeps bringing me back to Earth and saying, "What you do is not just a job. Most people do not understand what you do—don't expect them to."

RM: But you know how amazing it is how many people wish to become a writer—wish they could be a writer. You hear about these actors and actresses, these stars out in Hollywood, who say, "Boy, you know, I'm gonna quit this, and I'm gonna write a novel!" Kirk Douglas just wrote a novel, and he said, "This is something I've been wanting to do all my life, because now *I'm* in control of what I'm doing. I'm writing this novel and I'm in control." And you'd think Kirk Douglas would be satisfied with his life, he wouldn't need more. . . .

AS: *Spartacus*, for God's sake!

RM: . . . but he obviously wanted to become a writer.

AS: Yeah. But the flip side of that, though, is the people you get at cocktail parties who say, "I've got a great idea. . . ." Lawyer friends—I have a couple of friends like that, and I feel like, "Dump them," because they're demeaning what we do. When somebody says that to me now, I say, "What did you make last year? I wanted to be a lawyer, but I didn't feel like it." "I wanted to be a brain surgeon, but I don't have the time!" It really is the same question! But once again, my wife Beth says to me, "Have a little patience with these people, because you really are in a unique profession." No one understands what it's like until you do it.

RM: I think that it's a wonderful profession. I can't think of anything else I'd rather be doing—I can't think of anything I *could* do, besides writing. But I think there comes a point when you're writing, if you have a problem with your book, you're really alone, because nobody can help you.

AS: That's great in a way—it's kind of invigorating. It's hard but it's invigorating because you have to solve it yourself. I don't know about you, but when I hit "the wall," I pace. I have a place in the house where I pace back and forth. It may take two hours, and then maybe I'll sleep on it, but sooner or later you break through the wall. Because it's your *job*. The ones who have no patience for it anymore are the ones who whine about, "I'm writing and now I have writer's block and now I just don't feel like it." When it's your job, you do it. And you find a way to get through the wall.

RM: Do you find that you come up with these solutions, whether you realize it or not? These things kind of happen. I wonder why that is?

AS: It's a very mysterious process, I think.

RM: You know, you get the questions like "How do you come up with your ideas?" How can you answer that? That's one of those things you can't answer.

AS: What was it Stephen King said? Utica, New York? "I get them in the mail from Utica, New York." I haven't been able to top that one. . . .

RM: You can't tell. "How do you learn to write?"

AS: What I tell them is, "You have ten years to put aside, and you do nothing else. You just keep pounding the typewriter like a monkey, and sooner or later it'll start making sense." But you can't tell anybody—I don't even know how it works!

Do you remember, Rick, your first short story, the first time you got it right, how mysterious it was? It was like another person now—it was like another Al Sarrantonio.

RM: It is like another person. Don't you sometimes feel like that?

AS: I can't conceive of that now, but then it was— I remember my very first sale because I sold it to *Asimov's Magazine*—Isaac Asimov helped me sell my first short story, because I knew him. I told him, "If this stinks, send it back to me." Isaac Asimov, for Christ's sake! He took it home over a weekend, brought it back the next week when he came in to Doubleday Books, and said, "This is wonderful, I'm passing this on to George Scissors at *Asimov's Magazine*." And they bought it. I was high for a week. But I knew it worked. I'd

written how many scores of short stories before it, and there was always something missing. But that one, when I wrote it, I said, "It's right." And the next one I knew was even more right.

It's not just confidence—I always tell people, when they ask, that it's the only profession in the world that's completely self-taught. No one can teach you how to write. But you *can* teach them how to teach themselves—you can help them teach themselves. It's the most lonely profession in the world as far as teaching goes.

RM: There are no shortcuts; people seem to think there are shortcuts or tricks. This thing about working out problems—they do seem to work themselves out.

I was at a writer's seminar in Texas a couple of weeks ago, talking about writing and how do you write. The questions they posed were such that if you really sat down and thought about these things, you'd really have trouble writing. . . .

AS: Yeah, the mechanics and everything! Yeah, they're just second nature after a while.

RM: You just can't think about those things—you just *don't* think about those things.

AS: It's like asking a milkman, "How many degrees do you lift that carton before you carry it in?"

