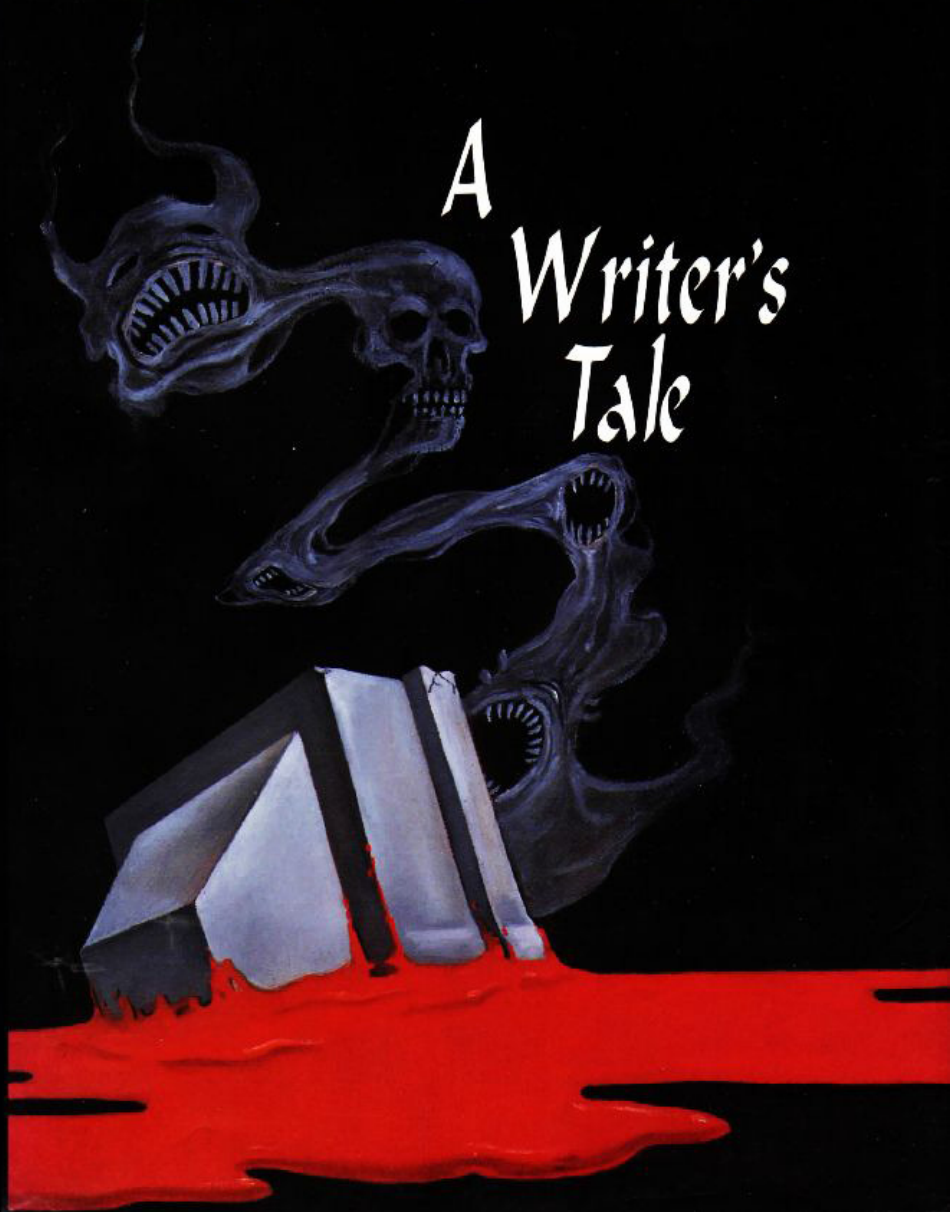


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A Writer's Take

Richard Laymon



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Richard Laymon

Richard Laymon has been a published horror writer for almost two decades. Of the dozens of books he has written, *A Writer's Tale* is like no other. More than just an autobiographical chronicle of his life and career, *A Writer's Tale* takes you behind the scenes in the life of a dedicated artist, who despite often sizable odds, persisted to become one of the best selling horror writers in England and around the world.

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A Writer's Tale is a book like no other. It is the ultimate Laymon companion, but it is also an indispensable survival guide for the would-be writer. Unlike Laymon's previous efforts, this is not a novel of fiction, but it may be his scariest yet. Because it's all true. Read on, if you dare...

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Richard Laymon is the author of over twenty-five novels and sixty short stories. He has been nominated for the Bram Stoker award three times, for *Flesh*, *Funland*, and *A Good Secret Place* (also published by Deadline Press). His most recent publication, *The Midnight Tour*, is the third novel in the Beast House Chronicles, which started with his first published novel, *The Cellar*. Laymon lives in Los Angeles with his wife Ann, where he continues to write novels of horror.

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A WRITER'S TALE

Richard Laymon

Richard Laymon

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dp

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*THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
TO
EVERYBODY WHO WANTS TO BE A WRITER
PERSIST AND PREVAIL!*

Richard Laymon

All good books are alike in that they are truer than if they had really happened and after you are finished reading one you will feel that all that happened to you and afterwards it all belongs to you; the good and the bad, the ecstasy, the remorse and sorrow, the people and the places and how the weather was. If you can get so that you can give that to people, then you are a writer.

Ernest Hemingway

Quoted in *Hemingway: The Writer as Artist* by Carlos Baker, 1952.

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Why This Book?

WHO AM I TO BE WRITING A BOOK ABOUT MY LIFE AS A WRITER?

Let's start by saying it wasn't *my* idea. John Scoleri and Peter Infantino, two of the fellows behind the publication of my first short story collection, *A Good, Secret Place*, approached me about it.

Early on, this was intended to be along the lines of a "Laymon companion": including a complete bibliography, a biographical sketch, an interview, some articles about me, and various other bits and pieces that might be of interest to my die-hard fans.

I thought it sounded like a good idea, and agreed to cooperate.

Then one thing led to another...

As I worked on the book, it changed course.

It grew into something a little more than a "Laymon companion" for my fans.

I hope so, anyway.

This book tells the detailed, behind-the-scenes *true* story of a normal guy who always wanted to be a writer, worked hard at it, met with plenty of failure, but also managed to write thirty novels and sixty short stories by the time he was fifty years old. I'm *still* a failure in the United States—if you don't count my small corps of extremely loyal fans. In the United Kingdom, however, my books are sometimes main selections of book clubs. They're often bestsellers.

How did all this come about?

How did I get to be a published writer, a success and a failure simultaneously? What did I do right? What did I do wrong? Who helped me; who messed me up? And what have I learned along the way?

In this book, I tell you.

I decided it was time for someone to tell the true story of the ups and downs of an ordinary writer's life.

It should be of some interest to people who know me, to my fans, to fellow writers, and to those who aspire to careers in writing.

I wrote it *most especially* for aspiring writers.

I tell them a few things they need to know about writing fiction and about the book industry.

Things that aren't often told.

I see myself as a veteran of the book wars. I'm not a general; I'm a grunt. I've made it through a several tours of duty. Now, I'm ready to lead a platoon of aspiring writers through the jungle, telling them the hard facts, giving them pointers, showing how to avoid the booby traps and land mines, generally doing whatever I can to help them survive and win.

A book such as *A Writer's Tale* would jeopardize the career of most authors. Which is why you've probably never seen another book like it. Since I have no career in the U.S. to jeopardize, I am in the peculiar position of feeling free to tell the whole truth.

I *do* have a career in the United Kingdom. Fortunately, however, I'm able to stick with the complete truth about my situation there— still not jeopardizing my career, I hope—because I have only the highest praise for my agent Bob Tanner, my editor Mike Bailey, and my publisher Headline House. I don't "kiss up to them" in this book. I simply am completely delighted by them.

Now, I feel compelled to mention a couple of small matters about the language I use in this book.

First, I sometimes employ the term "story" in reference to full-length novels, not just to short stories. I don't want anybody getting confused and thinking I mean "short story" every time I write the word "story." If I'm commenting specifically about short stories, I say so. Otherwise, I might be talking about fiction of any length.

Second, darned if I could find a good way to handle the "he" stuff. Lord knows, I didn't want to offend anyone's feminist sensibilities.

The problem could be avoided, of course, by writing in the plural. "They" covers a wide range of genders. However, I didn't wish to be stuck with a multitude of plural pronouns.

Sometimes, I sidestepped the issue by addressing "you." But "you" is really informal, and I hated to overdo it.

I tried going for "he or she" a few times, but it seemed awfully cumbersome and dumb.

My respect for the language forbid me from using such mutant forms as he/she or shehe or heshe or (s)he or any other disturbing concoctions.

So...well...golly...I just pretty much fell back on using the old-fashioned "he."

I apologize.

I did it for convenience, not to "dis" the females.

Some of my best friends are women. My mother is a -woman. So is my wife. And my daughter. Probably half my fans (maybe more) are females. And so are a lot of fine writers, aspiring writers, editors, and so on.

When I wrote "he," I wasn't ignoring you people.

I meant *you*, too.

To my way of thinking, "he" always refers in general to any human, male or female or any combination thereof, unless I'm writing about a specific male.

Whenever you see "he," just let on that I really -wrote "he or she" and that the "or she" part is invisible.

It's there. You just can't see it.

It's there, waiting to pounce.

Autobiographical Chronology

Introduction

This self-styled "autobiographical chronology" is intended to give readers some of the basics about my life—and some very detailed information about my career. Wanting it to be more than just an exercise in vanity, I have provided the sort of information that will give everyone a vivid, in-depth portrait of this writer's struggles, disasters, and successes.

Though it is *my* story, it is the same in many ways as nearly every writer's story.

General readers may find it to be a unique behind-the-scenes look at what *really* happens in the life of an author in our times.

It might be seen by my fellow professional writers as a travelogue of pretty much the same journey they're taking themselves. Though none of us follows exactly the same route, we're mostly roaming similar territory, running into similar adventures and mishaps.

Aspiring writers are certain to find it instructive, sometimes terrifying, and possibly—I hope—inspiring. Because it is the story of an average guy who wanted to be a writer, overcame plenty of obstacles, and managed to succeed beyond the wildest hopes of the kid who first sat down and tried to write a story.

This is not intended to be the complete story of my life.

It is a sketch, not a portrait. Plenty is missing. I only included information that I figured might be instructive or entertaining.

I based the earlier years of this chronology on my memories and on assorted documents. Starting in 1979, however, the information is based on calendars kept by myself, Ann and Kelly.

The ladies have been keeping track of our individual and family activities on the kitchen calendars. From those calendars, I was able to find information on book signings, our trips, our social engagements, etc.

On my office calendars, I have been keeping track of my career. They provided very detailed information about how many pages I wrote each day—on what story. And when I mailed a manuscript. And when it was accepted or rejected. I pretty much noted everything about my career that seemed significant.

Unfortunately, Ann and I have failed to locate my office calendars for two years, 1980 and 1985. We were able to fill in the gaps to some extent, but some interesting material is missing. Maybe those two calendars will turn up some day. If so, and if there are future editions of this -work.. .Who knows?

In the meantime, here is more than you ever really wanted to know about Richard Carl Laymon.

The Chronology

1947

I was born in Chicago, Illinois on January 14, the second son of Hugh Kelly Laymon and Wanda Kathleen Hall Laymon. My older brother, Robert Kelly Laymon, had been born on March 25, 1945.

We are Americans without hyphens. My great aunt, Emma Laymon, was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, so at least one of my ancestors was here in the days of the founding fathers.

My great grandfather, Joseph Laymon, grew up in Illinois. During the Civil War, he fought for the Union with Company B, 6th Regiment of the Indiana Cavalry Volunteers. He was captured and survived incarceration at the infamous Confederate P.O.W. camp, Andersonville. His son, my grandfather, Hugh Kelly Laymon (along with Aunt Emma) grew up in a sod hut on the plains of Nebraska. My grandfather later lived in Charleston, Illinois where he drove a locomotive for the Nickle Plate Road. My other grandfather, Carl Hall, ran a moving company in Charleston, Carl Hall Transfer. Carl Hall Transfer is still in business in Charleston.

My father served in the Army Air Corp during World War Two, and "flew the Hump" with the Air Transport Command. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

1947-1963

I spent a few early years living in a duplex in Skokie, Illinois. Then we moved into a duplex in Lincolnwood. My great aunt, Emma, lived on the other side of the duplex -with her cousin, Daisy Bliss (a member of the Women's Temperance Union). My father worked for Henry Regnery, a Chicago publisher, during the early years of the company. (Now run by Alfred Regnery, the firm courageously publishes many important, controversial books.) My mother was a housewife who stayed home and took care of my brother and me—chauffeur, cookie maker, den mother. She introduced me to the joys of literature, reading *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to me while Dad and Bob were away at Scout meetings.

Later, aunt Emma got married for the first time at the age of eighty—to her childhood sweetheart, Fred Hendrickson. She moved to Florida "with Fred. We moved to a new house in a nice suburban area north of Chicago called Northbrook. (Fictional versions of Northbrook are portrayed in lots of my fiction, probably most accurately in, "A Good, Secret Place.")

My whole family was active in Scouting. We often went camping in the woods. Nearly every summer, we drove to Wisconsin where we stayed in a cabin, went boating, fishing and swimming. I have great memories of those times, and much of my fiction takes place in areas similar to the places where we had such summer adventures.

Oddly enough, my first published work appeared in the newsletter of the Northbrook Methodist Church. Starting in September, 1962, I wrote a regular column—"The MYF News"—in which I briefed readers about the activities of our Methodist Youth Fellowship group. I wrote fourteen such articles.

For two years, I attended Glenbrook High School. There, I played Sousaphone in the marching band, ran cross-country and participated in track meets, running the 880 and sometimes the mile. I also submitted material to the school's literary magazine. In 1962, the magazine, *Helicon*, published my poems, "He Never Lost His Head" and "Ode to a Wayfaring Sousaphone," and my short story, "365 Days a Year."

In a hint of things to come, the "powers that be" made me tone down the end of my short story. The revision was found acceptable.

I won a \$5.00 prize for the story. My English teacher called me "the most prolific writer in the school." I was honored by the compliment, especially before learning the definition of "prolific."

1963-65

In March, 1963, I received my first rejection slip—for a piece of fiction that I submitted to the magazine, *Bluebook for Men*. My piece, "The Great War," was a crummy imitation of those vignettes that can be found in Hemingway's *In Our Time*.

After my brother's graduation from Glenbrook High School in June, 1963, we had a garage sale, packed up our belongings, hopped into a couple of cars and drove across the country to California where Dad started a business venture. We settled in Tiburon, in Marin County. We lived in a house with a spectacular view of San Francisco Bay, and I received my last two years of secondary education at Redwood High School in Larkspur.

At Redwood, I took two years of creative writing classes, edited a book review newsletter, "worked on the staff of the school literary magazine, and hung out with "intellectuals"—at least one of "whom got busted during the Berkley "free speech movement." I spent a lot of time with my friends, the Gronbecks. I went to a lot of plays. I spent much of my spare time exploring bookstores all over San Francisco, Sausalito, Mill Valley and San Rafael.

I wrote for *Bookmark*, the Redwood High School's monthly book review periodical, from January through June, 1964.

After doing reviews of such books as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *Battle Cry*, I inaugurated a column called "The Bookstore Browser" in which I wrote about new paperbacks appearing at the Red-wood student bookstore.

The 1964 issue of the Redwood High School literary magazine, *Orpheus*, contained my poem, "Memories" and my short story, "The Contemplator."

From October, 1964 through March, 1965 I was editor of *Bookmark*, seeing it through six issues. I wrote essays about several authors who turned out to be major influences on my own writing: Somerset Maugham, Ernest Hemingway, Nathaniel Hawthorne and J.D. Salinger. (Also one about Ford Madox Ford, but I don't think he had much effect on me.)

The 1965 issue of *Orpheus* contained my poems, "Man We Gotta Make Music," "Nothing," "Running Away," "A Prayer," "Eternity," "Road With a Sharp Turn," "Kite," my haiku "Sea Gull," and my short stories, "Beyond the Streetlights" and "Lillies Die in Rough Wind."

During that period, I "was extremely self-conscious, weird, arrogant and annoying—especially to my parents. I moped. I pined. And I continued to write. I fancied myself to be a sort of hybrid Dylan Thomas/Jack Kerouac/Ernest Hemingway/William Goldman/Edgar Allan Poe.

I also started taking backpacking trips into the High Sierra mountains with my brother,

some explorer scouts, and various other friends. Sometimes, I camped and took driving trips into dangerous places with my friend, Chris Gronbeck. It is a wonder we survived. But I got a lot of material that would later turn up in my fiction.

1965-69

Upon being graduated from Redwood, I headed north for Willamette University in Salem, Oregon to begin my days as a college student. Willamette is the inspiration for the fictional university, Belmore, which appears in some of my novels. I majored in English, wrote a lot, and had stories and poetry published in the university literary magazine.

The Spring, 1966 issue of Willamette's literary magazine, *Jason*, contained my poem, "Complaint."

The Spring, 1967 issue of *Jason* contained my poem, "One More Crucifixion," and my short story, "Beast." (About a teenager who keeps a dead mouse for his pet.)

I attended summer school, 1967, at the University of Iowa, where I took courses in literature and creative writing.

Three of my poems, "Night on a Lake," "Some of Us," and "Today I Could Have Lost" were published in the 1968 issue of Willamette literary magazine, *Jason's Phantasy*.

In 1967 and again in 1968, I received \$20.00 for winning second place in the Willamette University Creative Writing Award contest.

Though I'm officially in the Willamette class of 1969, I piled up a lot of credits by going to summer sessions at various institutions. I received my B.A. a year early, and spent my fourth year (Fall, 1968-Spring, 1969) working on an MFA degree at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Two of my poems, "Today I Could Have Lost," and "Some of Us" were published in the December, 1968 issue of *Tongue*, which appears to be the literary magazine of the University of Arizona.

While in Tucson, I took a driving trip into the desert with a friend who intended to steal a cactus. This incident inspired my first professionally published story "Desert Pickup."

In 1969, President Richard Nixon started the draft lottery.

I had lost my student deferment some time earlier, had gone for my pre-induction Army physical, and had made preparations to enlist in the U.S. Air Force. When Nixon held the lottery, however, I came up with a fairly high number. Thus, I never served in the armed forces. And I lived on to write my fiction.

1970

After one year at the University of Arizona, I dropped out of the MFA program and moved to Los Angeles. I enrolled in Loyola University of Los Angeles to pursue a Masters Degree in English literature.

April 10—I received a contract in the mail. My short story, "Desert Pickup," had been bought for \$75.00 by *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. It would be published in the magazine's "Department of First Stories." I went crazy wild with joy.

September—I got a job teaching ninth grade English to girls at Bishop Conaty High School. (A teaching certificate wasn't required for being a teacher at private schools.) I experienced a real life version of *The Blackboard Jungle*. I also started working on a Masters Degree in English literature at Loyola University of Los Angeles.

1971

I experienced my first major earthquake, a 6.6 that struck at 6 a.m. on the morning of February 9. Not knowing whether school would be in session at Bishop Conaty, I hopped into the car and drove downtown to Pico and Normandie. Traffic signals were dead. Fire hydrants were shooting water into the air. I used some of this experience, years later, when writing *Quake*.

At the end of my first year of teaching at Bishop Conaty, I resigned to publish a pamphlet called *Smoker's Blend*, which I thought would be sold by the thousands to pipe smokers and make me rich. It didn't. I published four monthly issues (July-Sept., 1971) before going out of business.

The issues contain articles, tips and jokes for pipe smokers—mostly -written by me.

December 27—I began working on my novel, *Dark Road*.

1972

I worked as a library clerk at Mount St. Mary's College in Brent-wood.

June 17—I received a Master of Arts degree in English Literature from Loyola University of Los Angeles.

Summer—I took classes in Library Science at University of Southern California, working toward a Masters Degree in Library Science in order to become a certificated librarian.

In October and November, I published *Smoker's Blend II*, two follow-up issues of my

original periodical.

1973

March 5—I joined Mystery Writers of America. Soon afterward, I was invited to attend a meeting of the Pink Tea writer's group. I ended up belonging to the group for about a decade.

September—I quit my job at Mount St. Mary's and took a good job as the library assistant at John Adams Junior High School in Santa Monica.

While working at John Adams, I attended USC and UCLA in my spare time (night and summer sessions). Over a period of about four years, I took teacher training and worked on a Masters Degree in Librarianship. I came out of it with a lifetime California teaching credential. I am permanently licensed in this state to teach secondary school and junior college English, and to be a secondary school and junior college librarian. Nice to have something to fall back on.

1974

April 25—My second story, "Roadside Pickup," was bought by *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*.

August—I briefly worked as the editor of *The Executioner Mystery Magazine* and *The 87th Precinct Mystery Magazine*. These magazines were published by Leonard Ackerman. They appeared to be sponsored and intended as some sort of conduit for stories written by clients of a certain famous literary agency that I'd better not name in print.

1975

Oct. 3—I sent a manuscript of my novel, *Ravished* (a revised version of the 1971 novel, *Dark Road*), to literary agent Richard Curtis. He didn't think much of it. More than twenty years later, a significantly revised version would be published as the novella, "Fiends." (This goes to show that rejected stuff is not necessarily without merit and value.)

Oct. 9—In a letter to Richard Curtis, I told him about my current work in progress, *Substitutes*, which I had been working on "during the past 18 months."

1976

June 24—Having sent *Substitutes* to Richard Curtis, I received a letter from him. He wrote that he and his staff were divided down the middle about the book's virtues and shortcomings. However, the shortcomings won the day and he didn't wish to handle the

novel. "You have a definite talent," he wrote, "and if you can learn to plot a novel better, I think we can break you into print in the novel field." (I later broke into the novel field, but *Substitutes* has never been published.)

August—Ann Marie Marshall and I took a driving trip up the coast, visited the Hearst Castle and the Winchester House, then drove on to Lake Tahoe where we got married. (I'd met Ann through our mutual friend, Marshall Oliphant. At the time, Ann was working in reservations at TWA.)

1977

Jan. 28—I was elected for a two year term as regional director of the Los Angeles Chapter of Mystery Writers of America.

April—My short story, "Keeper of the Books," was published in the Spring, 1977 issue of *California School Libraries*. (I don't list this on my short fiction bibliography because it was not a professional sale.)

May 3—I wrote to Jay Garon: "Saturday night (at a party hosted by Garon - R.L.), on the recommendation of Clayton Matthews, you said that you would be "willing to look at my work. I recently finished writing *Missing Pieces*, a mystery novel. The manuscript is enclosed."

June 28—Based upon my novel, *Missing Pieces*, (which is so far still unpublished) I was taken on by the literary agency of Jay Garon-Brooke Associates. I needed to sign a three-year contract with the agency.

June - Aug.—Instead of working the summer session at John Adams, I stayed home at our apartment in west L.A. and wrote my novel, *Beast House*, which would eventually be published as *The Cellar*.

Sept. 19 I sent my gun confiscation novel, *Take 'Em*, to Jay Garon.

Oct. 28—I sent the manuscript of my novel, *Substitutes*, to Jay Garon. In my letter to Garon, I told him that I wrote *Beast House* over the summer, and that I was currently halfway through a novel "about a girl's revenge on the man who raped her." This was *Lo Down*. I later finished the first draft of *Lo Down*, but I have never completed a final draft of it. The book was a little *too* nasty, and I'd been advised to back away from the really rough stuff.

Nov.—Ann and I moved into our house in west Los Angeles.

Nov. 17—Garon wrote to me, "We love *Take 'Em* as a hard cover possibility and *Substitutes* as a good paperback. (Neither novel has ever been published.)

1978

May 26—My novel about gun confiscation, *Take 'Em*, was rejected by Warner Books.

June 12—Jay Garon wrote to me, "I had made a presentation of what I considered two of your best to Warner, but to the top man (Larry Kirshbaum, I believe—R.L.)...In another 10 days or so, I may have an interesting deal with Warner in a major way."

Sept. 19—Jay Garon wrote to me, "We have read *The Keepers* and like it. You did a splendid job on this one. We immediately sent it out on multi-submissions." (It has never sold.)

1979

Jan. 26—*Beast House* (to be retitled *The Cellar*) -was bought by Warner Books for \$3,500.

April 18—*Your Secret Admirer* was bought by Scholastic for \$3,000.

April 25—Ann and I had lunch in New York City with John Kinney, my editor at Warner Books.

May 7—Jay Garon wrote to me that he had sent *The Keepers* to John Kinney.

June 21—Got news that Warner Books was giving me a three book contract for \$45,000.

July 25—Our daughter, Kelly Ann Laymon was born at Daniel Freeman Hospital in Inglewood.

July 31—I mailed out the manuscript of my mummy novel, *Dead Corse*, to Jay Garon. (This book never sold.)

Sept. 7—I mailed the manuscript of my novel, *Secret Nights*, to Jay Garon. (This book never sold.)

Sept. 12—My short story, "Stiff Intruders," was bought by *Mike Shayne's Mystery Magazine*.

Sept. 13—A full, two-page ad for *The Cellar* appeared in *Publishers Weekly*.

Sept. 22—Jay Garon informed me of "strong movie interest" in *The Cellar*. (Nothing came of this.)

Oct. 6-7—I attended a Bouchercon in Culver City, and recall playing a lot of poker with Bill Pronzini.

Oct. 22—*The Cellar* was bought by New English Library for \$24,000.

Oct. 23—I resigned my position as librarian at John Adams Junior High School in Santa Monica. The resignation would become effective January 31, 1980.

Dec. 4—I mailed the manuscript of my novel, *The Woods Are Dark*, to Jay Garon.

1980

January—*The Cellar* was published by Warner Books!

Feb. 7—At the old, dark house of our close friends, Chris and Dick Boyanski in Clayton, New York, we fooled around with a Ouija board and it seemed to give us coherent messages. This incident eventually led to my Ouija board novel, *Darkness, Tell Us*.

Feb. 13—In New York City, Ann and I had lunch with my Warner Books editor, John Kinney. Then we went to dinner at York, and Jay Garon's party.

Feb. 14—We had lunch with Jay Garon at Sardi's. That evening, we had dinner with our friends Bill and Marie Chambers.

April 1—I sent a revised version of *The Woods Are Dark* to Jay Garon.

June 1—We went to a poolside party thrown by Harold Moskowitz, my new film agent and Garon's protege. (He never sold anything for me.)

July 7—My novel, *The Woods Are Dark*, was accepted by Warner Books.

July 29—I mailed my finished novel, *Out Are the Lights*, to Jay Garon.

Aug. 12—I mailed the manuscript of my second young adult novel, *Nightmare Lake*, to Jay Garon.

Aug. 16—Back in upstate New York, we drove up to Gananoque, Canada. There, we went into a memorable House of Horrors that inspired quite a lot of my material, but especially some of the ideas I used in the final sequence of *Funland*.

Nov. 14—I went to my first and last P.E.N. meeting. The folks at P.E.N. seemed largely stuffy, self-important and pretentious.

Nov. 21—The Pink Tea meeting was held at Gary Brandner's house. He invited Dean and Gerda Koontz. I had never read any of Dean's books, but I'd recently read *Funhouse* by Owen West, so I was impressed to meet him. I blurted, "You're Owen West!!!" He

admitted to a fondness for *The Cellar*, and we started a friendship that has continued to this day.

Dec. 20—Though Ann had to stay home because we couldn't find a babysitter for Kelly, this was our first invitation to Dean and Gerda Koontz' house. I couldn't bring myself to miss the opportunity, so I went alone.

1981

Jan. 13—I received an advance for *Out Are the Lights* from Warner Books.

Jan. 15—I finished writing *Allhallow's Eve*.

Jan. 16—*The Woods Are Dark* was bought by New English Library.

Feb. 24—I mailed the manuscript of my novel, *Allhallow's Eve*, to Jay Garon. It was supposed to be book three of my three-book contract with Warner Books. But it was rejected.

March—I worked on screenplays for *The Cellar* and *The Woods Are Dark*. (Nothing has come of them, so far.)

March 13—I began writing my invisible man novel, *Beware!*

April 2—I mailed the finished two screenplays, plus the manuscript of my novel, *The Hag* to Jay Garon. (*The Hag* was a revision of *Dead Corset*)

In my letter, I told Garon about a new idea. "This is a horror story that is not occult or supernatural. It also, I think, has great series potential. The protagonist is an agent of a small, secret government department that investigates and "deals with" SPECIAL OCCURRENCES—reports of such matters as alien sightings, ghosts, satanist activities, or other strange circumstances that "would not fall within the bailiwick of normal law enforcement activities." (Golly, sounds a bit like *The X-Files*.)

April 28 - May 5—Ann and I traveled to New York City for the production of the play, *Ah, Men*. Its producer, my agent Jay Garon, had talked me into investing in it. Nobody told us that the opening date had been changed, so Ann and I showed up a week early and missed it. We got to see a rehearsal, though.

June 9—I received the contract from New English Library for *Out Are the Lights*.

June 19—Finished the first draft of *Beware!*

June 25—Mailed *Beware!* to Jay Garon. This "was supposed to be the third book of my three book contract with Warner Books. But it was rejected.

June 27—I began making notes for a sequel to *The Cellar*.

July 14—I received the contract for *The Lawmen*, to be written under the pseudonym Lee Davis Willoughby. I started working on *The Lawmen*, postponing work on my sequel to *The Cellar*.

July 30—In a letter to Jay Garon, Warner Books editor-in-chief Bernard Shir-Cliff rejected *Allhallow's Eve*, *Secret Nights*, and *Beware!* In regard to *Secret Nights*, a reader report stated, "The incestuous twist in Roger's parentage as well as his secret attic confinement is too blatantly a rip-off of *Flowers in the Attic*." This really annoyed me. I hadn't "ripped off" that book—or even read it. The report on *Beware?* stated, "Laymon only succeeds in creating an uneven mish-mosh with occasional moments of sex and sadism to try to hold the reader's interest." She also wrote, "Why invisibility? Why not back from the dead or something along the Shadow's line where the subject has the "ability to cloud other people's minds." Why not, indeed?

Aug. 3-5—I wrote my short story, "The Grab."

Aug. 14—I started -working on my secret project about people being marooned on a tropical island between California and Hawaii. (*There isn't an island out there!*) The project was instigated by a couple of film guys. They had an elaborate plan to make the book into a huge bestseller and blockbuster film. I was to ghost-write the book and keep mum about my participation in it. Unfortunately, their detailed plot outline was pretty much ludicrous and they refused to let me fix it very much. I ended up "wasting a lot of time on the project, but I did get paid at various stages. For the purposes of this chronology, I will refer to said project as *Hollywood Goons*.

Aug. 15—I dabbled with the outline of a "wishes book." I wish I could remember what that was about.

Aug. 17—I worked on the outline of a novel called *Servant*.

Sept. 1—Having given up on trying to revise *Beware!* for Warner Books, I mailed the outline of a completely new novel to Jay Garon—*Dark Sacrifice*.

Sept. 2—My short story, "The Grab," was bought by *Gallery magazine*.

Sept. 29—My short story, "The Champion," (which had appeared in the 1980 anthology, *Modern Masters of Horror*) was optioned by Universal for the television series, *Dark Room*. The show, with James Coburn as the M.C., would be cancelled before it could film my story.

Oct. 24—Dean and Gerda Koontz came over to the house for dinner for the first time.

Nov. 2—I had dinner at the restaurant, Joe Allen's, with one of the primary guys behind *Hollywood Goons*. A fictional version of the restaurant would show up in *Night Show*, when Tony rushes at people dining at a patio table. So something good came out of a lousy situation.

Nov. 13—I spoke to a writers' group at Orange Coast College.

Nov. 16—I wrote a desperate letter to Jay Garon about the possibility of abandoning the disastrous *Hollywood Goons* project. He advised me to stick with it.

Dec. 18—I started making notes for a novel called, *Chill Master*, later to be known as *Night Show*.

1982

Jan. 3—I finished *Beware!* revisions that I'd started in November, 1981.

Jan. 11—My outline for *Hollywood Goons* was accepted.

Jan. & Feb.—Most of both months "were spent working alternately on *Hollywood Goons* and *Chill Master* (*Night Show*).

March—Ann and I left Kelly with my parents in Modesto, and we spent a week in Hawaii with our friends, Frank and Loretta Beard. After returning, we stayed a *few* days in Modesto. Then we got home and I devoted all my writing time to *Hollywood Goons*.

March 26—My three book contract with Warner Books, "which included *The Woods Are Dark* and *Out Are the Lights*, "was terminated with extreme prejudice.

April 22—I mailed a revised version of *Beware!* to Jay Garon. April 30—The first draft of *Chill Master* was finished.

May 10—I changed the title of *Chill Master* to *Night Show* and mailed the manuscript to Jay Garon.

May 19—I delivered outlines of *Out Are the Lights* and *Night Show* to film producer/director Andrew Fenady for possible film development. (Nothing ever happened.)

June 3-12—I worked briefly on a possible novel about Edgar Allan Poe, but never got very far.

June 15—I started a novel "with the working title, *Curse*, which I later called *Tread*

Softly. The book was also eventually called *Dark Mountain* in the Headline edition. After working on it for a week, I went back to work on *Hollywood Goons*.

June 6—A momentous date! I finished the first draft of *Hollywood Goons*! But alas, it was not to be accepted or ever published.

July 16—I returned to work on *Curse*.

July 30—I mailed the manuscript for a short-short story, "Tiny," to *Gallery* magazine. It was rejected.

Aug. 2—I mailed the short story, "Bedtime Stories" (the "Hairy Hand" story) to *Twilight Zone* magazine. It was rejected.

Aug. 4—I mailed the short story, "Opening Night," to *Playboy* magazine. Also mailed the short story, "Pick Up" to *Woman's World*. Both stories were rejected.

Aug. 5—I started work on a novel with the working title, *The Dump*, which I was trying to write in collaboration with the mystery writer, Robert Colby.

Aug. 10—My young adult horror manuscript, *Nightmare Lake*, was bought by Dell. It would be published as part of the *Twilight* series under the pseudonym, Carl Laymon.

Oct. 12—I wrote a letter to Jay Garon informing him that I'd happened upon a paperback version of *Modern Masters of Horror*. Though it contained my story, "The Champion," I'd never received payment for any paperback version. Was this a foreshadowing of things to come?

Sept. & October—Throughout these months, I divided most of my time between *The Dump* and *Curse*. Toward the end of October, however, I got dragged back into *Hollywood Goons* for some major revisions.

Nov.—Mostly, I worked on *The Dump* and *Curse*,

Dec. 4—After doing my final work on *The Dump*, I quit the project.

Dec.—I worked the rest of the month on *Curse*.

1983

Jan. 27—I finished writing the first draft of *Curse*.

Jan. 29—New English Library bought *Beware!* and *Night Show*.

Jan. 31—I started work (again) on my sequel to *The Cellar*, which I was calling *Cellar E*.

Feb. 1—I changed the title of *Curse* to *Tread Softly with Care*. Feb. 4—I mailed *Tread Softly with Care* to Jay Garon.

Feb. 9—I had a meeting with Lynn Rudman about William Morris interest in film version of *Out Are the Lights*. (Nothing ever came of it.)

March 10—I mailed a revision of *Tread Softly* to Garon.

March 18—Mailed a *Hollywood Goons* revision to Garon.

March 22—My short story, "A Place Called Joe's," was accepted by Mel Cebulash, publisher of the "Fastbacks" at Pitman Learning.

March 29—My short story, "Cardiac Arrest," was accepted by Mel Cebulash.

April 14—My short story, "Dawson's City," was bought by Mel Cebulash.

May—Mostly spent working on *Cellar II*.

May 6—My major revision of *Hollywood Goons* 'was rejected by the Hollywood goons.

May 16—My short story, "Intruder," was bought by Mel Cebulash. June—Nearly all month was spent working on *Cellar II*.

June 28—I mailed short story, "Chopper," to Mel. It was later rejected.

July 8—My short story, "Night Ride," was bought by Mel. July 27—My short story, "Live Bait," was bought by Mel.

Aug. 9—Ann and I started collaborating on a non-fiction satirical book about auto driving—*Driving Me Nuts*.

Aug. 11—I sent letters to Aaron Priest; Paul R. Reynolds Inc.; Knox Berger Associates; Bill Berger Associates; and Michael Larsen/ Elizabeth Pomada. I explained that I was looking for a new literary agent to handle my work, and told them about my background. For one reason or another, I would end up staying with Jay Garon for another two years.

Aug. 22—Getting a positive response from Aaron Priest, I sent him the manuscript of *Tread Softly*. I also started hunting for a job.

Aug. 25—We finished *Driving Me Nuts*.

Sept. 1—I mailed *Driving Me Nuts* to Martin Asher of Long Shadow Books. It was rejected. (It remains unpublished.)

Sept. 7—I signed up with Thomas Temps to work as an "office temporary" worker.

Sept. 9-16—I worked 4:30 p.m. to midnight at a joint called "Mileage Plus" counting up people's frequent flier miles.

Sept. 20-23—I did some sort of un-rememberable office work at a place called Ticor.

Oct. 3—Mel Cebulash of Pitman bought three more short stories, "Guts," "Bait," and "The Lonely One."

Oct. 3-7—I worked at UCLA Medical Center Surgical Pathology reporting office where I learned the meaning of "necrotic tissue."

Oct. 13—I finished the first draft of *Cellar II*—later to be published as *Beast House*, (For you up-and-coming writers out there...yes, I "was working on a novel all along while I worked at the temp jobs and on the short stories for Mel. It's the only way to go-)

Oct. 19—I received contracts from Jay Garon for two contemporary romantic suspense novels to be packaged by James Bryans (same packager as *The Lawmen*), and to be published by Blue Heron Press. I was to get \$500 per novel. I needed the money.

Nov. 9-16—I worked as an office temporary at a place called Technical Books.

Dec. 1—I worked as an office temporary at Budget Furniture.

Dec. 6 - Jan. 27—I worked as an office temporary at General Telephone in Santa Monica, where I would eventually be offered full-time employment. Which I turned down. I aimed to remain a writer, not become an employee of the telephone company.

Dec. 11—I finished the first and only draft of the romantic contemporary suspense novel, *A Stranger's Arms*.

1984

Jan. 25—The contract arrived for a story called, "The Caller," from Mel Cebulash at Pitman Learning.

Feb. 3-14—I worked as an office temporary for a company called EJM.

Feb. 21—My short story, "Marathon," was bought by Mel. Feb. 28—I worked again at Budget Furniture. March 13—I worked at a place called Paradyne.

March 15 - April 6—More "work at General Telephone. Meanwhile, I was writing almost constantly for Pitman Learning, turning out numerous stories, including my four-story SOS series, "which remains in print as of this writing.

April 23—Feeling rather desperate, I bypassed my agent and sent letters to ten U.S. publishers, trying to hawk my novel, *Night Show*.

May 9—I started "working on a new novel "with the "working title, *Mystery Mystery*. I later changed the title to *Murder by the Book*. (Never sold.)

May 10—I finished and mailed *Passion Storm*, by Carla Laymon. Blue Heron Press apparently went out of business, however, and this book (to my knowledge) was never published.

May 22—I mailed sample chapters and an outline of *Night Show* to Little, Brown. This publisher had responded to my self-promotion letter. They rejected the book.

May 30—On a trip to Belmont, California, I met with Mel Cebu-lash to plan further work for Pitman. After the meeting, we drove to Santa Cruz. Ann, Kelly and I spent the night there. We noticed a lot of "homeless" people in the area. There, they were called "Trolls."

May 31—Ann, Kelly and I went to the Santa Cruz Boardwalk amusement park. Out of that visit and a newspaper article found by Ann, the idea for *Funland* was born.

June 11—I worked one day as an office temporary at Reback Design.

June 13—I worked again for General Telephone.

June 14—I worked at a law office.

June 15 -July 12—Back to General Telephone.

July 13—I began my four-year stint working as a researcher and report writer for the Law Offices of Hughes & Crandall. I was given the job by Richard Hughes, a friend from the Pink Tea writer's group. My job mostly entailed investigating medical reports in hopes of defending the L.A. bus company (and sometimes the Sheriff's Department) against personal injury lawsuits.

July 13—My short story, "Cobra," -was bought by Mel.

July 22—I started working on the outline for a novel called *Blood Sisters*. (Whatever that was.)

Aug. 10—My story, "Small Fish," was bought by Mel. (Was the title changed? I don't know of a story by that title being bought, rejected, or existing at all.)

Sept. 14—I mailed *Murder by the Book* to agent Al Zuckerman. He chose not to take me on as a client, in a letter indicating that he had reached a stage in his career where he no

longer handled authors of my kind. (Was that a dig?)

Sept. - Nov.—I didn't put much in my calendar, but was apparently writing material for Mel and sometimes getting in pages on a novel.

Nov. 21—Meanwhile, my career in the dumper in the U.S., I received the proofs for the New English Library edition of *Beware!*

Nov. 22—Across the "big pond," the New English Library edition of *Night Show* made the "best subscribed" list in *The Bookseller* (the British equivalent of *Publishers Weekly*).

Dec.—I was apparently dividing my time between an unidentified "kid novel" and something I called, "The Vision."

1985

Jan. 13—I mailed the manuscript of my new novel, *The Cellar II* (which would be published as *Beast House*) to Jay Garon.

Jan. - June—I was apparently working on the first version of *Alarums* (or *Alarms*) during this period, but my records are missing.

April 24—New English Library bought *The Cellar II* and *Allhallow's Eve*.

April 25—*Night Show* and *Tread Softly* were both bought by Tor for their new horror series.

June 27—Though we were nearly flat broke, I had been owed payments for long periods of time from nearly all of my foreign and domestic publishers. (Except Pitman, which didn't come through Garon.) Though I had often expressed my concerns to Jay Garon, he continued to suggest that I remain patient. Now, I ran short of patience. I wrote letters to several publishers and Garon's subagents asking about numerous payments that I should've received, but hadn't.

June 30—I sent a letter Jay Garon, explaining what I'd done. It resulted in an angry phone call from Garon in which he accused me of "stabbing him in the back" and trying to ruin his reputation by making him look like a crook. During the next month or so, however, he sent me checks from about ten different publishers, totalling about \$15,000. He had apparently received most of the payments long ago, and *kept* them. Records showed that he'd been holding my money for six months, a year, a year and a half—and one payment for *two and a half years* after receiving it from the publisher.

July—A VERY IMPORTANT EVENT!!!! Dean Koontz recommended me to his agent, Bob Tanner of International Scripts in London. Not only did Dean promote me to Bob, but he knew how strapped we were, and he actually *mailed* the manuscript of *Tread Softly* to England. Thanks again, Dean. And thanks again to Bob Tanner for taking me on as a

client and turning my career around.

Aug. 4—I wrote a letter to Jay Garon, expressing my wish to no longer be represented by his UK subagent, Abner Stein. Aside from the problems of payments being withheld (which might not have been Abner Stein's fault), I was being soaked for 30% agent fees between the two of them.

Aug. 17—I wrote a letter to Jay Garon, firing him. I fired him mostly because of the way he'd kept my payments for such long periods of time. But also because he seemed to consider me a loose cannon for raising a stink about it. (If I'd *really* been a loose cannon, I would've filed criminal charges against him for embezzlement. One of his other clients, John Grisham, did sue Garon's estate for similar practices.)

Dec. 3—At Computerland, I bought my first computer, a Compaq Deskpro. It had no hard drive, and ran off a pair of 5" floppy disks.

1986

Jan. 25—I started a new novel with the working title, *Parasite*. Later, I changed the title to *Snatcher*, and it was eventually published as *Flesh*.

Jan. 31—Over at the Law Offices of Hughes and Crandall, where I continued my full-time employment, I received a raise to \$10 per hour.

March 3—I wrote a letter to the agent, Sterling Lord, hoping he might take me on as a client. He wouldn't.

April 23—Ann and I, along with Robert Bloch and his wife, were guests for a dinner given by Tor (in Long Beach) to launch its new horror series. I got to meet Thomas Doherty, a very cool guy. I also got to listen to quips by Robert Bloch who was nothing if not a quipster.

May 20—I finished the first draft of *Flesh*.

May 25—In hopes of starting a new career as a suspense writer (•with a pseudonym) I started working on a new novel, *Intruder*.

June 24—Ed Gorman called, wanting to interview me for his magazine, *Mystery Scene*. It was the start of an on-going telephonic friendship with Ed that continues to this day.

June 27—I went to a Tor party at writer Bill Relling's place. The shock of the evening was being approached by a wildly enthusiastic fan who seemed ecstatic about meeting me. He introduced himself as Ray Garton. I soon became a big fan of his, and remain his friend and fan to this day.

July—Ray Puechner took me on as a client of his literary agency.

Aug. 22—On a driving trip through up-state New York and Vermont, Ann and Kelly and I visited Howe Caverns (near Cooperstown, NY). While on the cave tour, I was struck by the idea for *Midnight's Lair*.

Sept. 5—I started writing a short novel for young adults called, *Night Skater*.

Sept. 22—I finished the first draft of *Night Skater*. Oct. 6—My novel, *Alarms*, was rejected by Berkley.

Oct. 13—I saw my first copy of Tor's *Night Show* in a Culver City Crown bookstore.

Oct. 28—I started working on my new novel, *Cavern*, which would become *Midnight's Lair*.

Nov. 17—The great Bob Tanner made my first hardbound sale, *Tread Softly*, to W.H. Allen. Because New English Library was still bringing out some paperbacks, we decided to use the pseudonym, Richard Kelly, for *Tread Softly*.

Nov. 25—I finished *Intruder*, a suspense novel which has so far not been published.

Dec. 22—Ray Peuchner called to inform me that he had sold *The Cellar*, *Beast House* and *Beware!* to Paperjacks. It was lousy money, a total of \$5,000 for the bunch—but better than nothing.

1987

Jan. 13—I mailed my suspense novel *Intruder* to my agents, Bob Tanner in UK and Ray Peuchner in the US.

Feb. 9—My novel, *Intruder*, was rejected by Warner Books.

Feb. 12-16—Ann, Kelly and I went on a trip to Bullhead City, where we stayed with our friends Frank, Kathy and Leah De Laratta. During the visit, we explored the nearby desert, visited ruins and ghost towns. The area would soon provide the inspiration for the background setting, some plot elements, and a character or two for my novel, *The Stake*.

Feb. 20-22—I worked on my essay, "In the Midst of Life," about Dean Koontz for Bill Munster's book, *Sudden Fear*.

Feb. 26—Tor offered me \$7,500 for *Flesh*.

March 5—Over problems with the Tor contract, I ended my brief time as a client of Ray Peuchner.

March 9—I received and rejected the *Flesh* contract from Tor. The terms on paper were different and worse than I'd been told on the phone. (Lesson: believe nobody. Always read your contracts.)

March 14—I finished writing *Cavern*, which would later be published as *Midnight's Lair*. I also began to write a novel with the working title, *Gone*. (I don't think it came to much.)

March 23—Melissa Singer called from Tor. She insisted that the problems with the *Flesh* contract were "clerical errors," that there had been no intention of deceiving me. She also told me what the contract was *supposed* to say.

March 27—I signed the revised Tor contract for *Flesh*. Also, I started working on a new novel with the working title, *Zombie*. This would later become *Resurrection Dreams*.

April 12—We went to dinner at the restaurant, Scandia, with Dean and Gerda Koontz and Bob Tanner. At this dinner, Bob informed me that the U.S. agent, Ralph Vicinanza, would be willing to take me on as a client.

April 21—I answered interview questions provided by Charles DeLint.

May 8—I mailed the manuscript of *Midnight's Lair* to my new U.S. agent, Ralph Vicinanza.

May 14—I received the on-sign payment for my contract with W.H. Allen for the British hardbound edition of *Flesh*.

May 18—I started work on the zombie story, "Mess Hall."

June 2—Scholastic rejected my juvenile suspense novel, *Night Skater*.

July 28—I heard from Bob Tanner about an offer from Spain to do a film of *The Woods are Dark*. (Film was never made.)

July 29—At the law office, I received a raise to \$11.50 per hour.

Aug. 6—My short story, "Mess Hall," was bought by Skipp and Spector for their anthology, *Book of the Dead*.

Sept. 9—I finished writing my novel, *Resurrection Dreams*.

Sept. 10—On advice of Bob Tanner and my editor, I added a few pages to the ending of *Midnight's Lair* to "wrap things up."

Sept. 11—I started a new novel. It had the working title, *Troll*. It would be published as *Funland*.

Oct. 1—EARTHQUAKE!!!! A 6.1 magnitude earthquake occurred at 7:45 a.m. while I was alone at the law offices in Glendale, not far from the epicenter. This quake inspired the major plot and certain scenes for my novel, *Quake*.

Oct. 4—AFTERSHOCK!!! A 5.5 magnitude aftershock hit at four o'clock in the morning.

Dec. 9—The contract arrived for the W.H. Allen edition of *Midnight's Lair*, which would be published under the pseudonym, Richard Kelly.

Dec. 21—Ralph Vicinanza called with news that New American Library (Onyx) was interested in publishing *Resurrection Dreams*.

1988

Jan. 27—Bob Tanner called with news that W.H. Allen had made an offer for *Resurrection Dreams*.

Jan. 28—There was a brief flare-up of movie interest in *The Cellar*. (Film never made.)

Feb. 4—Bob Tanner called with news that he had received a contract for a film version of *Flesh*. (Film never made.)

Feb. 8—Ralph Vicinanza called and asked me to send him an outline and sample chapters of *Funland*.

Feb. 11—I sent Ralph an outline and the first 440 pages of *Fun-land*.

March 26—I finished writing *Funland*.

March 28—I started working on a new novel. The working titles at different times were *Finders Keepers* and *Vamp*. This would eventually be published as *The Stake*, and would feature material inspired by the Bullhead City trip of February, 1987.

March 29—Ralph Vicinanza called with an offer from New American Library for the purchase of *Resurrection Dreams* (\$9,000) and *Funland* (\$11,000).

April 25—I received \$1,350 for a film option of *Flesh*.

May 14-22—I wrote the short story, "The Bleeder," for Chris Lacher, a friend I'd met through Gary Brandner's writing group. Chris was the publisher of the magazine, *New Blood*.

May 20—I met Ralph Vicinanza when he came to town for the Nebula awards. He handed me the New American Library contracts for *Resurrection Dreams* and *Funland*.

May 23—Bob Tanner called with news of a film offer from Spain for *The Cellar*. (Film never made.)

May 27—"We had lunch at the Spaghetti Station in Anaheim with Bob Tanner and Mike Bailey, who were in town for the A.B.A. (The annual convention of the American Booksellers Association.)

June 9-19—I worked on a "stalker" story for Ed Gorman. It would be published as "The Hunt" in *Stalkers*.

June 24 - July 12—We went to New York City for the Horror Writers of America weekend. After leaving Manhattan, we visited Ann's hometown, Clayton, on the St. Lawrence River for a couple of weeks.

July 16—I started working on a novel called *Thin Air*, also known as *Madland*. This story was based on an idea of mine that had been approved by John Silbersack of New American Library (Onyx) as appropriate for a "break out" book.

July 19—I received \$2,700 in option money for *The Cellar*.

Aug. 4-10—I worked on revisions of *Resurrection Dreams* for New American Library.

Aug. 15—MY LAST DAY OF WORK AT THE LAW OFFICES!!! I RESUMED MY CAREER AS A FULL-TIME WRITER OF FICTION!!!

Aug. 19—I mailed the *Madland* sample chapters and outline to Ralph, and he would send them on to John Silbersack.

Aug. 27 - Sept. 11—I wrote an "on-spec" screenplay based on my short story, "The Hunt." It would be published in the book, *Scream-plays*, edited by Richard Chizmar in 1997.

Sept. 12—I resumed "work on *The Stake*."

Sept. 16—Bob Tanner called to tell me of W.H. Allen's offer for *Funland*, approx. \$15,000.

Oct. 22—We had dinner at Scandia with Dean and Gerda Koontz, Gary Brander and Martine, and Robert and Sally McCammon. The dinner was hosted by Dean.

Oct. 25-28—At Mike Bailey's request, I made minor revisions in *Funland* for W.H. Allen—mostly to tone down the sex.

Nov. 5—I went to Gary Brandner's bachelor party.

Nov. 6—Paul Mikol of Dark Harvest invited me to participate in *Night Visions VII*.

Nov. 7—I started writing the novella, "Mop Up" for *Night Visions*.

Nov. 11-12—At a hotel in Westlake Village, we fed the ducks in the stream. Our daughter, Kelly, instigated the duck banquet. Dean and Gerda helped by supplying the bread. The next day, I was best man at Gary Brandner's wedding to Martine, and toasted the bride and groom.

Nov. 13—I started writing my short story, "Bad News," for *Night Visions*.

Nov. 16—I started writing my short story, "Madman Stan," for *Night Visions*.

Nov. 23-27—Eight months after starting work on *The Stake* and still almost two months away from finishing the first draft, I went on a trip to Death Valley with Ann, Kelly and the De Laratta gang. Exploring the ghost town Rhyolite on the 25th, *The Stake* started coming true. (More about that elsewhere in this tome.)

Nov. 29—Having found a skeleton in Rhyolite, I started writing a story about a skeleton found in a tree—for *Night Visions*.

Nov. 29—I was interviewed on Kim Greenblatt's public access television show.

Dec. 3—Earthquake! Magnitude 5.0, not very big, but enough to shake us up. Regardless of the quake, we drove to Santa's Village near Big Bear.

Dec. 11—I finished the final drafts of my stories for *Night Visions*.

Dec. 23—I had a long telephone conversation "with John Silber-sack, my editor at New American Library (Onyx). He wanted my next novel to be the "break out," saying I can do it "as well as King, Koontz & McCammon, or better."

Dec. 28—I started writing a western horror story, "Dinker's Pond," for Joe Lansdale's anthology, *Razored Saddles*.

1989

Jan. 4—I had another telephone conversation with John Silber-sack about possible ideas for my "break out" novel.

Jan. 6-9—I worked on the outline for a new novel, *Voices*. (Though this book was never written, its main idea about reading minds possibly mutated into *Body Rides*.)

Jan. 12—I sent a partial of *Voices* to Ralph Vicinanza for submission to New American Library.

Jan. 19—I finished writing *The Stake*.

Jan. 21—I began working on a novel I called *Rain*. This would become *One Rainy Night*.

Jan. 27—I mailed the manuscript of *The Stake* to Bob Tanner and Ralph Vicinanza.

Feb. 17—Ralph told me of a U.S. film company's plans to option *The Cellar*. (No film made.)

March 1—A special friend sent us a surprise check—a loan to help tide us over while we waited for our "ship" to come in.