RM: If you thought about it too much, you'd go nuts.

But I do sometimes feel like they're talking about somebody else, that I'm two people—that I'm Rick and Robert is somebody else. The person who wrote this book is somebody different from me.

AS: I don't think any of us will ever figure it out. I hope we don't—it would take away the magic. ■

Recommended Reading List

Compiled by Hunter Goatley

From Mike Barrett, Kent, England:

- *Fevre Dream*, by George R.R. Martin (Pocket, 198?). Stunningly good vampire novel.
- *The Elementals*, by Michael McDowell (Avon). Chillingly atmospheric. No graphic horror, but a really haunting book. McDowell's *Gilded Needles* and *Katie* are also excellent.
- *Night Winds*, by Karl Edward Wagner. Excellent stories of Kane.

From Ray Pillow, Salem, VA:

- *The Ridge*, by Lisa Cantrell (TOR, 1989). Her first, *The Manse*, won the Bram Stoker Award for Outstanding First Novel.

From Pat Cramer, Wasilla, AK:

- *Open Season*, by David Osborne (Dell, 1974, PB). A tight little tale of revenge.
- *Hawkline Monster*, by Richard Brautigan. And anything else you can put your hands on that this gentleman wrote.
- *Suffer the Children*, by John Saul. He has gone downhill since his first, but I feel that it is a very good book.
- *The Wolfen*, by Whitley Strieber. This guy can write when he wants to.
- *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee. Probably the best book I ever read.
- *The Exorcist*, by William Peter Blatty. Blatty didn't do much before, or since, but this is a great horror novel.

From Keith Hamrick, Bonifay, FL:

- *L.A. Confidential*, by James Ellroy (Mys-

terious Press, 1990).

- *Mine*, by Robert R. McCammon (Pocket, 1990).
- *Lie to Me*, by David Martain (Random House, 1990).
- *Kane*, by Douglas Borton (Onyx, 1990).
- *A Feast of Snakes*, by Harry Crews (Atheneum, 1976).
- *Stone City*, by Mitchell Smith (Simon and Schuster, 1989).
- *Presumed Innocent*, by Scott Turow (Warner, 1989).
- *The Buy Back Blues*, by Ralph Dennis (Popular Library, 1977).
- *Four Past Midnight*, by Stephen King (Viking, 1990).
- *Summer of Night*, by Dan Simmons (Putnam, 1991).
- *Tender*, by Mark Childress (Harmony Books, 1990).

Lights Out!

- *Songs of the Doomed*, by Hunter S. Thompson (Summit Books, 1990).
- *Under Siege*, by Stephen Coonts (Pocket Books, 1990).
- *Bad Desire*, by Gary Devon (Random House, 1990).
- *Body*, by Hary Crews (Poseidon Press).
- *The Stake*, by Richard Laymon (Headline, 1990).

Once again, mystery and horror buffs should take these to heart. They *all* kick butt.

From Dan B. McMillen, Lynnwood, WA:

- *The Girl Next Door*, by Jack Ketchum (Warner, 1990). If child abuse doesn't bother you now, this book will make it so that it does. Chilling!
- *Hot Blood*, edited by Jeff Gelb and Lonny Friend (Pocket, 1989). Contains McCammon's "The Thang."
- *The Bad Place*, by Dean R. Koontz (Putnam, 1990). Another great one from Dean.
- *After the Last Race*, by Dean R. Koontz (Fawcett Crest, 1975). If you can find this anywhere, get it. It's mainstream fiction at top form, mapping the self-destruction of an alcoholic. Great work!
- *Forest of Arden*, by Don Robertson (Zubal, 1986). Wonderful, effective storytelling.
- *The Dark Half*, by Stephen King (Viking, 1989). The story's a bit thin in places, but the mood harkens back to *The Shining* days. You'll never look at sparrows the same way again!
- *My Pretty Pony*, by Stephen King (Knopf, 1989). Shows a much gentler side of King, with a tale of growing up and how time affects us all.
- *The Stephen King Companion*, edited by George Beame (Andrews and McMeel, 1989). Just when you thought you knew all there was to know about Stephen King. . . .
- *Women of Darkness*, edited by Kathryn Ptacek (TOR, 1989). Horror by women, with some interesting themes.
- *The Year's Best Horror Stories XVII*, edited by Karl Edward Wagner (DAW,

1989). There are some great chillers here. Be warned!