March 6-17—I had jury duty in Beverly Hills, got to read some good books, but didn't make it onto a jury. Ironically, the *prosecution* made the mistake of rejecting me. (This is ironic because I am generally rabidly pro-prosecution—unless they're trying to nail good cops.)

March 31—I "wrote a piece about *Resurrection Dreams* for Ed Gorman's *Mystery Scene*. And Bob Tanner called "from London to inform me of an offer from W.H. Allen for *The Stake* and one other unnamed novel for about \$54,000. YES!!!

April—*Flesh* was named best horror novel by Don D'Amassa in his article, "1988: The Best Novels of the Year" in *Science Fiction Chronicle*.

April 19—I received the big W.H. Allen contract for *The Stake* and untitled.

April 20—Bob Tanner called to inform me of a U.S. offer from Thomas Dunne, St. Martin's Press, to publish *The Stake* hardbound for \$15,000. Also, I learned that *Flesh* (published by Tor) had made the Horror Writers of America's final ballot for a Bram Stoker award in the "novel" category.

May 11—I finished writing *One Rainy Night*.

May 14—I started a new novel, working title *Beast Nights*. It was intended to be the third of the "Beast House" books.

June 4-5—I answered questions for a David Whitehead interview.

June 14-21—We went to New York for the Horror "Writers of America weekend. The Stoker for novel was awarded to Thomas Harris' *The Silence of the Lambs*, not to my *Flesh*.

June 22-27—I worked on the short story, "Slit," for the Ed Gorman/Martin Greenberg anthology which at that time was supposed to be called *Slashers*. The anthology came out

in 1993 with the title, *Predators*.

June 28—I started a novel with the working title, *Ouija*. It would be published as *Darkness, Tell Us*.

Aug. 17-20—I wrote the short story, "Invitation to Murder" for the Gorman/Greenberg anthology, *Invitation to Murder*.

Aug. 28—I signed the St. Martin's contract for *The Stake*.

Sept. 8-13—Though still working on *Ouija*, I spent a few days on notes for a new novel, *The Cage*. This didn't develop into a novel, but the idea was later used for my novella, "The Good Deed," which was published in my Deadline Press collection, *A Good, Secret Place*.

Oct. 7—My first book signing took place, given by Don Cannon at Aladdin Books in Fullerton. The signing was for *Night Visions VII*, but I was shocked and delighted to find a crowd of fans waiting in line with bags and boxes of my older books.

Oct. 13—We had a flat tire before dawn on the freeway as we headed north for a book signing given by John Scoleri at a B. Dai-ton in Santa Clara. But we eventually arrived safely. That night, we went to a party at Dark Carnival in Berkeley, where we met Joan Parsons and Larry Mori, who would become close friends. Lany would later do the artwork for *A Good, Secret Place*.

Oct. 14—We went to the signing at the B. Dalton, and met John Scoleri. John would later be a publisher of *A Good, Secret Place* as well as *THIS* book.

Oct. 17—A major earthquake hit the San Francisco area, and an overhead section of road collapsed onto the same stretch of highway that we'd driven four days earlier on our way to Dark Carnival Bookstore. By this time, however, we were safely home in Los Angeles.

Oct. 31—I wrote a piece about *Funland* for Ed Gorman's *Mystery Scene*. Later, we went trick or treating.

Nov. 4-7—I wrote short story, "The Tub," for *Hot Blood II*.

Nov. 18—I started a new novel, working title *Breakdown* (never finished), then returned to work on *Ouija*.

1990

Jan. 3-15—I worked on a new novel, *The Stillness*, but only wrote about 40 pages before abandoning it—temporarily, at least—and returning to *Ouija*.

Jan. 22—Mike Baker came to the house and taped an interview of me for the magazine, *Afraid*.

Jan. 30—I received the alarming news that my British publisher, W.H. Allen, was going out of business. I was terrified that this might be the beginning of the end for my career in the U.K.

Feb. 6—I finished writing *Ouija*, which would be published as *Darkness, Tell Us*.

Feb. 6—ANOTHER BIG DAY! In telephone conversations with Dean Koontz, Bob Tanner and Ralph Vicinanza, I learned that a major British publishing company, Headline House, intended to take over the contracts of a few W.H. Allen authors—including Dean and me. Headline would become my regular publisher. I was vastly relieved and delighted.

Feb. 7—Mark Ziesing and I made a deal for his special limited edition of my novel, *Alarms*. He "would be paying me the advance in much-needed installments of \$500 per "week. Upon making this deal, I re-read the novel, written in 1985, and wrote a major revision.

Feb. 20—Bob Tanner called to tell me that Headline bought *Out Are the Lights* ("which had originally been published in U.K. by New English Library).

Feb. 20-26—I wrote the short story, "Special" for *Under the Fang*, the HWA anthology edited by Robert McCammon.

March 6—I began a new novel, *Daring Young Maids*. It would be published as *Blood Games*.

March 28—Headline sent an "on-acceptance" payment for *One Rainy Night*.

April 17—I started work on material for an ill-fated, *Screamplay* stage play. (Not to be confused with the *Screamplay* collection of screenplays in "which *The Hunt* "would be published.)

April 22-25—I wrote the short story, "Saving Grace," for Richard Chizmar's anthology, *Cold Blood*.

April 26—I sent an article on novel outlining to *Mystery Scene*.

April 27-29—I worked on a "Mess Hall" stage play for *Screamplay* (the stage play that never materialized).

May 1—YES! Bob Tanner called with the news that Headline had offered me a three-book contract for approximately \$135,000. At last, "we'd really *made it!*"

May 18-23—I spent time communicating with a U.S. editor (then at Bantam) trying to come up with an idea for a book that she might find acceptable. I came up with ideas and sent off outlines, then got back to *Blood Games*.

May 31—I had lunch here in Los Angeles with Bob Tanner. He suggested that, since my main success was taking place in Great Britain, I should try to come up "with a novel having a British background."

June 17—Pondering Bob Tanner's advice from the luncheon, I came up with the idea for my Jack the Ripper novel, *Savage*. I would work on making notes and doing research for this book while continuing to write *Blood Games*.

June 29—The big "on-sign" check from Headline arrived. Finally, we were no longer poor!

July 11—With a portion of our new wealth, we went driving out to buy a new Jeep, but our ancient Omni broke down along the way.

July 12-13—We succeeded in buying a brand new red Jeep Cherokee. We immediately showed it to the De Larattas, then drove up and showed it to Bob and Cheryl (my brother and sister-in-law), spent the night in Bakersfield, then drove the rest of the way to Modesto for a surprise visit to my parents so *they* could see the new Jeep. We were pretty happy to have it.

July 18—Back in Los Angeles, I was treated to lunch at the Polo lounge by my publisher, Tim Hely Hutchinson, the head of Headline.

August 10—Returning to Berkeley for a signing at Dark Carnival, we spent the night in the apartment of Lany Mori and Joan Parsons—along with their collection of disturbing oddities.

Sept. 6-10—I wrote the short story, "I'm not a Criminal" for the Stanley Wiater anthology *After the Darkness*.

Nov. 8—*Blood Games*, begun on March 6 of that year, was finally finished.

Nov. 18—I started writing *Ripper*, which I would later retitle *Narrow Calls*, and which would be published as *Savage*.

Dec. 6-15—I wrote the short story, "Good Vibrations," for a Gorman/Greenberg anthology to be called *Stalkers III*. The anthology would be published in 1996 as *Night Screams*.

1991

Jan. 1-5—I made notes for a novel called *Nightman*—which never went anywhere.

March 1-3—We took a trip to Bishop, CA to visit the Laws Railroad Museum so I could do some train research for *Ripper* {*Savage*}.

March 18—I wrote a piece about *The Stake* for *Mystery Scene*.

March 20—Looking for an American agent to replace Ralph Vicinanza, I contacted Dominick Abel.

May 17—I spoke on being a "writer for "career day" at Canfield, Kelly's school.

May 24-27—We drove to Tecate, Mexico and spent several days there with my parents, my brother Bob and his wife Cheryl.

June 8—Don Cannon had a signing for me at Aladdin Books. Approximately sixty copies of *The Stake* were sold, and I spent three and a half hours autographing books and talking to fans.

June 21-23—We stayed at the house of our friends, Sally and Murray Harb, and attended the Horror Writers of America festivities in Redondo Beach. My novel, *Funland* was nominated for a Bram Stoker award, but lost to Robert McCammon's *Mine*. Bogart threw up. John Scoleri introduced me to Peter Infantino and they proposed publishing a collection of my short fiction in a special limited edition. I agreed.

June 29—I had a signing at The Bookstore, Ltd. in Modesto, CA. Approximately two copies of *The Stake* were sold. Larry Mori and Joan Parsons drove out from Berkley and had dinner with us.

July 17 - August 1—We took a driving trip out west. Went to Jackson Hole. At a dude ranch near Cody, Wyoming, we did a lot of horseback riding, some white-water rafting, some rock climbing. We got to meet a few real cowboys. We went to the Cody rodeo and Yellowstone Park. After the ranch, we went to Custer, South Dakota, saw Mt. Rushmore and Crazy Horse Mountain, the badlands, the Custer battlefield at the Little Big Horn, etc. We drove through fabulous landscapes near Moab, Utah. All this provided vast amounts of first-hand experience that came in handy during the "writing of *Savage*'?, western sections. (I had been writing *Savage* since November of the previous year.)

Aug. 9—I spoke and autographed copies of *The Stake* at The Book Annex in Venice, CA. This being Venice, we had real vampires in attendance.

Sept. 6—I finished writing *Ripper*, otherwise known as *Narrow Calls* and soon to be published as *Savage*.

Sept. 9—Though I'm convinced he did everything possible to help my career, I broke off from my U.S. agent, Ralph Vicinanza.

Sept. 10—I began a series of original stories for my first short story collection, to be published by Peter Infantino, John Scoleri and Robert Morrish of Deadline Press.

Sept. 12-18—I wrote the short story, "Finders Keepers."

Sept. 19-23—I wrote "Joyce."

Sept. 24 - Oct. 1—I wrote "Mask."

Oct. 1-5—I wrote "Stickman."

Oct. 7-20—I wrote a story called "Friend," which would become the title story of the Deadline collection, "A Good, Secret Place." (The title, of course, is a play on the title of Hemingway's classic short story, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place.")

Oct. 14—I met agent Dominick Abel for lunch at Coco's in West Los Angeles. He seemed "willing to take me on as a client, but he thought I would be a tough sell because of my track record. (It's all computerized, so if your books are not smashing hits, you can't escape the record and your career inevitably goes down the toilet.) Mr. Abel thought it might be a good idea for me to escape from my record by writing under a pseudonym.

Oct. 28—After smoking a pipe since about the age of sixteen, I gave it up. For a while, I thought I might not be able to write without smoking a pipe, but I managed.

Oct. 29—I started work on a new novel, *The Caller* (never finished).

Nov. 4—In my quest for a U.S. agent, I talked to a man from William Morris. I was informed, however, that the agency wouldn't take me on as a client unless I allowed them to handle the whole -world, including the U.K. Which would mean dumping Bob Tanner. So I didn't go with William Morris.

It may have been at this point that I decided to quit looking for an American agent, and have Bob Tanner handle the whole works. He'd done such a fine job everywhere else, that it made sense. And still does.

Nov. 6-13—I wrote the short story, "The Fur Coat" for Richard Chizmar's anthology, *The Earth Strikes Back*.

Nov. 12—Bob Tanner called to inform me that *Blood Games* would be the main selection of Book Club Associates, Britain's most important book club.

Nov. 17-23—I wrote the short story, "Phil the Vampire," for the Gorman/Greenberg

anthology, *Vampire Detectives*.

Nov. 27 - Dec. 2—We went to Bullhead City, Sedona and Cotton-wood with the De Larattas.

Dec. 2-9—I wrote the short story, "Dracuson's Driver," for the Gorman/Greenberg anthology, *Dracula, Prince of Darkness*.

Dec. 10-13—I wrote the short story, "Kitty Litter" for the Gorman/ Greenberg anthology, *Cat Crimes II*.

Dec. 14—I started writing my novel, *Quake*.

1992

Jan. 15—*The Stake* went into development for Tri-Star TV.

Jan 26 - Feb.2—In Florida, we went to Disney World, Daytona Beach, Cape Canaveral, and Gatorland where I ate alligator.

March 19—The trial of the police officers who subdued and arrested felon Rodney King began. Though still working on *Quake*, I took time to watch the complete trial on television.

March 25—Headline gave me a new and wonderful three-book contract.

March 30—My Headline editor, Mike Bailey, asked for a plot synopsis of *Quake*, so I wrote one up and sent it to Bob Tanner. (I send just about everything to Bob Tanner, and he delivers it all to Mike Bailey.)

April 3—I stopped working on *Quake*, leaving it unfinished. April 4-28—I wrote my novella, "Wilds."

April 29—The jury found the police officers not guilty of charges brought against them in connection -with the Rodney King arrest. The verdict wasn't appreciated by some segments of the population, and the Los Angeles riot started. Reginald Denny was pulled from his car and nearly beaten to death by a mob of black hoodlums while we watched it happen live on television.

April 30—The riot was continuing. Armed with a pistol and video camera, we piled into our Jeep and drove to the Target store on a mission to save our Disney World photos from the rioters. Though we passed through areas that had already been hit, we succeeded and returned home safely.

May 1-3—The National Guard finally came in. With such a massive show of force, the

riot tapered off and ended.

May 6—I started working on a new novel, *Sleep Over*, which would be published as *Endless Night*.

May 8—We went to a local gun shop and began to improve our home defense capabilities.

May 16—We went to Venice Beach, where we saw a fellow threaten another guy and chase him around with a big knife. We reported the incident to a couple of nearby LAPD officers.

May 23-25—The ABA was in Anaheim. We had breakfast with Bob Tanner, dinner with Anne Williams of Headline and Bob.

June 28—Two big EARTHQUAKES. A 6.5 demolished much of the city of Big Bear, and a 7.4 hit in Yucca Valley. We felt them both, but they -were too far away to do any damage in Los Angeles.

June 29—We had dinner with Sian Thomas of Headline.

July 10—We had dinner in Sacramento with Steve, Kathy and Sarah Adamovich of Cobblestone book store. We stayed at a motel that night, and I signed books at Cobblestone the next day.

July 21- Aug. 10—We flew to Ann's hometown, Clayton, New York and took a side trip through the Finger Lakes area to Niagara Falls. We also had an adventure in Clayton, in which we stumbled onto a possibly illegal dump site, were caught there on a back road, and feared for our lives.

Aug. 14-17—I worked on an interview for *Samhain* magazine.

Sept. 10—The St. Martin's version of *Midnight's Lair* was chosen to be a Doubleday Book Club selection here in the U.S.

Nov. 13—I had a book signing for *A Good, Secret Place* at Dark Carnival in Berkeley. Late that night, at the Berkeley Marriott, we had rodent adventures and needed to change rooms. We didn't find out until later, but in the new room Kelly spent the night between her bedsheets with a pile of nut shells near her feet.

Nov. 14—We visited the Santa Cruz boardwalk, which I had already fictionalized in *Funland*. While there, we observed a woman who was concerned because her child had vanished inside one of the amusement park's rides.

Nov. 17-18—I wrote a piece about *Midnight's Lair* for *Mystery Scene*.

Nov. 19-24—At the request of film agent Frank Cooper, I wrote a treatment of *Midnight's Lair*. Oddly enough, based on a review of the book that appeared in *Publishers Weekly*, the folks at Disney were interested in movie rights. But only for a while. Then they found out what *Midnight's Lair* was *really* about. (Film never made.)

Dec. 2—I finished writing *Endless Night* and sent it to Bob Tanner.

Dec. 12-13—We helped our friends, Loretta and Mel Roberts, set up and arrange their audio book store in Long Beach.

Dec. 15—I started making notes for a new novel, *The Pact* (*never finished*).

1993

Jan. 6-11—I had meetings with film agent Frank Cooper, and did more work on treatments of *Midnight's Lair*. (No films made.)

Jan. 19 - Feb. 9—We took a massive driving trip through Arizona and New Mexico, visited Carlsbad Caverns, drove through west Texas, stayed in Corpus Christi for a few days, spent a while in Houma, Louisiana, then a few days in San Antonio, Texas before heading for home. On the way back, visited the Cadillac Desert to pay homage to Joe Lansdale.

Feb. 15—I started writing a new novel, working title *MOG*. It would be published with the title, *In the Dark*.

Feb. 16—I made two trips to the Cooper Agency about a possible film version of *The Stake*.

Feb. 26—*Savage* sold to St. Martin's Press for hardbound publication under the Thomas Dunne imprint. Also, I went to the Cooper Agency for a meeting with screenwriter Richard Adams about a film version of *The Stake*. (Film never made.)

March 5-6—We went to Disneyland, Roy Robbins threw a book-signing party at the Disneyland Hotel, and Roy treated us to a night at the hotel. Tim and Serena Powers dropped by for the signing. We got kicked out of the Disneyland cowboy saloon (because Kelly was under age), so we all went to our room, opened up the mini-bar, and had a great time for a couple of hours.

March 12-13—We spent the night in Sacramento, then had another signing at Cobblestone Books. Larry Mori and Joan Parsons came over from Berkley and we took them to dinner.

March 15—I wrote my article, "The *Lizzie Borden* Syndrome," attacking certain book

reviewers. It would appear in *Afraid magazine* and cause a bit of a stir.

March 25—I "was informed that paperback rights for *The Stake and Midnight's Lair* had been bought by Berkley—but the publisher turned out to be Zebra, not Berkley. Also, Tom Dunne of St. Martin's made an offer for *Quake*, based on the partial I'd sent to England back on March 30, 1992.

April 17—Koon and Powell, two of the officers involved in the Rodney King arrest, were found guilty when retried by the Federal government. This was the "proper" verdict, so we didn't have a riot this time. Except for a small outbreak of violence at Magic Mountain amusement park.

April 19—The Branch Davidian compound at Waco was burned down with multiple casualties.

May 20—I got involved in writing a screenplay with the man who installed the new windows in our house.

July 1-13—To celebrate the 50th wedding anniversary of my parents, my brother and I treated them to a week in Hawaii. We all went over and stayed together in a condo on Maui. Then Ann and Kelly and I spent an additional week in Honolulu.

July 20—I finished "writing *MOG*, which would be published as *In the Dark*.

July 31 - Aug. 20—We took an extensive driving trip up the California coast, staying in such places as Bodega Bay and Fort Bragg, then going up the Oregon coast and spending a couple of days in Portland. After going to the disaster site of the Mt. St. Helen's volcano eruption, we stayed in Seattle, Washington for a while, then drove up to Port Angeles and Aberdeen. On the way back, we spent a couple of days at Gold Beach, California, where we took the mail boat ride up the Rogue River.

Aug. 20 - Sept .22—I wrote a screenplay based on ideas developed in discussions with the man who installed several windows in our house. I then sent a copy of the finished screenplay to him, and never heard from him again. So much for the fun and games of collaboration.

Sept. 24—I started working on a new novel called, *The Look*. (I don't think it went anywhere.)

Sept. 30—A letter arrived from Tom Dunne, who had just bought *Quake* for St. Martin's Press, in which he made several suggestions for revisions and ways to proceed with the parts I hadn't yet written.

Oct. 1—I returned to writing *Quake*, which I'd stopped writing on April 3, 1992—about a year and half earlier.

Nov. 29—I started making notes for a new novel, working title *Body Hitcher*, which would be published as *Body Rides*.

Nov. 30—I wrote an introduction for Bentley Little's first collection of short fiction.

1994

Jan. 17—*BIG AWFUL EARTHQUAKE!!!* A 6.6 magnitude earthquake (or larger) struck the Los Angeles area at 4:31 a.m. We thought it was "all over." For a while, we were trapped inside our house because a book case containing my published novels had fallen in the way of the front door—and we couldn't find the key to the back door. But we finally got out, and stayed in our car until dawn. Our only major damage was the loss of our chimney and fireplace.

Jan. 22—In spite of the destruction throughout the Los Angeles area, we went ahead with a signing at Don Cannon's Aladdin Books.

Jan. 25—I got back to writing *Quake*—with quite a lot of fresh perspective under my belt.

Feb. 7—I was interviewed by John Fredrickson via telephone at 7:30 a.m. for a radio show out of Penn State University.

March 3-6—We drove to Phoenix, AZ for the World Horror Convention. I spoke on a couple of panels, autographed books and met authors and fans. I finally got to meet Bob Morrish, one of the three guys who had published *A Good, Secret Place* and who would also be a publisher of this book.

March 20—*EARTHQUAKE!* Though we'd had a lot of aftershocks from the Jan. 17 quake, this was a big one. It was magnitude 5.3, hit on a Sunday afternoon when we are all home, and lasted 30 seconds. Ann, Kelly and I stood around holding television sets and the china cabinet.

March 24—I finished writing *Quake*.

March 24 - April 4—We took a driving trip to Arizona, returning to Tombstone, then spent a few days in Bullhead City with the De Larattas.

April 5—I started a new novel, working title *Glory Bus*. (Never finished.)

May 7-8, 15-16—I wrote the short story, "The Maiden," which would be published in *Dark Love*, edited by Nancy Collins and Edward Kramer.

May 8—"We took a Sunday morning drive to explore downtown Los Angeles and east L.A., and saw a dead body on the pavement of a car lot near the Hollenbeck police

station. It was partly covered with a blanket and surrounded by several cops.

May 25—I started making notes for my novel, *Island*.

May 27-30—ABA in Anaheim. We had dinner with Bob Tanner, went to a breakfast for a talk by Pat Conroy, and had lunch with Jane Morpath of Headline. Had a ten second chat with Stephen King, a man in a hurry.

June 2-6—We drove to Las Vegas for the Horror Writers of America weekend. I had been nominated for a Bram Stoker award in the short story collection category for *A Good, Secret Place*.

June 29—I had lunch at the Bel Air Hotel with my publisher, Tim Hely Hutchinson.

July 12-13—I worked on notes for *Down Cellar*, the third Beast House book. I sent a partial and notes to Bob Tanner, then started making extensive notes on *The Cellar* and *Beast House* to ready myself for writing the sequel.

July 22-26, Aug. 15-16—I wrote the short story, "Herman," which would be published in *Cemetery Dance*.

July 28 - Aug. 15—We flew to Memphis, TN, stayed a few nights, then took the Mississippi Queen down the river to New Orleans, where we spent a week. Among other things, we visited Graceland in Memphis and William Faulkner's home in Oxford.

Sept. 1-8—We spent a week in New York City. There, we had a meeting with Thomas Dunne of St. Martin's Press in his office at the Flatiron Building.

Sept. 14—I started writing my novel, *Island*.

Sept. 24—I went to Dangerous Visions bookstore for a signing of the Zebra paperbacks of *Midnight's Lair*, etc.

Sept. 27—A memorial service for Robert Bloch took place in Westwood, and I attended.

Dec. 26 - Jan.1—We went on a trip with De Larattas to Death Valley, Tonopah and Ely, Nevada. At an Ely bookstore, we were told that Stephen King had recently come through on his motorcycle. Apparently, he was in the area doing research for *Desperation*.

1995

Jan. 23—I finished writing *Island*. And the trial started for O.J. Simpson in connection with the murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman. Though continuing to get my writing done during the months of the trial, I watched nearly all of the trial on live TV.

Jan.' 27—I started working on my new novel, *Body Rides*.

March 6—Kelly had a day off from school, so we all went downtown to the courthouse to observe the O.J. action. The crowd was moved down the block because of a bomb scare.

March 16—I spoke about being an author at Kelly's high school for career day. There, I was teamed up with a local TV personality who was a lunatic, yelled at the kids (using the F word) and threw a couple of them out of class. Later, some of Kelly's friends wondered which of us was her father.

April 8-14—We took a driving trip to Lee Vining, visited Mono Lake, and spent most of the week in Reno, NV.

April 29—While leaving the Burbank Book Fair, we ran into Del Howison. He told us about his new store, Dark Delicacies, so we drove over for a look at it. Visited with Del's partner and future wife, Sue.

May 3—Ed Gorman interviewed me again for *Mystery Scene*.

May 6—At 11:30 p.m., Ann took Bogart into our enclosed back yard. She heard noises behind our garage, hurried back to the house, and told me about it. So I went to the rear of the garage and encountered a man trying to break in. I confronted him with my Colt .45. He flung up his hands, yelling "It's cool, man! Hey, it's cool! Don't shoot!" So I didn't shoot, and allowed him to run away. Though we called 911, the police didn't show up that night.

May 7—I called the police again. An officer came over and we gave him a statement about the incident.

June 3—We flew to San Francisco for a signing of *Quake* at a Brentano's bookstore. A couple of the guys who worked there were major fans of my work. And I found out that their store hadn't been scheduled to receive even a single copy of the St. Martin's hardback of *Quake*. This let me know just where I stood with my U.S. publisher. I made up my mind to waste no more of my novels on any publisher that isn't willing to put a little effort into getting behind me.

June 10—I had a book signing at Del and Sue's store, Dark Delicacies.

June 17—We went to the Mysterious Galaxy bookstore in San Diego, where Dennis Etchison and I talked to the customers, answered questions, and autographed books.

June 24—We had a book signing at a Waldenbooks at Eagle Rock Plaza.

July 14—We arrived in Ann's hometown of Clayton, New York, and were awakened in the night by a storm called a "micro-burst." It felt like a bombardment, and caused great

destruction throughout the area, uprooting trees, knocking out the power, ripping roofs off buildings, destroying the Lafargeville drag racing track, and killing several people.

July 14 - Aug.4—After the storm, we stayed in Clayton for a while, then took a driving trip. In Elmira, we visited a Mark Twain museum and his grave and saw a terrific stage play, *Mark Twain: The Musical*. Then we drove to Harrisburg, PA, visited the Gettysburg battlefield, then spent a while in Scranton.

Sept. 11—The concrete was poured for the foundation of our new garage. The garage, when done, would be two stories high. The top floor would be my office. We'd wanted such an addition for years. It was made possible by Tom Corey, a fan who'd come to many of my signings and became a close friend. A contractor, Tom managed to put the whole project together and get it done.

Sept. 27—I finished writing *Body Rides* and mailed it to Bob Tanner.

Oct. 3—All common sense to the contrary, O.J. Simpson was found not guilty by a jury of his admirers. This undoubtedly saved Los Angeles from another riot, but outraged some of us.

Oct. 5-16—I wrote the short story, "First Date," for Poppy Brite's anthology, *Razor Kiss*.

Oct. 17—I started work on a new novel, *Bite*.

Dec. 3-9—I revised my old novel, *Fiends* (originally written in 1974 and never published) cutting out large portions and turning it into a novella. It became the title story for *Fiends*, my first U.K. short fiction collection.

Dec. 26-31—We took a driving trip to Yuma, Arizona with the De Larattas. Visited the old Yuma prison and spent a day in the Mexican town of Algodones.

1996

Jan. 5—I mailed my short story collection, *Fiends*, to Bob Tanner, then resumed working on *Bite*.

Feb. 17-18—We drove to Ridgecrest, Trona and Death Valley so that I could get the geographical details straight for the driving trip in *Bite*.

March 11—I had lunch with publisher Lyle Stuart—who is famous for publishing such non-fiction titles as *The Anarchist's Cookbook*. He told me of his plans to publish *all* my books with loads of publicity, three books per year, under a special Laymon imprint. Sounded great, but it never happened.

March 29—The building inspector showed up and gave final approval of the finished

garage/office.

March 30—Peter Infantino and John Scoleri came over and we went out to dinner at the Warehouse in Marina Del Key.

April 5-12—We took a driving trip to Salinas, San Francisco, and Moro Bay. In San Francisco, we went on the tour of Alcatraz Island and I got the idea for having "self-guided audio tours" with cassette players—which I would soon use in writing *The Midnight Tour*.

May 1—I finished writing *Bite*.

May 6—I started -working again on *The Cellar III*.

June 9—I changed course on my ideas for the next *Cellar* book, and started making notes for a version called, *The Midnight Tour*.

June 22 - July 2—We took a driving trip to Modesto, Placerville, Reno and Lone Pine.

July 6—I returned to work on *The Midnight Tour*.

Aug. 7-24—We flew to New York City, took a train to Boston, drove around Cape Cod and took a train from Boston to Salem—of witch trial fame.

Sept. 4—Learning that Book Club Associates planned to print my next novel as part of a "double-book" with *Bite*, I quit writing *The Midnight Tour* about 180 pages into the manuscript. I started a new novel, *After Midnight*, which I saw as a "companion piece" to *Bite*.

Nov. 18—Going out for my morning walk, I slipped on our recently painted front stoop, fell down the stairs and broke my right arm in two places. Ann drove me to the emergency room at Brot-man Medical Center. Back home a couple of hours later, I returned to writing *After Midnight*. I'd gotten up to page 405. I managed to write two more pages that day—typing with my left hand.

Dec. 20—I received my new contract from Headline for four more novels. The new contract gave me about two extra months between each novel.

Dec. 21-22—We took my parents to Catalina Island, and storms nearly prevented us from returning the next day.

1997

Jan. 2 — I finished writing *After Midnight*.

Jan 15-Feb. 5 — With the extra time on my hands because of the new contract, I wrote a screenplay of *After Midnight*.

Jan. 19 — Ann and I had dinner at the Bel Air Hotel with Tim Hely Hutchinson and Amanda Ridout of Headline.

Feb. 18 — I finally got back to my third book of the "Beast House" novels — *The Midnight Tour*.

March 1,3,7,12,16 — At the request of Bob Tanner, I wrote a "zombie" story for an anthology being edited by Peter Haining. I experimented with a new writing method of skipping about from one project to another. A day or two here, a day or two there. . .

March 2,4,8,9 — I worked on the opening of a new novel, working title *Madland*, loosely based on an idea I'd long ago proposed to John Silbersack at Onyx. (He accepted the proposal, but didn't give us an acceptable offer so we declined.)

March 15 — I returned to *The Midnight Tour*.

March 22 — Peter Infantino and John Scoleri came to the house, we all went out to dinner at Islands restaurant in Beverly Hills, and discussed developing *this* book about me. After dinner, we drove around to show John and Peter some places that inspired parts of *Body Rides*. Then we went nuts and drove around for a couple of hours, exploring famous murder sites.

March 23-29 — We drove to Las Vegas, "where we experienced some terrible crowd scenes and I got the inclination to write a novel set in Las Vegas.

April 2 — I started work on my "Afterward" for the special limited edition of *The Cellar* published by Richard Chizmar and CD Publications.

April 15 — I had my first meeting with film maker Jerry Lentz. We discussed forming a limited partnership in order to produce films based on my books.

April 25 — I started working on material for *this* book, dividing my time between this project and *Midnight Tour*.

June 20 — We attended Kelly's graduation from Hamilton High School.

July 23 - August 10 — We spent about a week in Philadelphia, then in Baltimore. At much peril to ourselves, we visited former dwellings of Edgar Allan Poe in both cities. In Baltimore, we visited Poe's grave and hung around Fell's Point to watch the taping of *Homicide*, *Life on the Streets*, the best drama show on television.

Aug. 15-16 — Kelly and I attended Dracula '97, a vampire convention at the Westin

Hotel near L.A.X. I signed books, sat on panels, and had a memorable "dialogue" with Tim Powers. Afterwards, we had drinks with Tim and Serena, Nancy Holder, and Katherine Ramsland.

Aug. 23 — We took Kelly to college and managed to survive hauling her stuff to her third-floor dorm room.

Sept. 6 — Ann and I drove to Parkfield, the "earthquake center" of California, to celebrate my mother's birthday. On the way home, we dropped in on Dark Delicacies to sign a few books, visit with Del and Sue, and order our Christmas cards.

Sept. 14 — I finished most of *this* book, which I plan to call *A Writer's Tale*, and returned to work on *The Midnight Tour*.

Sept. 21 — I had a private chat room discussion on the Internet with John and Peter in which we discussed details of *A Writer's Tale*.

Oct. 16-18 — We went to Tehachapi, visited the cowboy museum, then attended an air show at Edwards Air Force base with my brother Bob.

Oct. 28-29 — I read and corrected the proofs for the Cemetery Dance edition of *The Cellar*.

Nov. 14 — I received and began autographing the signature pages for *The Cellar*.

Dec. 6—I finished all except the wind-up section of *The Midnight Tour*.

Dec. 7—In a private chat room on the internet, John, Peter, Bob and I made some decisions regarding the contents, format, special features, number of copies to be published, prices, contract, etc. for *A Writer's Tale*.

My First Published Stuff

THESE THREE PIECES, TWO POEMS AND A WORK OF PROSE FICTION, were published in *Helicon*, the literary magazine of Glenbrook High School in 1961, when I was in the 9th grade. Somehow, I "won a five dollar prize for one of them.

These are printed here exactly as they were published, in spite of my strong urges to revise them.

And I'm printing all three pieces, in spite of my almost overpowering urge to omit the Sousaphone poem.

Enjoy.

Or not.

He Never Lost His Head

Tim Harvey'd been a sad boy;
He'd run away to sea.
Now's commander of a man-o-war,
Wounded and on his knee.
The hull "was blown to pieces
And most his crew was dead,
But ol' Tim Harvey,
Well, he never lost his head.
He upped and fired the cannon
And he sank the enemy.
He hopped into a dinghy
And he made far out to sea.
His food was almost not
And the sun was bloody hot.
And though his body
Was filled with lead,
Ol' Tim Harvey,
Well, he never lost his head.
For days he made his way
Through tossed-up water and nightblack sky,
Water smooth as glass
And a sun that burned him fast,
Till finally he spied a tropical isle
And swam sharky waters for about a mile.
He reached the beach
Torn, half-dead,
But Ol' Tim Harvey,
Well, he never lost his head.
Now big, fierce natives
With spears and gleaming knives,
Up and come a' runnin',
To where Tim Harvey lies.
They danced their wild dances

As they poked him with their lances.
Then they speared him nice and neat
Until his heart had ceased to beat.
And then...
Tim Harvey,
Well, he lost his bloomin' head.

Ode to a Wayfaring Sousaphone
(Tune of "Deep in the Heart of Texas")

Your big round lips,
Like paper clips,
Boom, boom, boom, boom,
They taste like iron filings.
Your brassy skin,
It feels like tin,
Boom, boom, boom, boom,
It's filthy as a piston.
Your lousy breath
Will be my death,
Boom, boom, boom, boom,
Why don't you brush your mouthpiece?
Your voice is loud,
It stuns a crowd.
Boom, boom, boom, boom,
It's low and sick and fuzzy.
You're big and broad.
Oh yes, oh Lawd,
Boom, boom, boom, boom,
Ye gad! You sure are homely.

365 Days A Year

A TALL, RED-FACED BOY FINALLY REACHED HIS HOUSE AFTER A MILE'S walk from the high school. He opened the back door into the kitchen. His mother and Mrs. MacHony sat at the table sipping coffee.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. MacHony. Hi Mom."

"Hello Sidney," came from both.

"Think I'd better do my homework. Got an awful lot tonight."

Sidney carried his three books upstairs to his room. He turned on the light, for the sky 'was already becoming gray at five o'clock.

The industrious student threw his geometry book onto his desk, first. He always did the homework that he hated most, first. After scanning three of the assigned problems, he decided to do one. He knew that he would receive total credit for working only one of the fifteen problems assigned. Problem finished, though undoubtedly wrong, he slammed the book shut and threw it aside.

History. Nothing but a long reading assignment. He could get away with skipping it.

English. Read twenty pages in the reading book. He cleared a pile of Miscellaneous Paraphernalia from his bed, then sprawled out on the bed, on his stomach. Boring story. Every story in the book seemed boring.

The conversation in the kitchen suddenly toned down to whispers. Sidney's eyes scanned the pages, but his ears closely followed the conversation. Secret tones were a sign that the two gossipers were saying something that they did not want a third person to hear.

"You know, you're absolutely right. They are pampered too much." The unwanted third person recognized his mother's whisper.

"Yeah, they been sheltered, you know? When my husband was just in grammar school he got up at five to deliver papers!"

"John says the same thing. He says that these teenagers don't know what 'work' is. Actually, I believe that they don't understand what a cruel world they live in. Some day they'll come to a rude awakening. It's extremely sad; everything is just handed to them."

"That's the business, gal."

"My Sidney complains about shoveling an inch of snow. He makes excuses right and left. Really! After all the things we do for him with no payment at all! He gets \$2.00 a week for doing absolutely nothing."

"Right. My Harold, just the same. Never does a thing first time I ask him. I usually end up threatening an allowance cut. That hits him where it hurts—the wallet. Ungrateful! He won't go out and get a job, either, and he's sixteen. Simply disastrous! I really quite think he's afraid of the Cruel World. Afraid he can't get hired or might have to get a job where he has to work. I mean, this problem is reaching disaster stages. Oh! Hello, Sidney."

"Yeah. I think I'll walk the dog," he told his mother.

"You haven't done that in years!"

"It's sort of a nice day today. Anyway, I figured Rex would get a kick out of it."

"Well, don't walk too close to Jefferson. We don't want Rex run over, do we?"

"No, Mom." Sidney clipped the chain onto an iron ring on the dog's collar, then opened the door.

The dog burst out of the house, pulling Sidney close behind. They ran together down the dark, deserted street. "Slow down, boy." Sidney slowed his own pace, but the dog pulled on. "Come on, would you slow down!" Finally, half running, the boy reached the highway, Jefferson. He walked the dog up the sidewalk, which was blue in the dim street light, and slippery, until he came to the crossroad sign.

"Time to go home, fellow. Let's go. Come on!" The strong boy did not want to pull at the leash for fear of hurting the dog's neck, but the gnawing wind convinced him that he had better pull. He could not let the dog run around smelling every what not in sight. "Come on." He jerked the leash. Rex planted his paws firmly in the snow-spotted mud.

"Doggone. Let's go."

"Aw, I'm sorry, old fellow. That was pretty mean. You can stay out here as long as you want. It's a lousy business, having a chain on you. You're a real good guy." Sidney bent

over and patted the terrier.

This seemed the cue for the dog to start being cooperative. It led Sidney down Jefferson and up the lonely side-street to their home. Sidney pushed open the heavy, brown door to the kitchen.

"*And* then she had the nerve, the nerve, mind you, to say I shouldn't of laid down the king!"

"She sounds quite nasty."

"That's the gospel. Just doesn't have any regard for other people's feelings."

Sidney replaced the leash on its hook in the utility closet and hung up his jacket. He smiled at Mrs. MacHony as he squeezed between her chair and the counter. Past the woman, he went up the stairs to his room. He switched on the light over his desk, then set the portable tape recorder he had been given for Christmas, on the desk. He turned it to "play."

"...that melancholy burden bore

Of never—nevermore.

But the Raven still beguiling

All my fancy into smiling..." and Sidney turned off the tape recorder.

He laid his head on his hands. On the ink blotter covering his desktop he noticed an epitaph he had copied from *Bartlett's*. He read the scratchy print out loud.

"It is so soon that I am done for;
I wonder what I was begun for."

Sidney stood slowly, pushing away his chair. He walked to his closet. He opened the door and pulled out a bulky leather case. He unzipped the case. He pulled a .22 caliber rifle from it, and walked with the rifle back across the room to the window above his desk. Then, Sidney aimed the rifle and clicked the trigger at automobile headlights pushing bleakly through the darkness of far-off Jefferson.

the end

Postscript

When I first wrote "365 Days a Year" and submitted it, there was a different ending. Either Sidney shot himself (committing suicide), or he actually fired his rifle out the window at cars passing on the road (committing mass murder). It was one or the other.

Whichever ending I used, I was told by my English teacher that I had to change it.

A sign of things to come.

Also, most of the story (though being a blatant imitation of J.D. Salinger) is extremely autobiographical. My parents were not happy about it.

My mother, in particular, had a problem with the story. She apparently suspected that she might be the inspiration for the mother in the story.

Also, Sidney's strange behavior made my English teacher and parents fear that I might have some sort of psychological problems. There was speculation that maybe I needed a shrink, but I was never actually sent to one.

Oh well.

You can't please everyone...

More “Early Poems”

Running Away (1965)

A city-boy sits against a corn shock
Underneath the street lamp of the moon
Knowing that alone on an Autumn evening
Is no better
Maybe worse
In a -wigwam cornfield
Than in muggy-aired Chicago
Where at least you can see her
Passing by, saying hi
Once a day.
Maybe.
If you're lucky.

Gull (1965)

A sea gull slipping across the moon
In the Sierras
Shrieks a lonesome hunger
For a far-off sea-place.

Night on a Lake (1965)

I would have it night on a lake
our pale painted boat
riding silence on the water

under us smooth with the wind
all warm from the breath
of sleeping reeds near the shore.

There I would stand, free myself,
and feel the wind lick
where I want

you, now, stand slowly
not to flow over
into the lake too soon.

You, now, are white
where I am white,
hidden where I
out of hiding
will find you.

Now slip softly
into the wet warmth
warmer than the wind
with hands closer
than the wind
we rise
tight
out of the lake
and the wind
and the night.

Kite (1965)

Looking up I dig a stranded kite
Caught on a telephone wire
Shredded by the wind Its soul-string
 whipping behind in the wind
And the pale morning moon
Hanging stupid above it.
 I pass by
 Hoping another guy

Will come along
And dig it "with love
like me.

Patience (1967)

Some of us are
Waiting to walk
Along a beach at dusk
And stumble
Not on a sea weed,
Sea bone, driftwood,
But on
Skulls
Of
Some
Of us
Are
Waiting (patiently)
For things to get
Rather sticky red
With us
Before things get
Too dry to drink.

Assassin's Meditation (1967)

Today I could have lost
My lotus down the chest
Of president or king,
Died petal after petal
Down the warehouse wall
Into a siren asphalt fire.

I could have knelt
At Tower Hill
To die with More
Or grown black wings
With Latimer.

Today I could have slanted
My thighs through the sky
Grey doom of death's belly,
Slid down a cliff of shadow
Into the slated, shouting sea...

Taken my blood
By the bone of its hand
And led it, trembling,
Into the alter of tomb.

An Early Story

Note: "Beast" was published in Jason, the literary magazine of Willamette University, and won second place in the Willamette writing contest. The year was 1966. The kid was a sophomore. The tale is a sign of things to come.

Beast

"I'LL NOT ALLOW ANY SUCH BEAST IN THIS HOUSE! RICHY CAN RANT AND rave till Doomsday, but I'll not allow a dog in this house. Scratching up the furniture, tearing the curtains..."

"It's cats that tear curtains," corrected the father.

"Dogs too. And they smell. *And they* bite. They carry disease."

"So do children."

"But I'm not allergic to children! Besides, why should he want a dog anyway? He's got everything else a boy could ever want. We don't want to spoil him."

"He doesn't have many friends," his father said.

Rich watched the wind float a yellow leaf downward onto the lawn. I'll rake them all up Saturday, he thought. For Dad. A sad ache of tenderness swept through him. He rolled off the bed and walked to his desk, beside which sat a wooden box. He had made the box. One board of the side facing him was too long, its rough edge steeping above the top. The boards of the other side had come out even. Rich felt proud of the box. Especially of the way the screws went in so straight to hold the hinges on. The latch would also have met success except for a shortage of screws that left one side of the holes empty. Light brown wood showed where the slotted screw head should have been. The rest of the box was white.

A padlock sealed it. Rich reached inside his shirt for the key but his mother's voice came *again*. "There's Jimmy and Allen. He spends a lot of time with them. He seems to like

them well enough."

"I hope not!"

"Charles!"

"Hell, honey, those kids are creeps. Just like their parents."

"Allen has a dog."

"Hallelujah!" he sang.

"Don't act like a child."

"My only son associates with creeps so he can pet a dog! And I'm not supposed to act like a child?"

"Don't yell! Rich'll hear you."

Rich chuckled. He had left the white box and returned to his bed.

"He's undoubtedly heard everything we've said since I came in the door. Have a nice day, Rich?"

"Awright," he called.

"That's good." To his wife, "See?"

"Richy, time to get washed up for dinner."

"Awright."

He sat down at the table with its three plates white-gleaming empty, one glass of milk, and two thin-stemmed frosted glasses 3/4 filled with Chablis. It looked to Rich like weak apple cider, but he knew that it wasn't. He had tasted it once in secret and had gotten sick. His mother brought spaghetti to the table. He stuffed a chunk of French bread into his mouth.

"Rich," said his father, "how many times do I have to tell you not to eat before grace is said?" His mother sat down. "Will you say grace now?"

"God is great, God is good, let us thank him for this food. Amen."

"You should have combed your hair before dinner," his mother said.

"I guess," he said.

"What have you done today," his father changed the subject.

"Nothing."

"He's been pouting. That's what he's been doing. Pouting about not having a dog."

"Why do you want a dog?"

"I don't know, I just do."

Rich pulled on his jacket and ran outside. The air -was peaceful with the smell of burning leaves. That was his favorite thing about autumn. Better than bright leaves against the blue sky, better than the first football games, better than the strange excitement of starting school. The smoke odor was his favorite thing about autumn.

He ambled up the street with his hands stuffed in his bluejean pockets. Gary Cooper. He wished there "was a straw around to suck on. Only asphalt and grass and elm and red brick. Grass wouldn't do. He would say "Yup" instead. The ambling and the "Yup" would do it. He ambled up to the front door of Allen's house.

Rich touched the doorbell. It had a hair-trigger. Only chimes and a high-pitched howl answered the touch, no footsteps or voice. He touched the button again. Again the chimes and howl, but this time came a voice. From the backyard. So Rich cut across the front lawn and down the side of the house to the back.

"Hi Rich!" yelled Allen. "Come here."

"Yeah, come here," Jimmy echoed.

Both boys -were crouched above a special patch of grass. Rich joined them. "Howdy! What's goin' on?"

"A mouse," answered Allen.

Rich knelt beside the other two boys. "Yeah," he said with *amazement*. It was a live hump of greyness half-hidden in the grass.

"It's shaking."

"Cold."

"Winter'll be here pretty soon."

"And nighttime," Rich added. He hesitated to say anything.

He knew almost nothing about mice. Allen probably knew a lot about mice. Allen knew a lot about most things. His father used to be a professor of history.

"I think we oughta warm it up," stated Allen.

"How?"

"Bring it along over to the patio."

Jimmy lifted the quivering mouse out of the grass.

Rich stroked its back with his forefinger. "It sure *is* cold," he said. "That shivering under the fur is awful."

"You telling me?" Jimmy stared, vaguely repulsed, at the furry animal that stood passive and shivering in his hand.

"Come on," cried Allen. "Ya gonna bring it over?"

Jimmy followed orders. Within the charcoal broiler, the mouse continued to crouch, motionless except for the quiver.

Rich wished that it would move. He had never seen a mouse from so close and wanted to see it run.

"Go in the garage and get the gas," Allen commanded Jimmy.

"You. I don't know where it is."

"It's on the lowest shelf and it's in a red can."

"You get it."

"If you get the gas, I'll light the match."

Jimmy went for the gas.

Rich stared at the mouse. "You know," he drawled, "I don't think we oughta do it."

"It's cold, ain't it?" Allen laughed. The parted lips were very red and Rich had once almost asked if it was lipstick. But he hadn't.

"I don't know," Rich muttered, forgetting his Gary Cooper drawl.

"Are ya yellow?"

"Nah."

Jimmy brought the red gasoline can. He unscrewed the larger of the two lids and reversed it so that the flexible spout pointed upward. "You wanna pour?"

"Nah, you can."

Jimmy handed it to Allen and stepped back. Allen poured.

The gas looked like strong cider. Its fumes killed the autumn odour. And the mouse began to run, feet ticking against the metal floor.

Allen stood above the arena with a cardboard match in his hand, its red tip poised against the striking surface of the pack. "I can't do it!" he cried. "I can't!" Then his red lips thinned. He struck the match and dropped it into the broiler. The gas burst aflame with a quick, hollow wind sound. The ticking speeded as the mouse scampered in circles squeaking. It didn't squeak loudly. The squeak "was as soft and steady as the ticking of its feet against the flaming metal. The fire sound almost smothered both. Then both stopped. The mouse lay on its side.

Rich expected Allen to remark about the effectiveness of the warming process, for the grey animal no longer shivered. But Allen said nothing. The trio stood in a circle around the charcoal burner and stared at the corpse.

Then Jimmy said, "It doesn't even look burnt."

"Look how its fur is all stuck together," Allen said. "Like it's been in a river."

"Yeah, it just looks wet," Rich said.

"But it *is* dead."

"Must've been the smell of gas. Maybe it got exfixiated."

"Funny it isn't burnt."

"Yeah."

Allen lifted it with two sticks and carried it to the edge of his lot and dropped it in the alley. "I gotta go in now."

"Me too," Jimmy said.

Rich walked home as fast as he could.

Leaves whispered through the open window. He sat up in bed and leaned against the sill to look out. The leaves did not seem to move. Then a tiny patch of blackness floated downward. He saw it against the lighter darkness of the street and it disappeared when the street no longer lay behind it.

Rich rose slowly, careful not to let the squeaking bed springs make too much noise. Then he tiptoed around the bed to the box. It looked white, though hidden in the shadow of Rich's bed. He knelt beside it, opened his pajama shirt and touched the key. It was cool against his chest. He bent low over the box so that the key would reach the padlock without being removed from around his neck. He fitted it into the slot. He pushed it inward slowly, so that the sound would come as individual clicks, not as a quick loud ratchet. With a hollow clack, the lock fell open. Rich removed the lock and opened the box and took something out and tiptoed to the window. There, in the dim moonlight, he stared at the picture. Darkness shadowed most of the detail. But Rich could see the man because of his "white robe. He could also see white-coated sheep huddled around the man. He could not see the single sheep that the man held close because it was white like the robe.

He wondered about the softness of the wool and about the warmth beneath the "wool. A sheep is better than a dog, he thought.

The breeze became a wind, a cold wind that knocked leaves out of the nearby treetops and sent them spinning sideways so that they flew a long distance before landing. They slipped from the trees in fleets. Few would be left by morning. Maybe it'll snow, Rich thought. Then his face contorted. Maybe it'll snow.

He tiptoed toward his closet.

"Time to rise and shine," called Rich's father. The boy blinked open his eyes. He stared at the white ceiling, not wanting to move because of the peace. Then he breathed in deeply to awaken his chest. Sitting up, he turned his head toward the closed window. Cloudy. Probably cold too. But there was no snow and a few leaves still hung from the high elm limbs.

Rich swung his legs over the side of the bed and stood. He pulled on his plaid robe. Bending low so that his head felt sleepy again, he picked up a silver chain from the rug beside the locked box and slipped it over his hair.

With one step, he was standing over the waste basket peering in. One plastic corner showed. A wadded sheet of paper quickly covered it. Now nobody would know. He went

to breakfast.

"Good morning, Richy," his mother said.

"Mornin'."

"What are you going to do today?" his father asked. "That is, after you finish sweeping the garage?"

"Rake leaves?"

"What do you have up your sleeve now?" the mother inquired.

"Nothin'."

"We've had our final say about the dog," she warned.

"Martha! Let's not start that again. It's very nice, Rich, that you want to rake the leaves. That'll be a big help."

Rich drank his orange juice. When he had finished breakfast, he hurried to his bedroom, shut the door and went to the box. The key pushed in, the lock fell open, and he tossed the two together onto his bed. His white hands threw open the door of the box.

"Time to rise an' shine," he whispered. The stiff mouse didn't stir. Rich lifted it from the box and tickled its belly with his forefinger.

The Pink Tea and Me

WITH THE SALE OF MY FIRST STORY IN 1970, I BECAME A "PRO" AND therefore eligible to join the Mystery Writers of America. I found the MWA's address in *The Writer's Market*, wrote a letter, paid my dues, and joined.

In those days, the Los Angeles chapter held a meeting in the Sportsman's Lodge on the last Friday of every month. We all got together, listened to a guest speaker, and spent a lot of time standing around afterward, drinking and chatting.

Robert Bloch was at the first meeting I attended. I worked up enough nerve to approach him, introduce myself, and tell him what a huge influence he'd been on me. (To which he responded with a quip.)

I really didn't know anybody there, so I hung out with an elderly fellow named Bill Clark—who seemed to be a bibliographer. Bill introduced me around to several of the members.

One of them, Warner Law (an Edgar award -winning short story -writer) took me under his wing and introduced me to Clayton Matthews (who would later become rich and famous collaborating with his wife, Patricia, in writing numerous historical romances). It so happened that Matt (Clayton) would be hosting the next meeting of their writers' group, called the Pink Tea. Encouraged by Warner, he invited me to attend it.

At the time, I had no idea what an honor it was to be invited. The Pink Tea -was a small, informal group of real pros, including the people who had started the Los Angeles chapter of MWA and who were its early leaders. Such men as Clayton Matthews, Warner Law, Arthur Moore and Jack Matcha formed the heart of the chapter in those days and for several years to come.

The Pink Tea was a private group, and its existence -was something of a secret. There was only one way to attend a meeting: you had to be invited by the person who would be hosting it. After the first meeting, you didn't necessarily get invited to another. Here is an example of the procedure at work.

A rather annoying, aggressive, aspiring writer once pressured me into inviting him to a

Pink Tea when it was to be held at my house. I caved in, and said, "Sure, come on over!" At the end of the meeting to which I'd invited him, he approached the guy who *-would* be hosting the next one. "Say," he said, "will it be all right if I come to your . . . ?" "No," the writer told him. A bit cruel, maybe, but effective. For many years, the tight control over membership kept the group from disintegrating into a bunch of "hanger-onners" and "ne'er-do-wells."

I was a lucky one. After being invited by Matt, the others kept asking me to subsequent meetings until I was considered a permanent member.

The Pink Tea had been in existence for some time before I showed up. I've heard more than one story about how the group got its name. Apparently, it was first suggested by Warner Law, Arthur Moore, Clayton Matthews or Jach Matcha. (I recall that they each seemed to take credit for it, at one time or another—and argue about the origin.) "Pink Tea" was intended as a wry, tongue-in-cheek reference to the olden days when little old ladies would get together to trade gossip and sip tea.

None of us sipped tea.

We were mostly a pack of hard drinkers and heavy smokers. (My smoke of choice was the pipe, but there were plenty of cigarettes and cigars.)

Twice each month (every other Friday, except when MWA meetings got in the way), we would meet at the house or apartment of a member and have a party/workshop. We alternated locations, each of us taking his turn. (*Almost* each of us. Some people rarely or never hosted.)

The meeting places were scattered all over the Los Angeles area— members living in such areas as West Los Angeles, Brentwood, Glendale and Pasadena, Marina del Ray, Echo Park, Hollywood, Northridge, Sherman Oaks, Encino, etc. To reach a meeting, lengthy pilgrimages were often involved—fighting through heavy traffic for about an hour.

Because of the distances and uncertainties about traffic conditions, some people would arrive at the meetings very early, others quite late. The meetings were supposed to begin at 8 p.m.