- *Best Horror Stories from Fantasy and Science Fiction*, edited by Ed Ferman and Anne Jordan (St. Martin's, 1990).
- *Song of Kali*, by Dan Simmons (TOR, 1986). The film *Ghandi* didn't show what Calcutta is really like; this one will not make the tourism flow to India rise and it will not let you sleep after finishing it. A first-rate tale from a first-rate author.

From Hunter Goatley, Bowling Green, KY:

- *Flood*, by Andrew H. Vachss (Pocket, 1986). Now I know what a "hardboiled detective novel" is. The main character, Burke, is an ex-con turned private investigator who specializes in survival. In this excellent first novel, a karate expert named Flood asks Burke to help her track down a child-rapist responsible for the death of her best friend's daughter. Burke and his associates are fascinating characters, and the horrific underworld of kiddie porn is combined with doses of humor and action in just the right way. Highly recommended; I've also read the next two books in the series, *Strega* and *Blue Belle*; well worth the time.
- *Breeder*, by Douglas Clegg (Pocket, 1990). A complex story about a house harboring evil spirits awaiting rebirth into the world. Clegg once again delivers a powerful novel that transcends the "evil house" sub-genre. Clegg's highly-descriptive style will leave you breathless and squirming at the end. Highly recommended.
- *October*, by Al Sarrantonio (Bantam, 1990). A more "literary" novel than last year's *Moonbane*, *October* proves that Sarrantonio just keeps getting better with each novel. Rich in texture and plot.
- *The Unseen*, by Joseph Citro (Warner, 1990). A fascinating and believable explanation for one of Vermont's local legends. Citro's style and characters make this an especially enjoyable read.
- *Stolen Souls*, by Jeffrey Sackett (Bantam, 1987). Sackett's first novel is about a secret Egyptian cult's plan to resurrect the ancient mummies of seven priests of

Anubis. Filled with rich Egyptian history, but not bogged down by it at all.

- *The Lyssa Syndrome*, by Christopher Fahy (Zebra, 1990). A chilling tale of a mutant strain of rabies that is accidentally loosed on a small town in Maine.
- *Savage Season*, by Joe R. Lansdale (Bantam/Ziesing, 1990). Another hard-hitting suspense yarn from Lansdale, this time about a search for buried treasure. The usual nasty bad guys in a story a little better than *Cold in July*, which says a lot. Mark Ziesing published matching hardcover editions of both books that are well worth the cost.
- *Haunted*, by James Herbert (Jove, 1990). One of the best ghost stories I've read, and Herbert's best in several years.
- *Methods of Madness*, by Ray Garton (Dark Harvest, 1990). Very good short story collection—only a couple of clunkers.
- *Deranged*, by Harold Schechter (Pocket, October 1990). The true story of Albert Fish, who murdered—and ate—as many as 15 children in the 1920s and '30s. Schechter's style and attention to detail propel the reader along, keeping the book from degenerating into a dry parade of facts.
- *The Cuckoo's Egg*, by Clifford Stoll (Doubleday, 1989; Pocket, 1990). This non-fiction book has no horror, no blood, no sex, and no profanity—yet it was one of the most compelling books I've read recently. Someone is breaking into military computers and no one seems to care—except astronomer Cliff Stoll, who has since become one of the world's most renowned computer security speakers. Written so that even computer illiterates can enjoy it, the book describes Stoll's frustrations with catching the German hacker responsible for the break-ins. Very interesting, especially Stoll's dealings with the FBI and CIA. Highly recommended.

All of the review comments were made by the respective submitters. If you want to recommend a book or books that others may have missed, send the titles, authors, publishers, and dates to *Lights Out!* ■

The final issue of *Lights Out!* will feature excerpts from Robert R. McCammon's unpublished novels *The Address* and *The Midnight Man*, a brand-new interview with McCammon about *Boy's Life*, more author interviews, and the latest news! Coming Summer 1991!