Upon arrival, most of us would have our first cocktail. Then we would sip and smoke and wait, talking mostly about writing.

We never knew how many people might show up. The Pink Tea had a very fluid membership. There were stolid regulars who were serious writers, a few of their non-writer friends, and occasional visitors (maybe a boyfriend or girlfriend or a writer who wasn't a regular member). Some of us rarely missed a meeting. Some rarely showed up. I've been to meetings when there were only two or three people present, and others where

there were probably more than twenty. Usually, however, twelve to fifteen people would put in an appearance.

We all lived in small houses or apartments and hardly had room to seat everyone. By the time the whole crew had shown up, people "would often be jammed together on the couch, sitting on folding chairs, sitting on the floor.

On one memorable occasion at the Matthews' house, Dan Marlowe "was sitting on a "director's chair" that fell *apart*, throwing him backward to the floor. He was pretty old at the time, but that didn't stop us all from laughing our heads off. He wasn't hurt, and we were mostly a tad drunk. (Most of us "were *always* mostly a tad drunk—or more so.)

Reading time, though scheduled for 8:00 p.m., -would actually occur much later than that (and sometimes not at all). When it seemed that most of us had arrived, someone would announce that it was time to start reading. This was usually Leo Whitaker, a very proper chap with leftward political leanings and a penchant for orderliness.

After the announcement, we would have to abandon our "shop talk" and hurry off to get refills for our drinks.

Finally, the meeting would come to order. We would start by taking a rough count of how many people wished to read.

In the opinion of most of us, the fewer the better.

Some members never brought material to read. Others would bring things occasionally. A few of us never showed up *without* a brand new piece to run through the gauntlet. I nearly always brought a fresh story or chapter to the meetings. But I didn't always ask to read it. I would see how many other people were reading, how long it was taking...I didn't want to be responsible for dragging things out.

Generally, four or five people might express a desire to offer their material up for sacrifice. In keeping with the informality of the Pink Tea, you could read just about anything to the group.

If you dared.

Mostly, people would choose to read a short story or a chapter (or two) from a novel in progress. On rare occasions, someone might read poetry or a play. Jack Matcha sometimes handed out scripts, and different members took roles in his plays.

I believe there was a general caution to keep your material no longer than about twenty pages. But the rule was sometimes ignored. Time and again, we would be bludgeoned into agony and despair by a seemingly endless story or multiple chapters droning on forever.

Oddly enough, these adventures in monotony were very rarely interrupted. The group could be harsh, but it could also be compassionate and polite.

Some of us would read our own stuff to the group. (I always did.) Others would ask someone else to read it. Women frequently got drafted into this job. I recall Carol Law, Patricia Matthews and Marilyn Granbeck often reading not only their own material, but that of various guys who preferred to sit back and listen.

While each piece was being read aloud, we would sit there sipping our drinks and smoking and listening and trying to concentrate. We were politely silent except for an occasional wisecrack—or laughter if the material happened to be funny.

On one occasion, the whole group (or at least all the guys) went nuts, laughing hysterically, many of us in tears. Dan Marlowe was reading a revenge story that he'd written for a biker magazine. To get back at a guy who had wronged him, this kid put horse laxative into a fellow's drink. There sat Dan, this soft-spoken, gentle, elder statesman of crime literature, looking a bit like Larry "Bud" Melman, reading to us about poop exploding into the fellow's pants, describing the stench of it, the texture, the agony of the man as he raced around the tavern, his pants around his ankles, slipping and sliding and falling down on the oozing brown lake...and we fell apart.

It was a night I'll never forget.

There was also the night when, as we all sat and listened intently to a reader, the host's little doggie brushed its little butt against the leg of Ann's slacks—leaving a brown smudge. But that's another story...

Usually, things were not so eventful. We sat and listened in relative silence until the reader would come to the end of his story or chapter.

Then the fun 'would start.

Just about everyone would pitch in "with comments, criticism, and advice.

This was very much like several creative writing workshops I'd encountered in high school and in various universities. But it was different in a major way.

This "wasn't the blind leading the blind.

The Pink Tea was a bunch of tough pros. These were guys and gals who, for the most part, had been getting stuff published for a good many years. They had no patience for artsy pretensions.

They were down-to-earth, direct, and sometimes a bit mean.

They didn't talk about the richness of your themes or the depth of your symbolism.

They talked about characters and motives and plot.

They discussed, "Does it work?"

And if not, why not, and how can it be fixed?

And where can you sell it?

If anywhere.

Every so often, the recommended remedy for an ailing story was the fireplace.

The Members

Here are brief portraits of some of the main members.

Clayton Matthews was the godfather of the Pink Tea. A tough, wiry Texan, he was gruff and a little scary. But he always had a sly twinkle in his eyes, and a sweetness in his soul. He once told me I should just burn one of my stories.

He also once told me, in secret, that he thought I had a very large talent. Clayton Matthews was my mentor. From the very start, he took me under his wing and helped me. He not only gave me great advice and encouragement, but he fixed me up with his agent, Jay Garon.

Matt was a no-nonsense pro. He'd sold stories to the mystery magazines, had authored several novels (some under pseudonyms) and would later collaborate with his wife Patty.

Patricia, Matt's wife, was cheerful and warmhearted and always treated me as if I were a sweet, innocent little boy.

She 'wrote some good supernatural and fantasy stories. On the advice of Jay Garon (the agent), she and Matt collaborated on a series of historical romances. They became rich and famous.

Instead of moving to a new house, they bought the house on the hill *below* their home, built a swimming pool in the middle, and a lot of walkways and stairs. They threw some great parties.

Warner Law had been a story editor for television, and sold stories to such magazines as *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Playboy*. He won an Edgar for one of his short stories. He was the intellectual and artistic heart of the group—sophisticated and witty. Always

puffing on cigarettes, adjusting his glasses, giggling, nitpicking and encouraging.

Warner's wife, Carol, was one of the regular readers. She was nearly always drafted to read Gary Brandner's stuff. She sold mystery stories and children's books, and spent a lot of time writing a historical novel about an opera singer. She worked in advertising, and did a great job when I hired her to create an ad for *The Woods Are Dark*. The ad ran in *Fangoria*—before the days when I started to boycott that magazine.

Arthur Moore, who specialized in writing crime fiction and frontier stories and novels, just sort of sat there and gave you the evil eye. He seemed serious, even grim. And he'd nail you with a few rough words. But his advice was always practical and good. And underneath his rather rough exterior, he was a sweet, gentle man with a great sense of humor. One of the things I remember most about Ait is the time I was crouching down, tying a shoe or something, and he ruffled my hair as he walked by. Like a coach, or like a dad.

Arthur's ex-wife, Marilyn Granbeck, was a successful mystery novelist. She wrote under several pseudonyms. She basically seemed pretty friendly in a reserved sort of way. What I remember most about her, however, was a time early in my career (before *The Cellar* sold) that she said to me, "If you're not doing *something* wrong, how come nobody's buying your books?"

I get the feeling she didn't like my stuff too much.

Jack Matcha was a big, husky guy who was more "artsy" than most of the others. He wrote plays and often sported a beret.

He was gruff—like most of them—and like Matt, Warner and Art, he took me under his wing. We traveled together to New York City for my very first Edgar Awards weekend. We roomed together in the Edison hotel and he showed me around town. We ate at Nathan's and the Rainbow Room, and he even took me across town to have a meal with some of his family in one of the other burroughs.

Charles Fritch was the group comedian. He had clever puns about *everything*, "wrote hilarious stories, and was the editor of several Los Angeles magazines, including *Topper* and *Mike Shayne's Mystery Magazine*. He seemed to be a good buddy of Jack's. He often didn't show up, but he was a regular longtime member of the Pink Tea anyway.

Bob Colby, famous for his Fawcett Gold Medal books, was another regular. He always showed up with his wife, Francesca, who was very soft-spoken and nice. Bob was a kick. He would always wink and nudge me with his elbow and say, "Hey, Rich, if we're so famous, how come we're not rich?" Bob and I spent a while collaborating on a book, but it petered out.

Gary Brandner was "the kid" of the Pink Tea before my arrival. He'd only had a few

things published by the time I came along. His most recent work had been *Saturday Night in Milwaukee*, on which he'd collaborated with Clayton Matthews.

Our paths had already crossed in that my first story had appeared in the same issue of *Ellery Queen* as Gary's second story. With the publication of *The Howling*, he became a big-time horror writer. Whenever he hosted a Pink Tea, I knew it would be a very late night. He never wanted anyone to leave. He took departures as personal insults. So it "would often be two o'clock in the morning before I could force myself to leave. At the door, he always said, "Try to be a better person."

Over the years, Gary brought several women to the Pink Teas. They were always very attractive and flamboyant, including Barbara and Martine, two of his "wives I got to know fairly well.

Leo Whitaker had a huge dog that liked to attack us whenever Leo hosted a Pink Tea. He also has a charming wife, Elizabeth, who hails from Scotland. Leo, red-haired and ruddy, struck me as a Dickens character. I always expected his buttons to pop off.

A sweet-tempered socialist, he had stories about his days of campaigning for John Kennedy. We used to argue politics a lot. He once said, "Laymon, your answer to all the world's ills is summary execution." Though Leo succeeded in having some short stories published, he never seemed *obsessed* with writing the way some of us were.

Richard D. Hughes started coming to the Pink Tea, as I recall, because he was a friend of Leo's. Richard was an attorney and judge. Tall and soft-spoken and friendly, he became a regular member who sometimes read some fiction. For quite a while, he was working on a promising historical novel about the early railroading days in California. To the best of my knowledge, he has never had any fiction published. However, he was a good member who made worthwhile comments about the material being read. He would eventually hire me to work in his law offices. I worked for him for four years, and the job helped to get me through a very rough financial period. I'll always be grateful to him for that.

Al Nussbaum was renowned as a short story writer and bank robber. At one time, he "was on the F.B.I.'s "Ten Most "Wanted" list. When captured on the snowy streets of Buffalo, he was armed with a submachine gun and hand grenades. But, gosh, he was a nice guy! He always had a twinkle in his eye, a wisecrack, a joke. He told some of the funniest, raunchiest jokes I've ever heard. He was often the brains behind "practical jokes."

Dan Marlowe was one of the biggest names from the heyday of Fawcett Gold Medal, author of the Earl Drake series (*The Name of the Game is Death* is one of the best hard-boiled crime novels I've ever read), and winner of the Edgar Allan Poe Award of the Mystery Writers of America. He started showing up at the Pink Teas in the company of Al Nussbaum, and became a regular member (while Al only showed up once in a while). Even though Dan suffered from amnesia, he wrote better stories than any of us. And you always got the feeling, with Dan, that he was really listening to you, and that he cared.

Marshall Oliphant, a guy about my own age, has always wanted to be a writer and hasn't done much about it. He did get a couple of very nasty, funny short stories published in men's magazines. And he is always threatening the world with a novel that never quite gets done. I once tried to collaborate with Marshall on a horror novel, but it didn't work out.

Ted Williams and his wife, Carol, started coming to the Pink Tea because they were friends and neighbors of Matt and Patty. They were nice, friendly people and really interesting, but neither of them was a writer. Ted wasn't the baseball legend, either. But he was a professional photographer, and he did photos for the covers for some of my Pitman stories.

Vic Auer started coming to the Pink Teas as a friend of Arthur Moore. He was a very friendly, eager, enthusiastic fellow with a major-league smile. I don't know much about his background, but it seems that he wrote for television and movies. Unlike most of us, he did his writing in restaurants instead of at home—writing longhand at a corner table for hours at a time. A very Hemingway thing to do.

Bonnie Cardone, a good-looking young gal, recently divorced and living in Brentwood in the heyday of the Pink Tea, was cheerful and enthusiastic but didn't seem very interested in being a writer. She brought several interesting guests to the Pink Teas. Including some very snotty guys and at least one strange and ditzzy gal whose behavior was quite amusing but whose name luckily escapes me.

The Decline and Fall

Things happened.

Warner Law passed away. Matt and Patty moved away from Los Angeles.

And some new people, who shall remain nameless, started showing up at the Pink Teas. They were women who didn't appreciate smoke or hard liquor.

And they brought friends.

Ironically enough, they were turning the Pink Tea into a Pink Tea.

The low point was struck when these same ladies invited a celebrity to the Pink Tea, and then the celebrity and her celebrity husband hosted a Pink Tea and I decided not to go because I wanted our group to be about writing, not about celebrities.

Gary Brandner and some others felt the same way I did, so we broke away from the sissified remains of the original group. With Gary mostly at the helm, we started a new group.

Which was interesting in itself. Its members included Chris Lacher, Bill Relling, Tom Elliot, Bill Carney, Vic Auer, Creighton Barnes, Les Roberts and several others.

Gary hosted most of the new meetings, and I hosted a couple of them. But it wasn't the same. One thing led to another, and I quit after a while.

The Summing Up

My involvement with the Pink Tea went on for about a decade, and had a tremendous impact on my life.

I don't know how much good the "literary criticism" did. In fact, Ann and I eventually came to the conclusion that much of the advice and suggestions about my fiction (in the later years) was often counterproductive. But it was extremely inspiring and educational just to be associated with the original group of colorful, professional writers.

Most of them were considerably older than me. I admired them and took their advice to heart and never dreamed that I would ever be as successful as any of them. I held them in awe.

After years of getting advice from teachers and fellow students who rarely knew what they were talking about, the opportunity to learn at the feet of *real* writers was so incredibly great that it can hardly be expressed.

Aside from the influences these people had on my writing and attitudes, etc., they had an amazing, direct effect on all aspects of my life.

You know the old poem, "For want of a shoe, a horse was lost...?"

For want of the Pink Tea, major parts of my life would've been either lost or entirely different.

Look at this:

1. Clayton Matthews got me his agent, Jay Garon. Garon, for all his faults, launched my career.
2. When I was down on my luck, Richard Hughes gave me the job at his law offices.
3. Marshall Oliphant set me up on a blind date with Ann Marshall, a friend of his girl friend, Loretta. Ann and I got married and had Kelly.
4. At a Pink Tea at Gary Brandner's house, I met Dean Koontz. (Dean was not a member, and disapproved of the criticisms that were being thrown around at various writers.) Dean has not only been a great friend, but he has influenced my life and career in many significant ways. He advised me to

"broaden my scope" and he got me Bob Tanner as an agent. Under Bob's guidance, my career bloomed and he remains my agent to this day.

Without the Pink Tea, my life would probably not have included Jay Garon, Dean Koontz, Bob Tanner, my wife Ann and my daughter Kelly. Those are biggies, with ripple effects that touch every aspect of my life.

But to everything there is a season...

The season of the Pink Tea was when I was an innocent, aspiring writer learning from the old vets. We were a boy's club of hard-drinking, smoking, raunchy guys—along with a handful of good gals who didn't try to change us.

But then the "Aunt Sallys" took control.

Some of us wanted no truck with getting civilized, so we lit out for the territories. And so the season of the Pink Tea came to an end.

About the Lists

Included in this volume are lists of my favorite films, books, authors, etc. They are not intended to be lists of "the best." In fact, I was very careful to judge names and titles entirely on the basis of my own preference—not because the person or the work is generally considered wonderful. I tried to be as honest as possible.

They are very personal lists, reflecting nobody's taste but my own.

We (myself, John, Peter and Bob) felt that the lists would serve several purposes.

One, my fans "would be eager to see them. They are always asking about my favorite writers, books and movies.

Two, many writers will be curious to find out who and what is listed. In particular, are they? Are their friends? Are their enemies?

Three, the lists provide aspiring writers with names of authors and works that have been significant influences on a successful writer—me. If they use the lists as guidelines for their own reading, they'll gain a fairly broad background that will certainly improve their own writing.

Four, readers in general might use the lists to discover some excellent writers, books, and films that they might enjoy exploring.

Five, just about anyone might find it interesting to see what a guy like me prefers to read and watch at the movies. I am known as a horror writer. A lot of readers probably think that my tastes are limited to weird, hardcore, gruesome material. Some editors and critics and writers probably assume that I read nothing at all. I think the lists will surprise nearly everyone except for a few close friends.

Each list is arranged alphabetically; it would've been impossible to arrange the names or titles in order of preference.

I didn't set out to come up with a certain number of names or titles for any list. I named my favorites first, then counted. So you can be sure that I didn't include or exclude

anything in order to round out the number.

The lists are extremely subjective. I pulled most of the names and titles off the top of my head, though I did sometimes scan my shelves to make sure I wasn't leaving out anyone important. I undoubtedly *did* leave out certain names and titles simply because I failed to think of them. But many others were omitted on purpose. After all, a list doesn't mean much if it includes everything.

Some readers may feel that my choices were influenced by factors such as friendship. They may also suspect I omitted certain names or titles because of personal feelings about the author or a distaste for their material.

Guilty as charged. They're my lists.

My 15 All-Time Favorite Books

THINKING OF ALL THE BOOKS I'VE READ SO FAR, THE FIFTEEN LISTED below stand out as having made such strong impressions on me that they inspired me and changed my life.

1. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* - Mark Twain
2. *The Carpetbaggers* - Harold Robbins
3. *The Catcher in the Rye* - J.D. Salinger
4. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* - Ernest Hemingway
5. *Last Summer* - Evan Hunter
6. *Lonesome Dove* - Lany McMurtry
7. *Look Homeward, Angel* - Thomas Wolfe
8. *The Moon and Sixpence* - W. Somerset Maugham
9. *A Moveable Feast* - Ernest Hemingway
10. *The Night of the Hunter* - Davis Grubb
11. *The Old Man and the Sea* - Ernest Hemingway
12. *Soldier in the Rain* - William Goldman
13. *The Temple of Gold* - William Goldman
14. *The Travels of Jamie MacPheeters* - Robert Lewis Taylor
15. *True Grit* - Charles Portis

On Being A Horror Writer

HORROR WRITERS FIND OUT HOW IT FEELS TO BE THE TARGET OF bigotry. We are the second class citizens of the literary world.

Hell, we aren't even *citizens* of that world. We are aliens, trespassers, interlopers. Geeks, freaks.

Purveyors of trash.

Kids love us. So do a handful of real horror readers.

But most respectable people—"literary" authors, editors, teachers, librarians, scholars, politicians, preachers, parents—generally consider horror writers to be a stain on the floor.

I've had plenty of opportunities to observe the discrimination.

People ask me what I do for a living.

I say, "Oh, I write novels."

Their eyes light up. I'm suddenly on a pedestal. I'm an *author! An artist! An intellectual!*

They are *so* impressed. "*Really?*" they blurt. "What sort of things do you write?"

"Oh, scary stuff. Horror."

More often than not, their eyes go dead.

I'm no longer a light of culture and art—I'm a trash man.

They force a polite smile and say, "Oh, how nice. I just *love* Stephen King."

But they don't love *me*. They've never heard of me.

And they don't want to.

Because I've identified myself as a writer of "horror," most people automatically assume that I'm a worthless hack who couldn't possibly write anything they might want to read.

With the exceptions of such best-selling authors as Dean Koontz, Stephen King and Anne Rice, we are "untouchables."

We are horror writers.

We are dog poop on the shoes of literature.

Our families and friends are embarrassed by us. "Why don't you write something *nice*?" they say.

General readers go out of their way to avoid buying any book that is identified as horror. Most people in the publishing industry barely tolerate us. I doubt that there exists a horror writer who hasn't been urged by agents and editors to abandon horror and try writing some other type of fiction.

They know that horror "doesn't sell."

People don't want to read horror.

Except they do, don't they?

The fact is, *millions* of people read horror.

But they don't read us.

They want to *run* from us.

Which is very strange, considering that they *love* Stephen King, Dean Koontz and Anne Rice. Exceedingly strange, considering that the books by those three mega-stars aren't very much different in subject matter or quality from what many of us are writing.

In fact, I would venture to say that some of the worthless geeks and hacks of the much reviled horror clan have written books that are *better* than some of the bestselling books written by some of the mega-stars.

Not that it matters.

Because, in the opinion of every major U.S. publisher, horror doesn't sell.

Though we all know otherwise.

So. What's going on?

One fact is obvious: horror has a massive image problem.

To the book industry and the masses of general readers in this country, the word "horror" has nothing to do with *Phantoms* or *Whispers* or *The Bad Place* or *Midnight*. Horror has nothing to do with *Salem's Lot* or *The Shining* or *Desperation*. Horror has nothing to do with *Interview With the Vampire*.

Horror has only to do with poorly written, empty-headed, violent, gory, depressing, mean-spirited, immoral, unbelievable swill written by bottom-of-the-barrel wannabe authors about such nonsense as ghosts, vampires, werewolves, witches, demons, curses, monsters and psychos.

Does that sound like an overly harsh appraisal of the situation?

I bet it doesn't. Not if you're a horror writer.

To most horror writers, I bet it sounds like the solemn truth. But *why* do they revile us? We aren't bad people. Well, some of us, maybe...

Back to the question, Why are we reviled?

People in the book industry look down their noses at us because, with a few significant exceptions, our books do not sell very well.

Editors claim, "Readers just don't want to buy horror."

They advise, "Tone down the supernatural elements. We'll call it a *suspense* novel, and it'll sell a *lot more* copies."

Basically, it seems that nobody wants to read horror unless it is written by you-know-who.

And the publishers long ago gave up on finding any *new* stars. Oh, they tried a few times. But they got the impression that nobody clicked, so they quit. Now, they very reluctantly publish horror novels every so often. Giving them little or no publicity. Doing tiny little print runs.

Usually, a horror novel will get published with no promotion at all. As a result, nothing much happens. With paperbacks, you're lucky if five or six copies get into the average store. With hard-bounds, two or three copies may end up somewhere on a shelf, spine out. They are pieces of hay in a hay stack. Nobody is likely *notice* these books, much less buy them. If they *do* get purchased, most bookstores will not reorder (though they might *claim*

to).

When *Funland* came out in paperback, a local bookstore received a dozen copies. They flew off the shelves. They "were all gone within two days. But I expressed an interest in buying the book, and was told that they wouldn't be ordering any more copies.

Even books that do sell "don't sell."

All of which goes to prove that the publishers are right. Horror *doesn't sell*.

When the books don't sell like hotcakes, the publisher blames the writer.

So much for why publishers despise us.

But what about the general public? Here is my "deep" answer.

The general public probably reviles horror writers (except for...) because we are often dealing with taboo subjects that make them nervous. Horror stories dwell on such things as torture, deformity, madness, dismemberment, rape, incest, bestiality, cannibalism, and bad ways of dying. We are the specialists of the "worst case scenerio." We are tour guides leading readers into dangerous, frightening territories. In general, we write nasty stuff. It repels a lot of readers. But it also attracts them.

Many readers probably feel *especially* uncomfortable if they find themselves *drawn* to such sordid material. Good people are not supposed to enjoy reading about these things. If they do like it, many of them undoubtedly suffer feelings of guilt.

Reading horror is like looking at pornography.

Plenty of people might *want* to do it, but they know it would be wrong. It would be dirty.

They should be *ashamed* of themselves for liking it.

And if they're caught, what would *other* people think of their dirty little secret?

As a result, these good people scorn horror novels.

They scorn horror writers as if we are smut peddlers...peddling smut they would *love* to get their hands on if they could only do so without risking embarrassment, damnation, or ridicule.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! ATTENTION, PLEASE!
I HAVE AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT TO MAKE!

I have just stumbled onto the reason that, -while most horror writers are reviled, the

mega-stars of horror are revered.

They provide a culturally acceptable outlet for those who long to wallow in horror.

"I'll go to *them!*" the readers say to themselves (subconsciously— I don't imagine they realize this is going on). "That way, I'll still be able to get my share of goosebumps and thrills, still be able to relish the joys of dismemberment, rape, incest, cannibalism, vampires— the whole voyeuristic nine yards—but with no risk to my self-esteem because these books are bestsellers! *Everyone* reads them. If *everyone* is doing it, there's no reason for *me* to feel guilty, no reason for *me* to feel as if I'm a slumming illiterate wallowing in trash."

"Trash is what the rest of them write: the Big Three write literature."

That was my "deep" answer to the question, "Why do general readers hate us but love the Big Three?" Here is another answer, not so deep, but perhaps no less valid.

Too many "horror writers" *do* turn out poorly written, empty headed, violent, gory, depressing, mean-spirited, immoral, unbelievable swill about nonsense. If that weren't bad enough, much of it is *boring*.

For years, (once you've eliminated the shelf-loads of books by Knoutz, King and Rice) the "horror sections" of bookstores have been loaded with books so poorly conceived and written that they should never have been published in the first place.

Certainly, *excellent* horror novels have also been published.

But they are surrounded by horribly written, annoying, boring junk.

If as a reader, you take a chance on a horror novel by a writer you've never heard of, you stand about a 20 to 1 chance of wishing you hadn't.

I am a horror writer. I am a fan of horror literature. I *love* to lay my hands on a book that'll pull me in and scare the hell out of me.

I almost never buy a novel from any bookstore's "horror section."

In my head, there is a small, select list of horror writers I trust. I pretty much stick with them, because I've been burnt too many times. It'll be a fairly cold day in hell before I snatch up a "horror book" by someone whose name I don't know.

Because it's almost sure to stink.

The problem is, nearly all of us are tainted by the stink.

Horror writers such as Dean Koontz, Stephen King and Anne Rice managed to rise above the stink because they wrote stuff that was so strikingly good that publishers got behind them *in spite of* their subject matter. They rose above the "horror genre," and into the fresh air of mainstream acceptance.

The only way for the rest of us to get un-tainted is to achieve bestseller status, which is pretty hard to do if you're down there on shelves loaded with crappy horror novels. It's a Catch-22.

Which is why so many of us turn away from horror.

Some of the best horror writers in this country are now writing mainstream novels, espionage novels, crime novels, medical thrillers, romance novels, suspense novels, historical novels, juveniles, movie scripts, comic books, computer games, etc. Some have apparently quit writing altogether.

I could name them.

I suspect they got tired of living in the ghetto.

Got tired of being scorned, ignored and underpaid.

This leaves us with somewhat less than a handful of mega-stars making millions of dollars every year, and a small crowd of horror writers struggling at the bottom of the barrel, usually making no more than \$10,000 per book—but frequently getting more like \$2,000 - 5,000.

Most of the good writers at the bottom of the barrel get out. They move on to more lucrative pursuits.

This is just dandy with the publishers, because there are always new writers jumping in. The publishers of horror fiction *love* new writers.

Beginners are so eager for a first sale that they'll go for *anything*. They don't care if they're at the bottom of the barrel—they just want to *be in the barrel*. Publishers can get them to sign contracts that would disgust a seasoned -writer. A novice will sign away all rights to a book forever for \$1,500.

The new kid who'll sell his horror novel for peanuts might not be as good a writer as the pro, but that doesn't matter. To the publisher's way of thinking, *the readers will never know the difference*.

In the immortal words of a certain powerful New York editor, "Why should I pay Richard

Laymon ten thousand dollars for a book when I can get one from Joe Schmow off the street for two thousand?"

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! ATTENTION PLEASE!
I HAVE A *SECOND* MAJOR ANNOUNCEMENT TO MAKE!

Guess what? The big establishment New York publishing industry thinks FOC/are trash.

Holds *you* in contempt.

You are as vile and worthless as the people who *write* the horror you hope to read.

If publishers assume (and believe me they do) that all non-star horror writers are interchangeable and dispensible, it is because they think that those of you who read us *don't know the difference*.

They think *you* have such lousy taste buds in your choice or reading material that you can't tell the difference between top sirloin, ground chuck, and dog shit.

So they are inclined to throw you whatever is cheapest.

And guess what that is?

Given such a state of affairs, those in the business of providing meat go out of business.

Which, in my opinion, goes far toward explaining why we lovers of horror fiction have such a difficult time finding the good stuff.

How do you find the good stuff?

First, follow authors. Know your favorite horror writers and stick with them, even if they write "non-horror" books. The qualities that drew you to these writers will still be there, even if they have turned to adventure novels or medical thrillers or whatever.

Second, keep an eye on the small presses. They are not immune to publishing crap, but some small presses do bring out quality horror books by major authors who have been trashed by the New York literary establishment.

Third, find yourself a book store or mail-order dealer who can provide you with books published in England. It appears to me and to a great many other horror writers of my acquaintance), that publishers in the UK still care about quality fiction—and respect authors. Not only do such companies as Hodder/Headline publish overlooked American authors, but they publish books by some wonderful UK authors, as well.

Fourth, keep an open mind. In bookstores, don't spend all your time inspecting the horror

section. Excellent horror novels are being published by major U.S. houses on a fairly regular basis but *they are disguised*. They aren't promoted as horror. Instead, they are labeled *suspense* or *thriller* or simply *fiction*. They might be found in just about *any* section of a bookstore. For instance, I've found copies of my books in the science fiction section. A couple of times, I've even found horror novels (such as *The Amityville Horror*) tucked away in the non-fiction section of major bookstores.

You need to study covers. You need to read a few pages.

The situation is *so* ironic.

The same U.S. publishers who despise horror and readers of horror will go out of their way to write the most lurid, shocking cover material imaginable for their mass market mainstream thrillers. They know that readers hunger for scary, graphic stuff. They are *so* aware of the taste for grue that they actually write *misleading* cover material, trying to make even mild, tame suspense novels sound more gruesome than *The Silence of the Lambs*.

And yet they despise horror fiction, its writers and readers.

What gives?

What *is* going on with horror in the U.S. publishing industry?

The more I look into the situation, the more complex it seems to be. It is a bundle of contradictions, ironies, paradoxes.

Horror is frowned upon by most publishers and readers in spite of the fact that three of the best-selling, most highly-regarded writers in the country are blatantly writing horror novels.

On top of that, what about "literary" authors?

How can it be that the very same people who loathe the writers of horror fiction somehow manage to revere such figures as Homer, Virgil, Sophocles, Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Robert Lewis Stevenson, Dickens, Dostoevski, Poe, Conrad, Melville, Hawthorne, Mark Twain, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the Brontes, Shelley, Coleridge, Faulkner, Bradbury...? The list could go on and on. Every one of them wrote material that I would call horror.

You'd be hard-pressed to name *any* major literary figure in history who did not write stories or poetry that could reasonably be defined as "horror."

And yet those of us who do it here in America at the tail end of Twentieth Century are worthless writers turning out trash that nobody wants to read.

Well, well, well...

They can despise us. They can reject our books. They can pay us next to nothing for the few books that they *do* buy. They can drive many of us away.

But some of us...

Well, we ain't going nowhere.

We were here first, and we'll be here to the last.

The first stories ever told around campfires in the dead of night— ages before anyone ever dreamed of a publishing industry—were tales of horror.

And if there is to be a final tale told somewhere to a tiny, huddled group of survivors waiting for the end, I know what sort of story it will be.

It won't be a contemporary romance.

It won't be a courtroom drama.

It won't be a techno-thriller.

It won't be about Hollywood wives or covered bridges or feisty career girls or a professor's identity crisis.

Hope.

It'll be about what's out there in the dark...and coming for them.

It'll be a horror tale.

50 Favorite Horror Authors

THIS IS A LIST OF WRITERS WHO HAVE WRITTEN EITHER ONE GREAT PIECE or a body of work that I have found to be exceptionally "wonderful and frightening. Remember, this is not supposed to be a list of "the best" horror writers: it is a list of *my favorites*.

1. Peter Benchley
2. Ambrose Bierce
3. Algernon Blackwood
4. William Peter Blatty
5. Robert Bloch
6. Ray Bradbury
7. Gary Brandner
8. Michael Cadnum
9. Wilkie Collins
10. John Coyne
11. Michael Crichton
12. Roald Dahl
13. Charles Dickens
14. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
15. Larry Dunbar
16. Ed Gorman
17. Davis Grubb
18. H. Rider Haggard
19. Nathaniel Hawthorne
20. James Herbert
21. William Hope Hodgson
22. Shirley Jackson
23. W.W. Jacobs
24. M.R. James
25. Jack Ketchum
26. Stephen King
27. Rudyard Kipling
28. Dean Koontz

29. Ira Levin
30. Bentley Little
31. H.P. Lovecraft
32. Brian Lumley
33. Graham Masterton
34. Richard Matheson
35. Robert R. McCammon
36. David Morrell
37. Edgar Allan Poe
38. Seabury Quinn
39. Ray Russell
40. John Russo
41. Saki
42. William Shakespeare
43. Mary Shelley
44. Dan Simmons
45. Michael Slade
46. Robert Lewis Stevenson
47. Bram Stoker
48. H.G. Wells
49. F. Paul Wilson
50. Cornell Woolrich

My 51 Favorite Non-Horror Authors

MY LIST CONTAINS A FEW NAMES PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED AS HORROR writers. I've done this in cases in which a writer has also distinguished himself or herself in writing "non-horror" fiction.

1. Sherwood Anderson
2. Lawrence Block
3. John Buchan
4. Tom Clancy
5. Mary Higgins Clark
6. Joseph Conrad
7. Pat Conroy
8. Michael Crichton
9. Charles Dickens
10. Franklin W. Dixon
11. Feodor Dostoevsky
12. William Faulkner
13. Jack Finney
14. F. Scott Fitzgerald
15. Ian Fleming
16. Brian Garfield
17. William Goldman
18. David Goodis
19. Ed Gorman
20. Winston Groom
21. Joseph Hayes
22. Ernest Hemingway
23. Evan Hunter
24. Stephen Hunter
25. Nikos Kazantzakis
26. Jack Kerouac
27. Dean Koontz
28. D.H. Lawrence
29. Jack London

30. John D. MacDonald
31. W. Somerset Maugham
32. Larry McMurtry
33. David Morrell
34. Charles Portis
35. Flannery O'Connor
36. Ayn Rand
37. Bob Randall
38. Harold Robbins
39. J.D. Salinger
40. Mickey Spillane
41. Glendon Swarthout
42. Robert Lewis Taylor
43. Jim Thompson
44. Trevanian
45. Mark Twain
46. Leon Uris
47. Joseph Wambaugh
48. Thomas Wolfe
49. Stuart Woods
50. Cornell Woolrich
51. P.C. Wren

Laymon's Rules of Writing

Rule 1

"Write the book that you would like to read."

I don't know where I first ran into that idea, but I think it's great. And it contradicts advice that writers often encounter, especially when they are starting out.

Writer magazines, how-to books, teachers and even many agents and editors (who should *really* know better) suggest that the road to success runs through the Land of Imitation. They advise you to write "more like" someone else.

More like Mary Higgins Clark, more like Sidney Sheldon, more like John Grisham, etc. Deal is this...

Why try to write a book that is "like" what someone else has written?

Someone else is *already* writing that sort of stuff.

The last thing the world needs is another cheap imitation.

But you'll likely be told otherwise.

If you jump on someone else's bandwagon and do a fair job of appealing to an established audience, you might get a publisher to hype your novel, and you might end up rich and famous.

You could then be a rich and famous hack.

Chances are, though, you *won't get* rich and famous.

In which case, you'll just be a poor, unknown hack.

If you want to be something more than that, walk away from the well paved road and

blaze your own trails into unknown territory.

Here's how to do it.

Sit down and ask yourself this: If I could read a book about *anything*, what would it be about? Where and when would it take place? What would the main guy be like? What sort of gal would I love to read about in a book, if such a book existed? What might happen to these people that would be really *neat*?

And so on.

Find the answers to those questions.

Then figure out if such a book *already exists*.

Which means you need to be well-read.

If your ideal book already exists, you would be ill-advised to go ahead and write your own version of it.

If it *doesn't* exist, you're in luck.

Write it.

Write it *your* way.

As Polonius said, "To thine own self be true."

As Ricky Nelson sang, "You can't please everyone, so you've gotta please yourself."

Set out to please yourself. With a little luck, you may end up pleasing others, as well.

Rule 2 ***"Learn How to Write."***

I have always been a master of stating the obvious.

The obvious, however, is quite often undervalued and overlooked.

I find it astonishing that a great many writers pursue their craft and sullen art without having a halfway decent grasp of language, grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc.

Just about everyone has daydreams about being an author.

We all like to tell stories. Most of us are able to read and speak English reasonably well.

We have even written things, now and then: letters, thank you notes, maybe reports of various kinds at school and work. So it seems a simple matter to write a story.

Easy as pie. Anyone can do it.

At a cocktail party, a famous writer (possibly George Bernard Shaw) was told by a famous surgeon, "When I retire, I plan to write a novel." Said the author, "When I retire, I plan to operate on people."

The author's comment may seem like a wisecrack, but it is dead-on accurate.

Learning to write well is probably no easier than learning to remove a kidney or replace a heart valve.

It requires years of study and practice.

Some aspiring writers think they don't really need to know proper usage of the language. They think that whatever miserable errors they make will be fixed by an editor.

Wrong.

Most editors (especially here in the U.S.), know less than the writers.

If your story *should* somehow end up on the desk of a *good* editor, he isn't likely to fix the writing for you. The rare, good editor would be so disgusted by your crappy writing that all you'd get is a rejection slip.

Chances are, however, that your manuscript will be read by a *lousy* editor. Such an editor might accept badly written material simply because he doesn't know any better.

If that happens, you can be certain that *nobody* will end up correcting it. The mistakes will be over the heads of the publishers, just as they were over yours. Your book will be published in all its pathetic glory.

Full of mistakes that would win you a flunking grade from any good high school English teacher.

Even if all editors were masters of the language, no writer should ever submit a piece of work that is not written well enough to earn an A+ in any English class in the country.

We have a responsibility to use the language better than anyone else.

A writer submitting a careless, error-inflicted manuscript is like a police officer robbing a bank. It just shouldn't happen. It should never be tolerated. It's a perversion of Nature.

This is not to say that liberties cannot be taken. Rules broken. Experiments conducted. Tricky stuff pulled.

But manipulating the language in order to create special effects is not allowed for people who can't pass "bonehead" English.

And this is not to say that all mistakes can be avoided. The language is so complex that nobody can get it right all the time.

Mistakes will happen.

They are *inevitable*. Even if the writer somehow throws together 150,000 words without a single error, the *printer* is sure to blow it here and there. Errors will slip by.

All the writer can do is try...

Strive for excellence even though it may be unattainable.

Rule 3 ***"Write."***

The famous science fiction writer, Jerry Pournelle, once told me, "All you've got to do is write one page a day. In a year, you have a novel."

A short novel, at any rate. (By current standards.)

But the point is this...If you want to be a writer, you *must* sit down and turn out pages. Even as little as a single page each day can result in a full novel over the course of time. How long does it take to write a page?

For some writers, a page might be composed in a couple of minutes. (He is more typist than writer.) At the other extreme, a person might spend two or three hours laboring over one page. (Such a person is probably *not* a great artist. More likely, he's either a prima dona or doesn't know what the hell he's doing—likely both.) For most of us, a page might take anywhere from fifteen minutes to half an hour. Maybe a full hour if we're trying to compose a very special effect—or having a problem.

To write a single page per day, then, is a task that should probably take no longer than one hour.

If an aspiring writer is incapable of finding one hour per day to sit down and work on his craft...

Well, let us suggest that he give up the pretense of being an aspiring writer.

Because he ain't one.

Because *anyone* can find time to turn out one page a day if he really wants to.

Now, I don't want to seem like I'm getting hung up in semantics here. A person doesn't have to write a page *every* day. Things happen. *I* don't write a page *every* day. I don't write at all, for instance, when I'm traveling. Now that I'm reasonably successful, I take a day or two off, each week, for activities with my family.

However, I usually *do* write 100-150 pages per month. That averages out to a lot more than a page per day. My daily goal is five pages. Sometimes I go over, and sometimes I don't make my five.

Before I was a full-time writer, I held full-time jobs but still managed to turn out a large amount of fiction. (See the Autobiographical Chronology.) Having a job is no excuse for not writing. My goal in those days "was three pages per day.

How did I do it?

Not easily.

I sometimes wrote for an hour before going to work in the morning. I often wrote during my lunch break. I wrote another hour or two each day after work. And I usually devoted large portions of my days off (weekends and holidays) to writing.

I often hear aspiring writers talk about what they are "going to write" if they can ever "find the time."

With that attitude, they are probably never going to accomplish much.

You don't *find* time. It is there. Twenty-four hours of it each day. If you want to be a writer, you only need to make the decision to use at least one of them for the writing. Turn out that page. Or skip a day, and turn out two or three the next day. But get them done.

Or forget it.

A few helpful hints on how to turn out pages:

1. If you can't find an uninterrupted hour, it's hardly worth bothering to get started on real writing. So use the fifteen minutes, half an hour, or whatever to proof-read, revise, or play around with ideas for new stuff.
2. For best results, find a block of two or three hours in which you'll be able to write without interruption. With this

much time, you can get *into* the piece and really cook.

3. Start each writing period by re-reading what you wrote yesterday. Revise it as you go. This will not only improve yesterday's material, but it will pull you back into the story, making it easy to continue where you left off.

4. Write the material well, but don't spend great amounts of time trying to get it "just right." Don't spend your whole hour working on one or two sentences. Keep moving.

Turn out a page or two or five. Polish them some other time.

5. Follow Hemingway's advice and stop the day's writing at a point where you still know what is coming next. This will help you start up again easily the next day.

6. If you are serious about being a writer of fiction, then be wary of foreign entanglements. For example, you might be better off writing your own fiction than trying to edit an anthology or publish a fanzine or run a web site or organize a fan convention, etc. Sure, such activities may gain you some recognition and possibly important connections. But it is more important to make books and stories than contacts. You won't have any *use* for the contacts if you don't have a product to sell them.

Rule 4 ***"Write Truly."***

The notion of writing *fiction* "truly" may sound a trifle contradictory.

After all, fiction is *made up*. How can it be true if it's made up?

In fact, most fiction is mostly true. You are obliged to be accurate about every detail that isn't directly related to your story. For instance, such matters as historical, geographical, scientific and technological facts (including how firearms *really* operate) must be true. Readers have to be given the straight scoop except when you are manipulating the truth for the sake of the story (in which case, your readers need to be tipped off that you're bending the truth).

In some cases, novels provide valuable information about fascinating subjects. Most Tom Clancy and Michael Crichton novels, for example, give a lot of insight into one topic or another. Their stories are made up, but their information isn't.

No matter what you're writing about, your background material should be as close to the truth as possible.

Which really should go without saying.

But I decided to say it, anyway, on my way to the *real* subject of my rule, "*Write Truly*."

It's this.

Everything you write should come out of yourself. Every character, every scene, every story, should be a reflection of *you*. Pull it out of yourself, not out of movies or television shows you've seen, not out of news articles or books you've read.

If your stuff is nothing more than a rehash of *other people's* work, you're not accomplishing much. Even if you're able to make a success of it (which isn't likely), you'll be little more than a hack.

To be *good*, your stuff has to be yours and yours alone.

You accomplish this by writing about what you've personally experienced in the real world, not what you've experienced vicariously in other people's books, movies, etc.

For example, suppose you're eager to write a vampire novel.

Don't set out to write a book "like *Dracula*, but different." Instead, look for a "way to make the subject of vampires *personal* to you. How might *your* life be affected if you should encounter a vampire? Where might *you* run into one? How might you, your family, your friends react to the situation?

A hack will do a "mix and match," creating his stew by throwing together bits and pieces taken from other sources.

A good writer's novel might also be a stew, but whatever ingredients might be lifted from other sources will be awfully hard to identify and there'll be a whole new taste due to the author's secret sauce.

The secret sauce is what makes it good—makes it more than just a trite mish-mash of old material.

Pushing this analogy well beyond the boundaries of good sense, I'll go on to say that the secret sauce is made of the blood, sweat, tears, heartaches and joys of the author's life.

Every writer's secret sauce has a different flavor.

Some writers have lousy secret sauce that you just can't stand. Some don't even use the stuff at all.

You can tell when it is there and when it isn't. It's what makes the difference between a bland story and a rich, spicy one.

It makes the difference between an *artificial* story and a *true* one.

Have you ever wondered why you want to read more of certain authors?

'Cause you like their secret sauce!

But let us now abandon that analogy (a little bit late) and say it straight out: To write truly, you need to tap into yourself as deeply as possible and use what you find there.

Every character, scene, word of dialogue, plot development, etc. is your creation. *Allow them to look like your creations.*

This is what will make them unique and valuable.

If anyone tells you to write more like Tom Clancy or Mary Higgins Clark or John Grisham, politely tell them, "Thank you very much and go to hell."

There is only one you, so *write like yourself.*

It's what might make your stuff worth reading.

It's what could make your readers come back for more.

Because, if you do it right, they can't get the same taste from anyone else.

Rule 5 ***"Finish."***

Whatever you are working on, get it done.

Just as the world is loaded "with aspiring writers who claim they can't find any time to write, it is also chock full of folks who are busy on a "work in progress." This is usually a terribly wonderful epic novel sure to set the literary world ablaze when the author sets it loose on the public in some unspecified, distant decade.

Yup. Sure.

A work in progress might make for good brag, but it's otherwise useless.

The artist concentrating on his -work in progress — and never finishing it — is probably afraid it's no good. And afraid that, if he does get the masterpiece done, he won't know what to do with himself afterward.

You don't "want to be one of these people.

You want to be a writer. Right?

So do it.

Write the story, write the book. Get it done, send it off, and get started on the next.

In addition to the dangerous WIPS (Work in Progress Syndrome), and somewhat related to it, is the malady that I'll call LWD (Life's Work Disorder). Writers suffering from LWD are inclined to *stick* to a project forever instead of finishing it or abandoning it and moving on to a new project. (It differs from WIPS in that people suffering from Life's Work Disorder may actually be talented writers seriously trying to create a marvelous book.) They labor year after year on a book, sure that they've got a *great concept* that'll put them on the literary map or bestseller charts if only they're eventually able to get it right and/or some agent or editor will finally discover its merits.

Maybe the thing *has* merits. Or maybe it's a dud.

The deal is, you might not want to be working on the same book for five, ten or twenty years. If you *are* devoting that much labor to a book, follow Tom Snyder's advice and take look in the mirror. You'll probably see the face of a moron. Or a lunatic.

Here is what to do.

If you have a concept that you think is spectacular, give it your best shot. Do whatever preliminary work might be necessary (research), then write the book. It shouldn't take you longer than a year if you're serious. Give it a revision, then send it off, sit down and come up with a *new* great concept, turn that one into a book, and go on to the next.

Whatever you do, don't just sit around to wait for the "great book" to get accepted. If it is rejected (which is not exactly unlikely), don't devote months or years to reworking it in hopes of "getting it right."

Just put it away. (Maybe go back to it some day, but not now.)

Instead of hoping to revive Lazarus, make a baby.

And another, and another.

If you are behaving properly as a writer, you will have a second novel finished before your first novel has had time to find a publisher or accumulate more than a few rejection slips.

At the opposite end of the problem from Work in Progress Syndrome and Life's Work Disorder is a malady that I will simply dub *Quitties*.

This is one of the most common disorders, and probably inflicts all writers to some extent.

It happens this way.

You get started on a novel, thinking it is brilliant. You write ten pages or sixty or three hundred—then give up on it.

There are a couple common reasons for quitting.

One, you decide the story isn't working out the way you'd hoped. In other words, it no longer seems overwhelmingly wonderful. So it isn't worth continuing.

Two, you've come up with a *new* great concept, so you're compelled to drop the work in progress and start in on the new one *immediately*.

On occasion, perhaps a work *should* be abandoned for one or the other of those reasons.

But rarely.

As a general rule, you should resist the urge.

Because, believe it or not, the book you quit writing might have turned out just fine. It might've even been better and more successful than the one for which you abandoned it.

But you'll never know if you don't finish it.

Your initial enthusiasm for *any* novel is almost certain to diminish as you get into it. You'll have doubts about whether it's any good at all. You'll be tempted to give up and try something else. The deal is, it's natural to feel this way.

And if you *do* quit and go on to a new novel, guess what—pretty soon, you'll start having your doubts about *that* one.

You'll be tempted to stop writing it, too.

If you don't resist these urges, you'll end up with a room full of unfinished novels and nothing accomplished.

An unfinished novel is no good to anyone. All it does is take up space.

This is true not only for authors suffering from *Quitties*, but also for authors trying to sell their work on the basis of a "proposal."

If you have to submit sample chapters and an outline to your agent or editor, go ahead and

do it. But go ahead and do something else while you're at it: *write the book*.

Best case scenerio: by the time your proposal gets accepted, you'll have the book ready to send in.

Worst case scenerio: your proposal is rejected. But if it *does* get rejected, you still have a completed manuscript.

An unfinished novel is a waste of space; a *finished* novel is an asset. Just because a novel is rejected by darn near every publisher on the face of the Earth today doesn't mean it won't be bought and published *tomorrow*.

Rule 6 ***"Read."***

It should go without saying that writers need to read.

However, I've frequently heard authors claim that they don't have time to read, that they only read non-fiction (research for their fiction), or that they only read books in the genre they hope to conquer.

My "rule" is to read as much as possible across the whole spectrum of published material. There are several major reasons for this.

First, reading is the best way to learn how to write. Each piece is a sample showing how some other author chose to put words and sentences together, how he described a sunset, developed a character, dealt with dialogue, structured a scene, manipulated a plot. Basically, everything a person needs to know about writing can be learned by reading other people's stories, poems, plays, screenplays, novels, etc.

Second, by reading omnivorously, you protect yourself against one of the most common problems encountered by aspiring writers—wasting a lot of energy and time trying to write a story that has already been done. If you don't *know* the other stories, you're too ignorant to avoid them. And you really must avoid them. Nobody wants to publish a story that looks as if it's a remake of an earlier piece by someone else.

If your apparent re-hash *does* get past your agent and editors and sees the light of print, then you might end up in legal trouble with the author of the original material. And if you're lucky enough to escape that fate (for instance, if the author is dead), you might end up with a lousy reputation among readers who recognize the similarities and figure you're a rip-off artist. This can happen even if you've never heard of or read the earlier piece.

Third, *knowing* the other stories not only allows you to avoid them, but to *play off them*. Just because there have been a gazillion vampire books doesn't mean *you* can't write one, too.

But if you want to write about vampires, you'd better do some research first by reading *Dracula*, *Salem's Lot*, *Interview with the Vampire*, etc. The more vampire stories you read before embarking on your own, the better. It's as if you are making yourself a map of a minefield. You find out where *not* to step, but you also find out where you *can* step in safety. You want to reach the point of being able to say, "Hey, I don't think anyone's used *this* angle yet." So you use it.

I've so far written two adult vampire novels, *The Stake* and *Bite*. All I hear about these novels is how *different* they are, how fresh, how they broke new ground and went against the reader's expectations. In my opinion, there are *always* fresh ways of dealing with any subject—even something as overdone as vampires. But you can only find the new angles if you've read what else is out there.

Fourth, it is very limiting to read *only* in the genre in which you write or aspire to write. Don't make the mistake, for instance, of reading only horror. (And don't make the enormous error of *not* reading horror in the mistaken notion that, if you haven't read it, you can't be accused of copying it.)

If you want to be a horror writer, read plenty of the current stuff being written in the field, read the classics of horror, but also read in every other area possible. You need to be familiar with the whole scope of literature. For a list of reading material that has been important to me, see my reading lists in this book.

By reading broadly, you gain a great store of knowledge about literature and about the human experience. You see how the writing was done by others throughout history. Such literature enriches your imagination, shows you the range of possibilities, and can't help but give your own writing more breadth, depth, richness and weight.

Rule 7 ***"Keep Your Stuff to Yourself."***

Generally speaking, you're better off letting nobody know exactly what you're writing. That way, you avoid several dangers.

When you tell someone about your story, you diminish it in your own eyes. You're not likely to do it justice. So hearing yourself describe your brainchild, you might conclude that it sounds rather lame.

Fairly often, writers actually lose interest in writing a certain story or novel after telling someone about it. They decide not to write it at all. Or, if they are well into writing it, they sometimes quit.

Another danger of sharing a story is that your friend or lover might not seem very enthusiastic about it. That can be a bummer, and might lead to *Quitties*.

Or your listener might offer advice on how to make it better. Do you really want that?
On some occasions, if you tell your story to a writer, you might experience the delight of finding your idea in his or her next novel.

The same might happen if you tell your story to an editor.

So it is always best to keep your mouth shut and write the book. Let the curious discover your story only after it is safely housed between the covers of a book and on sale in a store.

If someone asks what you're working on (as friends often do), your best defense is vagueness. Don't give out a blow by blow description. Give your friend a sentence or two. Example, *The Cellar*. "Oh, it's just about some old house where a bunch of people got killed." You have politely answered the question, but you haven't given away the farm or ruined anything.

Just as you should keep your mouth shut, you should keep your manuscript away from anyone who might be inclined to peruse it.

Don't allow friends or loved ones to read what you've written. You may be eager for their gushy approval, but suppose they don't *like* what you've written? Even a lukewarm response from such a person can mean disaster for your relationship. It can also be unhealthy for your writing.

Let's not pull punches, here.

You're the writer. In most cases, your friend or lover is not a writer. In some cases, he or she may not even be well read. So ask yourself this: "What the hell do they know?"
Do they know more than you?

No, they don't. So why should you ask for their opinion?

In fact, you should *run away* from their opinions. *Never* seek the opinion of anyone.

It is not even a good idea to ask a professional writer for an opinion of your manuscript. You should never do that, even if the writer is a good friend. *Especially* if he is a good friend.

Because there is nothing to be gained, and plenty to lose. If your work is wonderful and flawless, no advice from the professional writer will improve on it. If things are wrong with it, however, the writer is not likely to tell you about them because he doesn't want to hurt your feelings or turn you into an enemy. If he *does* tell you what's wrong with it, you'll probably turn on him with an arsenal of resentment and scorn.

Also, sending your manuscript to another author creates huge burdens for him. As mentioned above, he won't dare offer even the most valid of criticisms. (Not if he's smart.) And if he reads it at all, you might some day accuse him of stealing your material. Even if the author ignores all the risks to himself, reads your stuff and dares to give you advice, it may turn out to be *bad* advice.

What he tells you might be excellent as it applies to himself, but bad for you. (You need to discover *your* voice, not his.) A fellow writer might also give you bad advice on purpose, hoping to derail you.

Trust no one.

Trust only your own instincts.

Keep your mouth shut, write your manuscript, show it to nobody. Make a photocopy and send the photocopy to your agent.

Your agent should be the first person, other than yourself, to find out what you've been writing. Otherwise, you're asking for a legion of troubles.

Rule 8
"Persist."

I read somewhere, "Persist, even if the "world calls it doing evil— as it is most likely they will."

Persistence will win out.

Show me a published writer, and I will show you a person who has kept on writing in spite of every obstacle.

He has found time to write. He hasn't let rejection stop him. Or poverty. Or writer's block. Or people saying he shouldn't write about that sort of thing.

No matter what happens, he keeps turning out the stuff.

Because he's a writer.

It's what he does.

So he does it.

He persists.

And through the persistence, he succeeds.

You Might Be A Lousy Writer If...

1. Your character "produces" his gun, wallet, or other item without benefit of a factory...
2. You've written a story that contains no scenes...
3. Your *short story* takes place over a period of weeks, months, years, decades...
4. Any of your characters experience an "involuntary shudder..."
5. You have a character switch the safety off his revolver...
6. You describe the same thing three or four different ways in the same paragraph, if you needlessly repeat yourself, if you are so enamoured of your own words that you aren't satisfied unless you've given your readers the same information several times without letup or mercy...
7. You write your stories in the present tense...
8. You write an entire story in the second person viewpoint...
9. You allow a character to "hiss" a sentence that hasn't a single sibilant...
10. "You write a sentence like this," he smiled.

Turning A Incident Into A Short Story: An Experiment

WHEN WRITERS ARE FIRST TRYING TO LEARN THEIR CRAFT OR ART, THEY often have trouble understanding -what a story is. Frequently, they'll mistake an "incident" or "occurrence" for a story. There is a difference.

But the difference is very difficult to explain and difficult for aspiring writers to understand.

Understanding what makes something "a story," however, is essential for success as a writer. Let me give you a quick test.

Picture this. A guy walks into a convenience store, sticks a handgun into the face of the clerk, takes money from the cash register then shoots the clerk and runs out the door.

If you expand that situation into ten or twenty pages, describing all the details and fleshing it out with dialogue, have you written a short story? Nope.

It's an incident, not a story. Now, suppose you want to *turn it into* a story. Maybe you learn about a new fiction anthology that's in the works. It'll be called *Stick-Up*. The theme of the anthology is that every short story has to be based on the idea of a guy committing armed robbery in a convenience store and shooting the clerk. And you want to create a story appropriate to the theme.

How do you turn any incident into a short story?

This slams us straight into the question: What is the difference between an incident and a story?

A story, in my opinion, is *an incident with a striking, unexpected element*.

What is striking and unexpected about a guy sticking a gun in the face of a store clerk and shooting him? Not a thing. Not where I come from. Happens all the time. While such an occurrence is terrible and shocking and sad when it happens in real life, it makes for lousy fiction. Because it isn't a story.

To become a story, the stick-up needs a "trick" or "gimmick."

I'm now going to take you on a little journey into writer-land. We'll go on a step by step search for a way to turn the stick-up incident into a short story.

This isn't planned.

I'll explore the situation just as if I have every intention of writing a story for the *Stick-Up* anthology.

Okay.

The incident is a given.

I now have to start hunting for the gimmick, the trick that'll make it work.

Here goes.

Is there something funny about the criminal? Something strange about the clerk? What about a customer who somehow gets involved?

Immediately, I like the idea of bringing a customer into the picture. For one thing, I can easily identify with being a customer. I'm not a criminal and I've never been a store clerk. Several times every week, however, I'm a customer at a store, at the bank, at a restaurant, etc. And I often do worry that I'll be "in the wrong place at the wrong time."

I bet you do, too.

And so do your readers.

If you toss a customer into the crime scene, you'll immediately grab the attention of your readers. They'll *identify* with him or her.

At this point, I *know* that I want to focus the story on the customer.

Should I make the customer a man or woman?

A woman, probably.

Though I still don't know where this story may go, I do know that a female customer will be more interesting than a guy. After all, we're putting the character into a dangerous situation. It's usually more fun to do that with a pretty, likeable gal than 'with a fellow. She might be a career woman, a housewife, a student, a cop.

How about a cop? Right away, I eliminate that idea. Way too trite. Any scenario in which the customer turns out to "really be" some sort of armed and dangerous superwoman should be avoided—or at least viewed "with great skepticism. Such gimmicks are too predictable. (Of course, even predictable gimmicks can be used if you find a way to give them an unusual twist. Maybe she turns out to be a cop, *but...*)

Let's keep looking.

What if the apparently innocent female customer is secretly a "bad guy?"

I've used that sort of gimmick successfully on several occasions. In fact, that was the main trick of "Desert Pickup," the first short story I ever sold.

It can work because, if done well, it goes against the reader's expectations. Which is always your goal.

Jim Thompson used to tell people that there is only one plot— *things are not as they seem*.

If the customer seems to be an innocent victim in the wrong place at the wrong time, readers will strongly identify with her.

They'll imagine themselves being in such a situation. They'll be worried about her. They'll be pulling for her. They'll be wondering whether she'll survive the situation. If you pull a switcheroo (such as making her a robber, too) you can take the readers off guard.

Exactly what you want to do.

But I'm not completely comfortable with turning her into a "bad guy." Besides, I don't want to jump at the first halfway decent idea that pops into my head.

We'll keep it in mind.

Let's continue exploring possibilities, but remain focused on the female character.

We'll call her Susan. She will be our main character, and the potential victim. Somehow, to make her story work, we'll need to find a way to turn the situation around so that Susan not only survives but prevails over the criminal. We'll call him Spike.

But how does she win the day?

She must do something *unexpected*.

While writing this, I'm partly thinking ahead. I'm thinking along the lines of, "What if she *helps* Spike?" Maybe he is trying to shoot the clerk, but his gun won't fire. And Susan,

standing nearby with a carton of milk or a bag of potato chips in her hands, says to Spike, "Could I give you a hand with that?"

Certainly unexpected—about the *last* thing you'd expect a customer to say in such a situation.

And I find it rather amusing.

In any sort of story, humor can be a very good thing. Everybody enjoys smiling and laughing. And you don't expect to find humor in such a situation, which makes it even better.

Aside from being amused and thinking, "This is odd," the readers will probably be wondering what Susan is up to. She can't *really* intend to help Spike put his firearm into working order. After all, he might end up using it on her. She must have a trick up her sleeve.

At this point, I think most readers "will be very eager to find out what happens next. They'll be hooked.

Spike, of course, is shocked by Susan's offer to help. And he isn't *about* to turn over his weapon to a bystander, a witness, a potential victim. He'd say something like, "What're you, nuts?"

We're off and running.

But to where?

Who knows? I don't.

I do know this, however: Spike isn't likely to hand his gun over to Susan.

So what does happen?

In other parts of this book, I write that every story has a secret, internal structure. It's the writer's job to discover this structure, "which is inherent in every story.

At the heart of *this* story's natural structure is the problem with the bad guy's firearm. When he attempts to shoot the clerk, "why won't it fire?

The answer to this question will almost certainly be the key to the story.

Right now, I don't *know* what's wrong with his gun.

But there are a limited number of possibilities in the real world. If he's using an automatic

(i.e., a semi-auto), perhaps he has forgotten to take off the safety or neglected to jack a round into the chamber. Unfortunately, either problem could be fixed in less than a second—without Susan's interference. If he's using a revolver, the situation is even more limiting for us. Revolvers almost never have safeties and there is no need to jack a round into the chamber. You pull the trigger and that's it. If a double-action revolver is loaded, it *fires*. Unless you have a misfire, which is so rare with modern ammo that you don't want to fool with it. Besides, if you have a misfire, all you really need to do is pull the trigger again and go with a fresh round. Certainly the *next* cartridge won't misfire, too.

I can see only two realistic possibilities for our scenario.

One, Spike is using an automatic and it gets jammed. This sort of "Thing does happen. A round sometimes doesn't get fed into the chamber properly, and the gun won't fire. In that case, you may have a difficult time prying out the stuck round.

Two, Spike doesn't *have* ammo.

If I want to save my gimmick, I need to choose between those two alternatives.

The jam has potential. Maybe Susan could offer to let Spike use her eyebrow tweezers to clear the jam.

Nah. I don't care for it. The jam is a little too forced and complicated.

Whereas the other alternative has a wealth of possibilities.

He has no ammo!

Why the hell not?

Now we really have a story cooking.

Obviously, Spike *thinks* he has ammo. Otherwise, why did he try to shoot the clerk?

If he thinks he has ammo but he doesn't, *where is it?*

I have no idea.

But I've got to figure it out. If I can come up with a good reason for his gun being empty, I've probably got a story.

The ammo might be missing because someone interfered with it.

Susan?

How could Susan, without Spike's knowledge, get her hands on his weapon and unload it?

Maybe she's a magician.

I don't think so.

Maybe she's a pickpocket.

Better. But it still seems to push the boundaries of credibility a little bit too far.

While thinking about these matters, another thought has been running through the back of my mind: maybe Spike's *wife* unloaded his gun—without his knowledge—back home before he took off for "work." Why would she unload it? Maybe she knows he's a robber, and she takes out the ammo so he won't hurt anyone. Or maybe she hates him and wants him to get killed. Or maybe she's overprotective of him, unloaded the weapon so that she could clean his fingerprints off the cartridges, but then neglected to reload it after "helping" him. Any such situation might be the basis for a very interesting short story.

While fooling with those possibilities, however, an idea suddenly exploded into my head.

What if Susan, the-store customer, is Spike's wife?

This could work.

In fact, I feel sure that it will.

A little tricky to pull off, but most stories are.

Naturally, the story has to be written in such a way that Susan appears to be a complete stranger to the criminal. She seems to be an innocent bystander, so the readers worry about "what the awful robber might do to her. Things start looking very dicey for Susan when the Spike tries to shoot the store clerk. But the handgun doesn't fire.

We've already decided that it doesn't fire because, for some reason, it isn't loaded.

At this point, the "natural structure" of-the story allows us another simple choice.

Who unloaded the gun? Spike or Susan?

Given the decisions "we've already made, it has to be one or the other.

Unless they have a kid.

I don't like the idea of their child unloading the gun. It seems too forced.

But the *notion* of their child's involvement in the situation triggers another idea.

Even though Spike is a criminal, he's a good parent. (Chortle chortle.) Far be it from Spike, an armed robber, to leave a loaded firearm around the house -where his child might play with it and have an accident!

No, he always unloads his gun and keeps the ammo hidden safely away from the kid.

Let's make the gun a revolver, not an automatic. Spike would be less likely to notice empty cylinders than a big gap up the handle of his weapon.

This morning, Spike ran off "to work" without remembering to retrieve his revolver's cartridges from their usual hiding place. His adoring wife, Susan, noticed his oversight. By then, however, Spike was already out the door. So she went chasing him in her own car. Because of his head start, she is unable to overtake him until he is already inside the store and in the process of robbing it.

Susan needs to enter the store *after* Spike has started robbing it.

She enters just in time to see him try to shoot the clerk.

But his gun doesn't work.

In the original concept, the idea was for Susan to say, "Let me see your gun. Maybe I can fix it for you." Or something to that effect.

As the story has developed to this point, however, that wouldn't work.

Susan has brought the ammo to Spike in much the same spirit that a wife might chase down a husband who left for work without his wallet or sack lunch. But this is more serious. She certainly doesn't want him to get killed for lack of his ammunition.

Just as she enters the store, however, she sees him try to shoot the clerk in cold blood. And she is shocked.

Suddenly, she doesn't want to give him the ammo.

But Spike knows she has it. The moment his gun doesn't fire, he realizes that he forgot to load it before leaving the house. There can be only one reason for Susan showing up: she followed him from home to bring him the ammunition.

Now, he wants it.

But she won't hand it over.

And the nature of the story has changed dramatically since we first started toying with it.

I sort of hate to leave behind the nifty, tricky little tale that we seemed to be developing at the start of all this.

If I'd stuck with it and pulled it off, it could've been a nice story of the kind that appear so often in mystery magazines.

Light, superficial, amusing, not very realistic.

But that story is gone.

Suddenly, we've uncovered a potential for a crime story with some real depth. There might still be humor in the interchanges between Susan and Spike (with the clerk for an audience), but there is a heaviness, a grimness, an opportunity to get very realistic.

Susan loves Spike, wants to help him, but doesn't "want him to murder the clerk and therefore doesn't want to hand over the ammo. Spike *must* have the ammo. The clerk is a witness and has to die.

"I've gotta have that ammo, Sue!"

"So you can blow that poor man's head off?"

It might go beyond words. He might attack Sue in hopes of getting his hands on the ammo.

As they try to resolve their problem, time is going by.

More customers might enter the store.

The clerk might try to make a break.

Cops might show up.

Anything might happen.

They've got to resolve their conflicts and hit the road before something hits the fan.

I suddenly see a possible wind-up. Remember their kid? Remember how they're such good parents? Well, Susan wouldn't rush off in the car and leave the kid home alone, would she?

She brought him along.

He's out in the car, waiting.

But maybe he gets tired of waiting, and comes in to see what's taking so long.

Maybe the clerk grabs the kid to use as a shield.

Susan's kid.

You don't screw with HER KID!

She tosses a bullet to Spike. He catches it, feeds it into the revolver and strides toward the clerk, pulling the trigger until the round makes its way to the cylinder...

And Spike puts a bullet through the clerk's head.

And we have ourselves a story.

There is, however, one problem that should be dealt with.

Why didn't Spike load his gun before leaving the house?

The answer to that question could change the entire story.

For instance, maybe he forgot to grab the ammo because he'd had a serious fight with Susan, that morning. Or maybe he or Susan had set down something in front of the cartridges—a gift—so that he simply didn't see them and left them behind. Or maybe somebody else took them *out* of his gun for whatever reason.

The possibilities are almost endless.

But dealing with any of them would change the story drastically.

Let's say that we don't *want* to take the story into a completely new direction by dwelling on the story behind Spike walking out of the house without his ammo.

Simple.

It would be possible to ignore the issue. Just state it as a simple fact: he left his ammo home. Woops. These things happen. And these things *do* happen in real life. I enjoy allowing certain story elements to go unexplained sometimes.

Makes for realism. Crap happens.

However, some readers aren't happy with that sort of thing.

They want every aspect to be nicely explained. They've come to expect it from reading mediocre books and watching movies and TV shows written by the numbers.

So, let's give them a neat, logical explanation for Spike walking out of the house with his ammo.

One that won't intrude on the story.

Last night, Spike and Susan celebrated their anniversary.

Spike got looped. The next morning, when he staggers out of bed and goes to "work, he's suffering from a terrible hangover. He can hardly think straight, so he forgets his ammunition.

The hangover not only provides a simple explanation for the ammo oversight, but also gives us some insight into Spike's character and into his relationship with Susan. It might even give readers the idea that he doesn't *always* go around trying to shoot store clerks. It's just that today he has this *horrible hangover*. He's not "himself."

And so it goes.

"Stick Up" started out in one direction, and ended up somewhere unexpected.

In the old days, when writing for magazines such as *Ellery Queen*, *Alfred Hitchcock* and *Mike Shayne*, I would have kept the story simple and light. I probably would've ended it with a surprise such as Susan tossing ammo to Spike and saying, "I swear, you'd forget your head if it weren't attached." Period.

But that was in the old days.

Ever since I stopped "writing for the mystery magazines, I've been "going for it." I've felt completely free to do the stories my way.

This is now *exactly* the sort of story I would write if asked to contribute a crime story to an anthology. If I should write it as I've described it here, I'm sure it would be purchased and published.

Maybe I'll give it a whirl.

My 28 Favorite Short Stories/Novellas

1. "The Big Two-Hearted River" - Ernest Hemingway
2. "The Black Cat" - Edgar Allan Poe
3. "The Body" - Stephen King
4. "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" - Ernest Hemingway
5. "The Color Out of Space" - H.P. Lovecraft
6. "The Deep End" - Robert R. McCammon
7. "The Dunwich Horror" - H.P. Lovecraft
8. "The Fall of the House of Usher" - Edgar Allan Poe
9. "Iverson's Pits" - Dan Simmons
10. "Lamb to the Slaughter" - Roald Dahl
11. "The Man from the South" - Roald Dahl
12. "The Mist" - Stephen King
13. "The Monkey's Paw" - W.W. Jacobs
14. "Night They Missed the Horror Show" - Joe Lansdale
15. "One of the Missing" - Ambrose Bierce
16. "The Open Window" - Saki
17. "The Raft" - Stephen King
18. "Skin" - Roald Dahl
19. "The Squaw" - Bram Stoker
20. "The Tell-Tale Heart" - Edgar Allan Poe
21. "Ten Indians" - Ernest Hemingway
22. "To Build a Fire" - Jack London
23. "Traps" - F. Paul Wilson
24. "The Ugly File" - Ed Gorman
25. "Up in Michigan" - Ernest Hemingway
26. "The Voice in the Night" - William Hope Hodgson
27. "The Wendigo" - Algernon Blackwood
28. "The Willows" - Algernon Blackwood

On High Concepts

HIGH CONCEPTS FOR NOVELS ARE HIGHLY OVER-RATED.

But what are they?

A high concept is a *brilliant, earth shaking story gimmick that'll guarantee you a huge advance from your publisher, big publicity, a sure bestseller, and the sale of film rights to a major studio.*

A lot of writers beat their brains out looking for a high concept. I've done it myself. Generally, this results in little more than sore brains.

I know of writers who "test" ideas. They'll try out their concepts on friends, fellow writers, their agents or their editors, asking basically, "What about this one? Is *this* a high concept (alternately known as a 'breakout idea') or should I keep on looking?"

Some agents and editors might even request a selection of concepts from you, so *they* can have the pleasure of picking out the topic for your next book.

(If they do, you're in trouble.)

Now, I'm not a-gonna say there's no point in looking for high concepts.

They can't hurt.

You're certainly better off writing a novel with a terrific gimmick than one that has a mediocre gimmick or no gimmick at all. That stands to reason.

But a high concept is no guarantee of success.

A lot will depend on how well—and in what directions—you develop the concept. If you take it in a direction that your editor doesn't appreciate, you're sunk.

If you are serious about taking the "high concept" route, you really need to second-guess your editor and try to figure out how he would like see it developed. Try to read your editor's mind. Ask questions. Write the book to order.

If you do that, of course, you are a hack.

If you're going to be any good, you need to do it your way and take your chances that other people (including an editor) will appreciate what you've done with your story.

I've written several novels that, at least in my opinion, have high concepts. *The Stake*, *Savage*, *Quake* and *Body Rides*, for instance. In my opinion, if treated properly by publishers, every one of them had the potential to be a bestseller. They pretty much *did* live up to my hopes for them in the U.K., but not here in the U.S.

Why did none of them become bestsellers here in the States?

Because the publishers decided, for whatever reasons, that they *wouldn't be*.

The decision is based on a lot of factors, such as your "track record" and the publisher's notion of "what sells."

It has *nothing whatsoever* to do with the intrinsic value of a book.

Realize that.

Know it in your heart.

Know that book publishing is almost entirely a self-fulfilling prophecy on the part of the publisher. A book cannot be a major seller, or even a decent contender, unless the *publisher* decides that it will be. And the decision is made early.

It is usually made before the publisher has even offered you a contract.

See how much they offer you, and you'll immediately know whether they'll be putting any effort into selling your book and whether they plan to print up more than a bare minimum number of copies.

Since publishers are always on the lookout for a "high concept" novel, you might hit a homerun by giving them one.

Provided you're lucky or cunning enough to write it the way they think is appropriate. And provided you have no mediocre track record that'll warn them off.

My advice, however, is to avoid *treasure hunting* for a high concept.

Instead of trying to come up with the greatest gimmick in the history of the world, just go for a story that *you'd* like to read. In other words, write something that is close to your own experiences. And write it truly.

You can never go wrong that way.

And you won't have to worry about someone else beating you to the punch. Because if you do it right, you're writing a book that nobody *can* write but you.

You are the high concept.

On Outlines

WHEN I WAS IN SCHOOL, AN OUTLINE HAD A VERY SPECIFIC STRUCTURE. It looked something like this:

I. Topic Heading

A. a subdivision of the heading.

1. a subdivision of A.

2. and another.

a. with a couple of subdivisions

b. of its own.

1) and then you can go here

2) with further subdivisions

a) and then here

b) which gets a little crazy.

B. But if you have an A, you must have at least a B. It can have a host of subdivisions, too.

II. And you must have a II, or there was no point in having a .

III. And on and on it goes.

This used to be what people meant by an "outline." Among writers, agents and editors, however, an outline is something different.

It is a synopsis—a brief version of your story.

An "outline," or synopsis, might be written for your own use—as a blueprint for your novel—or as a selling device.

I've got comments about both.

When embarking on a novel, should you start by creating an outline so you'll have your route mapped out before you start the actual writing?

It's debatable.

I recommend against it. In my own opinion, doing an outline is risky business.

1. There's a good chance that you'll "shoot your wad" on the outline. When you get around to writing the novel itself, you might find that you aren't terribly excited about it. You feel as if you've already travelled this route and seen the sights before. So instead of writing the novel with a lot of creative energy, you may find yourself lukewarm about the thing. There's not much excitement in following an outline, fleshing it out, padding it. Your lack of enthusiasm will almost certainly show in the finished product. Your novel will probably have a "painted by the numbers" quality.
2. When writing an outline, you are building your novel on a superficial structure of logic. *Tins leads to this leads to this leads to this*, with all the causal elements carefully thought out. Which should make for a novel in which everything ties together very nicely. This might be a great "way to operate if you're building a house. But you're not an architect—you're Dr. Frankenstein trying to create life. Your novel doesn't need a blueprint, it needs lightning.
3. Even if you are able to breathe life into your carefully outlined novel, its plot will almost certainly be predictable. By the act of outlining, you have not allowed the story to grow naturally out of itself. Instead, you've developed it by imposing a step by step logic on the events. You think, "Well, *this* needs to happen next. And it should lead to *this*."

The problem is, most readers will already be familiar with the logical routine, so they're not only with you, they're one step *ahead* of you. Even a carefully calculated surprise, or "twist," isn't likely to come off very well if you've previously worked it all out, detail by detail, in your outline. If you want to surprise your readers, you need to surprise yourself.

A *character* has to surprise you, the writer, by doing something you never expected.

Or an *incident* needs to pop out of nowhere and screw things up.

If you outline, you're pretty much shooting down your chances of spontaneity.

My advice is this. After you've come up with an idea for your novel, tinker around with it for an hour or two. Make some notes to yourself until you have a general idea about where you want to go with it.

Then start writing.

As Hemingway said, "Write one true sentence." And then follow it with another.

Build your book one sentence at a time, meet the characters, get to know them, and let them lead the way. See where they want to take you. Play along. Let one event lead logically to another, but if something wild wants to happen, let it.

Learn by going.

An editor once told me that my plots seem very "haphazard," as if I never know what is supposed to happen next. He meant it as a criticism. But I think it's a quality that has contributed to whatever success I've had.

Readers often tell me, "I never know what's going to happen next."

They mean it as a high compliment.

And it means I'm achieving one of the desired effects. I *want* to keep them guessing—and reading.

I accomplish it by *not* outlining.

Most of the really good "writers I know do not work from outlines. They make up their novels as they go along, and hope for the best.

It may seem like a dangerous route. Like setting off on a long driving trip without a map. No telling *what* might happen or *where* you might end up!

Exactly.

A trip without a map makes for an exciting trip.

And you do end up getting where you're going.

It might not be where you'd *intended* to go. But it might be a *better* place.

When you do take the mapless trip, you'll discover something very odd and amazing. Magic happens.

Somehow, the bits and pieces of story and character and theme and setting end up *fitting together* in unexpected, often wonderful ways. Ways you never could've planned.

Almost as if an actual story is out there someplace—already created by someone else—and you've somehow tapped into it.

So don't worry about "getting lost" without an outline or "painting yourself into a corner."

Just start writing, head things in the right general direction and see what happens.

Let the destination take care of itself.

And if you *do* get lost—first make sure you're not off on a detour that might take you somewhere interesting. If it's leading you to a dead end or some other place you definitely don't want to visit, just backtrack to where you took the wrong turn. Go in a new direction. Your trip isn't "chipped in tablets," it's on an electronic screen or on paper. Making changes is usually a simple matter.

Take chances.

Take the roads not taken.

You can always revise.

The best time to write an outline of your novel is *afterward*.

Your agent may want one. Editors may want one.

So throw it together after you've finished writing the novel. That way, it can't hurt you.

If you write the outline *before* you're done with the book, you're asking not only for the damages I've described above, but you're inviting various external disasters.

Some agents like to sell novels on the basis of proposals.

That is, they'll shop around your outline, along with a few sample chapters. (This can't usually be done until after a couple of your novels has been sold.)

In theory, your new novel might consist of thirty pages—twenty pages of sample chapters and a ten page outline of the rest. You don't actually have to write an entire book unless a publisher buys it in advance.

Sounds great.

In the time it might take you to write a whole novel, you could probably write *twenty* proposals. One of them is *sure* to hit.

But there're always buts...

1. For obvious reasons, it's much better to have one completed novel than *any* number of proposals.
2. If your agent *does* sell one of your proposals, you will most likely receive a smaller advance than if he'd sold them the

same novel *after it was complete*.

3. If the proposal sells, you suddenly become obligated to write the actual novel. And you might find out, much to your surprise and alarm, that you're not *able* to write it. Maybe the topic is over your head. Maybe certain elements of the story, -when fleshed out, don't work the way they're supposed to. Until you've written all or most of a novel, you can never be absolutely sure it'll fly. You don't want to sell it in advance, only to find out too late that your story has no wings.

4. If your unfinished novel is sold on the basis of a proposal, the door is wide open for... *EDITORIAL INTERFERENCE*.

There is little excuse for editorial interference when the publisher has bought your completed book. If they want you to make significant changes, *Why the hell did they buy the book in the first place?*

If they've bought it on the basis of a proposal, however, anything goes.

Most likely, you'll hear from your editor. He will have a few "suggestions" about "fine tuning" your concept. He'll have reservations about how you propose to handle certain characters, scenes, plot-lines. He'll have ideas for how to give it more "mainstream appeal."

The suggestions will be ripe with common sense.

"He's an old man, but he's not stupid. Don't you think, when he realizes the fish is towing him out to sea, that he'd cut the line?"

"Supernatural stuff doesn't sell *nearly as* well as suspense. So why don't you dump the ghost stuff. How about having three different serial killers drop into Scrooge's bedroom?"
"He just *turns into* a cockroach? No, no, no. You need to explain *why*. Maybe he was involved in a science experiment that went awry. DNA is big, these days. Maybe you can explain it "with DNA."

"Now, this is just an idea. Let me run it up the flagpole, okay? If you don't want to salute, fine, but... why not play up the gay aspect? The *real* reason Huck and Jim take the raft together..."

And so it might go if you sell your novel on the basis of an outline and sample chapters. *Most editors wish they were writers. They will try to satisfy their frustrated creative urges on the back of your novel.*

If they get their hands on a proposal instead of a finished novel, they drool. You're handing them a chance to pretend they are writers. They now get to *participate* in the

creation of your novel.

If you don't go along with their "suggestions," they are in a position to wreck you. Aside from pouting and complaining, they might refuse to accept your finished manuscript. They can easily ruin any future you might've had with their employer.

They can even sabotage you with *other* publishers. In other words, you'd better go along with the editor's suggestions—or else.

Most editorial interference, however, can be avoided simply by selling your novel on the basis of itself, not on the basis of sample chapters and an outline.

Why outline your novel at all?

If you ask me, don't do it unless your story is so complex that you need an outline just to coordinate the logistics of it.

On Writers Block

IF YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH THE QUANTITY OF MY OUTPUT, YOU MAY BE Asking yourself whether I know anything at all about a topic like writer's block.

My output might appear to be evidence that I've never suffered from it.

On the other hand, maybe it shows that I've found ways to beat it.

Every writer has probably suffered from some degree of writer's block at one time or another. What is writer's block? Nothing more, really, than a state of mind that stops a writer's creative flow.

Symptoms usually include staring at a blank page or computer screen for hours, wanting desperately to write, wracking your mind for ideas or a starting place, but writing nothing. More severe symptoms might include not even trying—avoiding the desk, the computer, the typewriter, the pen, the paper.

The block might continue for hours, for days, for weeks or months or years. No doubt it must last a lifetime for some people.

What is behind this inability to write?

Here are some of the usual suspects.

You might have too many distractions. Distractions can take a Region of forms, from a barking dog to the noise of a television coming from a different room. An interrupting child or pet. An interesting activity going on outside your window.

A talk-radio topic that catches your ear on your office radio.

It is virtually impossible for most people to write if another person is in the room. And many of us need silence.

If distractions are the source of your troubles, try to eliminate them. Find a quiet place to work. A place where nobody will intrude on your privacy. If your home or apartment or dorm is too crowded or busy, go somewhere else. Write in a coffee shop, at the library, on

a park bench—in the back seat of your parked car.

Go anywhere necessary to get privacy and silence.

If you simply cannot *avoid* an environment full of distractions, learn to block them out. But *exterior* distractions are not always the problem. Often, writer's block is the result of *interior* troubles.

You might just be tired. Fiction writing takes a tremendous amount of mental and emotional energy. If you haven't gotten enough sleep, you may sometimes find yourself gazing blankly at a blank page. The solution? Simple and very effective. Take a nap and try again later.

You might be preoccupied. Troubles with finances, health, relationships, etc. can throw major disturbances into your head.

If your life is full of problems, do what you can to remedy them. If they are beyond remedy, ignore them. At least for the hours each day when you need to write, shut them out. Stick them into the back of your head, then go ahead and concentrate all your attention on writing.

One of the most common mental blocks comes from the What-The-Hell's-The-Use-Anyway Syndrome. You feel that, no matter what you might do, you'll never get published. As you see it, there are too many other writers out there, you're no better than they are, you can't imagine why anyone would ever bother to notice your work, and you don't stand a chance of succeeding. So why waste your life trying?

If you're an unpublished writer, you feel sure that you'll probably stay that way forever. If you're published, you might suffer from the syndrome because you feel that—no matter what you may write—it doesn't stand a chance of reaching the audience it deserves. You'll remain a mid-list -writer until you fade into oblivion. So why even try?

To deal with this problem I advise saying, "Screw it!"

Then go ahead and write.

Write for yourself. "Write the book you -want to -write.

Forget about competing with other writers, impressing editors, worrying whether anyone will ever publish your book or promote it, or whether it will ever get into any store or into the home of any reader.

Put it all behind you.

Sit down and write.

I know, easier said than done.

Here's a suggestion. If you can't get past the "What-The-Hell's-The-Use-Anyway" feelings, try reading.

Go to a book store and buy a few paperbacks that have recently been published in the area of your interest. Take them home. Read them...

And grin.

Because if you're a good writer yourself, you'll notice that the stuff you've just bought is *not so good*.

And you'll think, *I can write better than this!*

It's very encouraging to discover that much of what is being bought and published day in and day out is complete, utter, stinking crap.

The realization is liberating.

Knowing that so much crap is being published, you have absolutely no reason to be despondant about your chances of eventual success. (Many of our greatest books were written by people who picked up their pens for the first time after reading a piece of published junk and thinking, *I can do better than that*.)

All you need to do is vigorously, persistently write non-crap.

Of course, a great many editors aren't capable of distinguishing crap from non-crap, so the journey to success may be long and frustrating. But sooner or later, good material will be discovered and published. I'm certain of that.

Fairly certain.

At any rate, you'd be an idiot to let the What-The-Hell's-The-Use-Anyway Syndrome hold you back. You have a fine chance of being a successful writer—if you persist.

Writer's block can also be caused by confusion and despair about how to proceed with a novel or story. You're not sure what to do, so you can't do *anything*.

This may happen when you're trying to start a new project—or when you're in the midst of one.

When just trying to begin a new project, the difficulty often come from a fear that your basic story idea isn't good enough.

When you're first starting out as a writer, you may have an exaggerated idea about what "good enough" means. How can you possibly come up with an idea that hasn't already been used *and* is something that people may -want to read it? After you've had some books published, you will probably be faced with competing against yourself. When I finished writing *The Stake*, I ran into a block because I was worried about living up to my own creation.

The Stake was in many ways a much better novel than anything I'd written before. I didn't want my next novel to be *not as good* as *The Stake*. Therefore, I found myself unable to write anything at all.

Here's my solution.

I thought, *Screw it. I'll write the book I want to write.*

I'll write the best book I can. If it isn't as good as *The Stake*, *too bad*.

Face it. You can only write as good as you can write. Give them the best *you* can. If they want more than that, the hell with them.

There is, however, life after the "screw you" phase.

Once you've determined which story you want to tell, "good enough" or otherwise, you might *still* encounter troubles getting started.

The trick is, don't let them stop you.

Take a while to analyze possible sources of the trouble.

In my experience, difficulties in getting started often have very specific causes.

Maybe this isn't the story you really should be writing at this time. You sense that it -won't -work, that something about it is beyond your reach. Maybe it's too complex. Maybe it's missing a key ingredient that you can't quite identify. Maybe you should put it aside and take another look at it down the road. (Many of the books that I've written recently would've been *impossible* for me to have written in my earlier years. I needed more experience, more confidence, more knowledge.) Your block may be the result of strong feelings, possibly on a subconscious level, that writing this particular book at this particular time is a *bad* idea.

If that's the case, the cure is to move on to a new project.

However, your difficulty in getting started may have cures that are far less drastic.

A common problem is that you might be trying to start your story at the wrong point in time. Maybe you're trying to begin the tale too early—too many days or weeks before the real conflict gets under way. No matter what genre you're writing in, the best place to begin is *when the trouble starts*. Begin telling your tale too early, and you might just be floundering around, trying to write scenes that serve little or no purpose. Begin with the trouble, and things should run smoothly.

If your plot doesn't *have* trouble, drop it. Because if you don't have trouble in your story, you don't have a story.

You may be surprised—and delighted—to discover how easily the words flow if you skip the preliminaries and start your tale at the moment the trouble first rears its head.

Another possible cure for difficulties in getting started on a new project is to *change the point of view*. Time and time again, I've had problems with a new novel until I realized that I was trying to tell it from the wrong viewpoint. Some stories might require third-person viewpoints of multiple characters, while other stories might call for a first-person viewpoint. Sometimes, just realizing that you *have* to tell it in a very subjective first-person voice instead of in third person can make all the difference—and clear away your writer's block.

You may be starting to tell your story at the right point in time, and using the best possible viewpoint, but then run into difficulties because you're planning to focus your plot on the wrong character. You run into the block because you know something isn't right—but you don't know what.

When making my preliminary notes for *After Midnight*, I thought my story would be about a teenaged boy looking out his bedroom window at night and seeing a mysterious young woman lingering in his back yard. Though I made quite a few pages of notes about where to go from there, I felt *wrong* about it. But suddenly I thought, *What if we reverse roles? A woman looking out her window sees a mysterious guy!* It changed everything, and I knew it would work.

When trying to develop *The Stake*, I figured to have a man find a stake-in-the-heart body while digging a hole in his back yard. From there, however, the plot was pretty much up for grabs. I didn't know where to take it until the notion popped into my head that the man should be a horror writer. After that, everything fell into place as if pre-ordained.

Trying to develop *Out Are The Lights*, I had nothing more than a book about a movie theater showing snuff films—until I realized the potential of making my main character deaf.

Moby Dick was probably a pretty ho-hum idea for a book until Melville decided to take away one of Ahab's legs.

My suggestion to get past the block: ask yourself how the story might go if you made it happen to *someone else*. Play with the ages of your characters, their genders, their careers, special interests, etc. You may stumble onto a notion that will suddenly bring your story to life—and blast away your writer's block.

After you've decided that your story is starting at the best point in time, that you've found the right point of view and that you've selected a terrific cast of characters—something else may be still prevent you from getting started.

But you don't know what.

My advice is to sit down at your pad of paper, typewriter or keyboard and simply *play around* with your story. Don't try to write it. just toy with it. Ask yourself what sort of *events* you envision taking place. Who does what to whom? What leads to what? Just fool around for a while and see what happens.

More than likely, you'll very quickly astound yourself by discovering what you want to do, where you want to go.

So then you immediately go to a new page, write "Chapter One," and have at it.

If all else fails, do what Hemingway said.

Begin your story by writing one true sentence. Then follow it with another. And keep adding sentences. Don't worry about where they are taking you—just follow them. Soon, you'll find yourself telling a story.

If you run into a block in the midst of a project, you should stop and think. Somewhere nearby, you probably took a wrong turn. You made something happen that shouldn't have happened. You had the wrong character do something. You forgot to put in a necessary scene. You're letting the plot bog down.

Or you're *about* to head off in a bad direction and the block is trying to warn you off.

All you need to do is identify the problem, find the better way to go, and go there. You'll leave the block behind.

In many cases, writer's block is actually your friend. It warns you of something wrong about the story you're writing or about to write.

All you need to do is determine the source of the problem.

When you correct the problem, that form of writer's block will vanish and you'll be able to plunge on ahead.

The key, always, is to plunge on ahead.

Let nothing stop you.

On Rejection

REJECTION SLIPS ARE BADGES OF HONOR.

Purple Hearts.

They mean that you've done your duty. You've written your stuff and sent it out. You've done your part.

Show me a writer who doesn't have a stack of rejection slips and I'll show you an unpublished writer.

The rejections can feel like a kick in the stomach when you get them, but they are part of the life. They're the receipts you get in the mail each time you pay your dues.

Eventually, if you are persistent, you'll open an envelope that isn't self-addressed, it will contain a letter of acceptance, and you'll be a "published author."

In a period of five or six years, I collected at least thirty rejection slips from *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, fifteen or twenty from *Ellery Queen*, and numerous rejection slips from other magazines.

They're not fun to get.

But what you must understand is that *a story can be rejected* for any of several reasons. True, maybe it's just a lousy story. Or not a *story*, at all. Maybe it's badly written. On the other hand, maybe the editor had a headache when he or she read it. Or maybe the magazine had recently bought a story with a similar plot. Or maybe your piece is too violent for their taste. Maybe the editor thinks it is sexist. Maybe your story has a dog in it, but the editor is a cat person. Maybe the editor thinks your main character is too pushy or not pushy enough. Or maybe the publisher has a backlog of stories and just isn't interested in buying *any new* ones just now.

Your material *might* even be rejected because it is too unusual, too original, doesn't fit the stereotypes or the editor's expectations of what a story *ought* to be. Maybe you've dared to enter unknown territories and the publisher is unwilling to risk the adventure.

In other words, it ain't necessarily a bad story.

This is true of any manuscript you submit, whether it's a short story sent to a magazine or a novel sent to a publisher.

It may be a perfectly fine piece of work.

More often than not, its rejection will have little or nothing to do with the work's intrinsic merits.

So be not glum!

Get your work into the right hands, and it *might* sell.

First, make sure that your manuscript is seen by a wide sampling of editors. If none of them wants to buy it, go ahead and put it away.

But don't *throw* it away.

The finished product is an asset.

Time goes by. You keep on writing. Some of your stuff sells. You develop a following.

Down the line, you might very well be able to sell the very same story or novel that nobody wanted at the time it was written.

In my own case, I spent years sending out short stories to magazines. I accumulated scads of rejection slips. After my novels began to sell, however, I rarely wrote or submitted short stories. Soon, editors were *asking me* for stories for their anthologies and magazines. About half the time, I *turned down* the offers for one reason or another. So the situation had reversed itself.

The same situation is true of novels. Once you've had a certain amount of success, you might be able to sell some of those old novels that had been rejected when you were a "nobody."

In many cases, they were only rejected in the first place *because* you were a nobody—not because there was anything wrong with them.

Get big enough, and you can sell just about anything you ever wrote.

You may *think* you'll never get that big.

But if you're good and you persist, you might.

So don't let the rejections get you down. Keep everything.

And be ready to dust a few things off, some day—polish them up a bit...maybe change the price of gasoline, change the character's typewriter into a computer, replace the eight-track tape player with a CD changer, etc.

In your old, rejected stuff, you may have some good stories, good novels that you'll be able to sell someday—even though nobody wanted them when you were young and unknown and *needed* the acceptance and money.

On Book Covers

MOST AUTHORS, MOST OF THE TIME, HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO CONTROL over the artwork or written material that appears on the covers of their books.

They're lucky if they get to keep their titles.

Usually, publishers make all the decisions about such matters without consulting the author.

The writer is at the mercy of strangers in the editorial, sales, and publicity departments. They decide what is best for the book. Then they do it, never asking the writer's opinion. Neat deal.

If they put a great cover on the book, terrific.

Unless the book finds itself spine-out on the shelves of whatever bookstores deign to carry it. If the book is by a "nobody" and gets no special push by the publisher, that'll be its position. Most bookstores display thousands of books. The important books arrive by the dozens, sometimes by the hundreds, and are stacked everywhere. Also, every important book is placed on the shelf in such a way that its front cover faces the customer.

Meanwhile, two or three copies of the no-name's book are shelved side by side, spine out. In such cases, the cover means zilch.

Because nobody will ever see it.

Such a situation would make this little essay an excercise in futility. So we'll shove the spine-out scenerio aside and proceed with the assumption that cover is facing the customer.

If it is a *great* cover, the book will probably sell like hotcakes.

If it's an okay cover, the book will sell okay.

And if it stinks?

It can destroy an author's career.

Except in a few cases of bestselling authors whose *names* are enough to sell anything they write, the cover of a book usually means the difference between a hit and a flop. Even with such stars, however, the quality of the cover has an impact on sales.

If readers are browsing, looking for a new experience rather than going straight to books by familiar authors, their first sight of every book will take in nothing more than its title and cover art. If a certain book catches their eyes because of those elements, then they might pull it off the shelf for a closer look.

As for the title, it *might* be the work of the author. Every novel is submitted with a title.

Maybe half the time, however, the publisher decides to change it. They don't like the author's choice in naming his book, so they come up with a "better" one.

The author might not like the new title, but the publisher has the final say in the matter. If he doesn't like it, he can lump it.

As for the cover design and illustration, the writer usually has no input at all. Every decision is made by the publisher. The writer's first look at the cover comes after it has been printed.

So the title and cover illustration, the two elements that first draw the eyes of browsers, are out of the author's control.

What about the browsers' next step on the path to purchase?

After pulling the book off the shelf, they usually read whatever is written on the front cover. Aside from the title and the author's name (which they've never heard of), there is usually a brief descriptive passage about the book. Something like, "When the horror won't stay on the movie screen," or "Come to the carnival of death for a screaming good time!" or "The dead are rising—to live and lust again!" Who writes this material? Not the author.

What else is on the front cover?

Maybe nothing, or maybe a quote that praises the book. Maybe even a couple of quotes. We call them "blurbs" or "endorsements."

Sometimes, they are phrases plucked from a published review.

Other times, they come from authors -who are recognized in the field. Sometimes, they are fake.

My old agent, Jay Garon, was not above making up endorsements and saying they were

given by one of his famous clients. "Laymon writes with a typewriter ribbon soaked in cold blood"—Burt Hirschfeld, author of *Fire Island*." Nope, Jay Garon. When I found out about the deception, I questioned Mr. Hirschfeld. He said it was okay with him. But he hadn't read *The Cellar* and he hadn't given the quote.

Mendacity.

If you look behind the scenes, you'll find that a *lot* of quotes come from writers who share the same agent or publisher as the author whose book gets a favorable blurb. Often, too, the creator of the quote is a friend of the author who is on the receiving end. I even know of instances in which an author provided *his own* endorsements, penning them under a nom de plume.

(Telling tales out of school, the real question ain't who wrote the blurb, it's who wrote the book. Plenty of major bestselling books are not being written by the person whose name appears as the author. Fraud, if you ask me. But that's another story, and I don't want to get into it here. If I dealt with it, I'd get my butt sued from fifteen different sides.)

Back to cover endorsements.

If I am asked for an endorsement by a friend or by my own agent or publisher, it's great if I like the book. But sometimes I don't. This creates a moral dilemma. Should I be a stand-up guy and give the book a good quote? If I do that, I'm saying to my fans, "Richard Laymon recommends this book." I hate to do that if I think the book stinks.

I've gone both "ways on the issue. If I decide to cave in, however, I'll make sure to write something mundane and noncommittal. Like, "What a book!"

In other words, my business or personal relationships prevent me from being honest.

Every author probably faces the same problem. No doubt, plenty of them end up saying nice things about books they can't stand.

Publishers put huge amounts of faith in blurbs. Quotes from Stephen King or Dean Koontz are especially treasured. (Even though, when they *get* such quotes, they sometimes forget to use them.)

Browsers, however, should not put too much faith in cover blurbs.

I'm sure a lot of quotes are perfectly legitimate. Publishers often send bound galleys of upcoming books to various authors and reviewers, asking for endorsements. This practice can bring in useful comments from people who are unbiased.

I am sometimes sent proofs and requests for quotes, myself.

Strangely enough, I have sometimes been asked for quotes *by publishers who refuse to buy my books!*

Where is the logic in that?

They don't think I'm good enough to publish, but they obviously believe my name will help the sales of some *other* writer's horror novel.

Give me a break.

I don't give them quotes.

Let us now return our attention to the bookstore browsers.

In their quest for a good read, they have looked at a book's title, cover illustration, descriptive passage, and blurb(s).

None of which the author has had the slightest amount of control over (unless he cheated and wrote his own blurb).

If still interested, most browsers will probably now turn to the back of the book. (Or inside the dust jacket. That which appears on the back of a paperback can usually be found on the inside flaps of a hardcover's dust jacket.)

On the back cover, they'll find a few sentences or paragraphs that tell what the book is about. This is almost never written by the author. It was probably written by an editor. Maybe in collaboration with people in the sales and publicity departments. The author will usually first see this material after the cover has been printed.

In some cases, the information on the back cover is inaccurate or confusing. Sometimes, it is intentionally misleading. (If the book is a collection of short fiction, they often try to make it appear to be a novel.)

In some cases, the story description on the back cover gives away every major secret of the book's plot.

Even if it doesn't blow the *entire* story, it tells the reader enough to ruin plenty of the surprises that the author worked hard to create.

You never know how much will be given away until you've already read the description. By then, the damage has been done. If I had my way, nobody would see the back cover of a paperback until *after* the book has been read.

What else can be found on a book cover? There might be a photo of the author, but only if he's a celebrity—a movie star or someone who has already written a number of bestsellers. In some cases, even the photos have elements of mendacity. Some were taken

twenty years ago. Others depict someone who is not actually the person who wrote the book.

There's an old saying, "You can't judge a book by its cover."

Which is about as true as any old saying is likely to get.

In the United States, the author of a book usually has nothing whatsoever to do with just about any aspect of his own book's cover.

But if the cover is lousy, the book will not sell.

And who gets blamed?

Not the publishing executives who chose the title, chose the cover concept, chose the artist, chose which quotes to use (if any), or wrote the descriptive material on the front and back covers...the *only* stuff generally seen by browsers before they decide to buy or not to buy a certain book.

Nope.

The browser probably made his decision before reading the first sentence of the author's actual words.

But the blame for the book's failure drops like a ton of crap on the head of the author. Ironically, publishers seem to believe that their covers are responsible for the *success* of a book. I once heard a senior person from a major publishing firm claim that the choice of an orange color for a certain paperback *made* the book a bestseller and launched the stellar career of a certain author whose name we all know.

So they believe that their covers *create* bestsellers, but they don't seem to accept the notion that their covers might also create flops.

Every flop is the fault of the author.

And the word gets around.

In the New York mainstream publishing establishment, everybody knows everybody. And they talk.

"Oh, his stuff just doesn't sell. If I were you, I wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole."

"Thanks for the warning."

All that I've just written is subject to debate.

And I'm sure that exceptions exist.

Bestselling authors, for instance, certainly have *some* control over the packaging of their books. (Oddly enough, even the biggest authors rarely get the final word on such matters.) Also, practices do vary from publisher to publisher.

And nothing I've written here about author involvement with covers should be applied to the U.S. small presses.

What I wrote is based on my personal experiences with many of the major U.S. establishment publishers—and to a lesser extent on my knowledge of what has happened to fellow authors who are friends of mine. Like the publishers, we talk.

The situation I described above also has nothing to do with my experiences with Headline House in the United Kingdom.

With Headline, I am consulted about the packaging of my books.

We sometimes wrangle about the titles. Sometimes I win, sometimes I don't.

Mike Bailey, who has been my editor for many years, usually asks me for suggestions about cover art. I may give him a couple of ideas. He later sends me some artist's drawings and asks about my preferences.

Mike also writes the material for my covers. His descriptions of the novel's contents are usually based on a synopsis provided by me. He sends all the cover writing to me for approval, and it's almost always perfect. He is not only a good writer, but he is careful about what he tells.

A bit different from the U.S., huh?

Here, I've had absolutely no input about any aspect of any cover. With Headline, I participate in every aspect.

On at least one occasion, my participation in the cover had some very peculiar consequences.

Headline publishes my material *very* fast. They often begin production of a book before I've even finished writing it.

I was still in the middle of writing *Island* when Mike Bailey called to ask for ideas about the cover art. I told him a little about the story. Then I said that the cover might show a sunny tropical beach with an inlet in the background. Offshore is a yacht. The illustration might be from a viewpoint as if we're looking out at the beach and yacht from just inside

the border of a jungle.

As we discussed the possibilities, we came up with the idea of showing a palm tree in the foreground—with a weapon stuck in its trunk.

My *Headline* covers almost always depict a weapon—usually a cutting implement: a saw, a meat cleaver, an ax, a knife, etc.

Whatever it is, it usually drips blood.

So I told Mike about some of the weapons used in *Island*.

He said he would give the matter some thought, talk it over with the artist, others at *Headline* and Bob Tanner. (Bob seems to have a lot of influence on the packaging of my books.)

The result, some time later, was a very nice artist's sketch of the beach and inlet and yacht, with a palm tree in the foreground. A spear was stuck in tree trunk.

Uh-oh.

I phoned Mike.

"It *can't be* a spear," I explained. "They've made their spears out of sticks. The points are *whittled*. They'd *never* penetrate a tree trunk."

Mike, of course, immediately recognized the problem.

I suggested that the spear be replaced by a Swiss Army knife—a sharp -weapon that not only appeared in my story but could definitely stick in a tree.

But I also mentioned the presence on the island of a straight razor.

The straight razor had already *appeared* in my book, but had not been used in any significant way. Unlike the Swiss Army knife, which played a bigger role.

I'm not sure "why, but the decision eventually came in against the Swiss Army knife. Stuck into the palm tree on the cover of my book would be a straight razor.

Here's the thing.

As mentioned early, I was still in the process of writing *Island*.

And I now knew that a straight razor would appear prominently on the cover.

So I beefed up the role of the razor.

And the book was better for it.

That razor...

Ooo, the places it went, the things it did!

All because of some decisions about what to put on the cover.

Before leaving the subject of covers, I must mention that nearly all of my Headline dustjacket and cover illustrations have been done by the artist Steve Crisp. They've all been great, and I'm sure that no small part of my success in the United Kingdom has been due to his artistry. My deep appreciation, Steve.

On “Real” Jobs

YOU'RE AN ASPIRING WRITER.

But everyone warns you that you need a "real job to fall back on."

An annoying thing for them to say.

It demeans you from the get-go.

Besides, everyone has it backwards. You don't need a real job to "fall back on" in case the writing career goes on the fritz. Instead, you need the real job to sustain you during the early years, *before* the writing career has blossomed enough to provide you with a decent annual income. (See "On Money.")

There is little doubt that you will need a "real job" during the early stages of your writing career.

Now, what sort of job should you take?

First, it should be one that you like. If you're very lucky, you may only need it for five years. More likely, though, you may need to turn out fiction for ten years before you'll be able to make a decent living at it. It may take longer. And some people are never able to make it as a full time writer. (Which I figure is their fault. In my own opinion, those who don't make it generally fail because they don't try hard enough. My theory is, I'm an average guy. If I can do it, anyone can. *If* he works at it hard enough.)

Okay. So try to find employment in a job that you won't mind keeping for a decade or longer. That is most important. But be careful. If you like the job *too 'much* and let it consume your time and energy, that'll be the end of you as a novelist.

Second most important, look for a job that gives you the maximum amount of free time. A job in education is ideal for this reason. Most teachers get off work in mid-afternoon and receive three to four months of vacation each year. An entire novel can be "written during one summer vacation. (I wrote *The Cellar* during one.) Being a teacher is an ideal side-career for a great many reasons. A possible drawback is that some educators get so caught up in preparing lesson plans, grading papers, etc., that they have trouble getting

around to their fiction. This need not happen, though. Even the most conscientious teacher in the world should be able to find an hour or two each day for pursuing a career as an author.

If a career in education isn't right for you, look for any sort of job that might allow you extra blocks of free time. The fewer hours per day you need to work at the "real job," the more time you can devote to writing. If you can earn enough money at some sort of part-time job (such as substitute teaching, construction work, "consulting," office temporary work, etc.) so much the better.

It is probably best to avoid jobs that involve writing. (A lot of people might disagree with this, but it's my opinion.) In many cases, the writing you do for your job will put an enormous strain on your urge to write fiction in your spare time. You've been writing all day. Probably the last thing you'll want to do, after getting home from work, is to sit down in front of your computer for another hour or two.

The need to hold a "real job" is not entirely a bad thing.

Non-writing jobs can be valuable to you as a writer beyond their function of providing a stable income.

You might want to seek out jobs that will provide you with colorful background material for your fiction. Some of the most successful novelists have been doctors, seamen, police officers, lawyers, and soldiers. But such jobs require a lot of time and dedication. They aren't for everyone. Also, some of the most colorful jobs can get you maimed or killed.

No matter what sort of job you take in order to make ends meet, you'll find that it offers you a lot of valuable experiences. You'll learn the ins and outs of whatever business it might be.

And you'll probably be forced into contact with *people*.

People!

People—characters—are at the center of everything you will ever 'write. (They'll also be your audience.) So pay close attention to everyone you meet at work. Learn their physical characteristics, their quirks, their charms and flaws. Then, when you sit down to write your fiction, use what you've learned about them.

Take full advantage of the situation. After you've given up the "real job," you'll no longer have such close contact with so many people. You'll actually lose a great source of fresh material.

(However, you'll be more than glad to lose most of it.)

Finally, you should try to avoid taking any job that *involves* you to any large extent—intellectually or emotionally. Your job should not consume you. *It's something you do to*

make ends meet while you write. When you're not actually on the job, you need to be able to shut it out, ignore it, leave it behind.

In a very real sense, you'll be an imposter at the "real job." You're putting on a good show at being a clerk, a secretary, a teacher, a carpenter, a truck driver, an accountant, a computer repairman, a salesman, a lawyer, a doctor, a janitor, a guard, a cop.. You should do a *good* job, but you're an imposter and a spy— you're a writer.

On Money

NO ASPIRING WRITER LIKES TO HEAR THIS. I SURE DIDN'T. BUT IF YOU want to write fiction for a living, you will need another source of income.

Either find yourself a full-time job or marry yourself a working spouse—unless you have plenty family money and don't need to worry about income.

Though it is certainly possible to earn a living at the writer's trade, the chances of making much money early in your career are very slim. Virtually non-existent.

First, be advised that you can't earn a living by writing short stories. There aren't enough markets. And the markets that do exist (anthologies and a few magazines) don't pay much.

Unless you sell a story to a really top market (such a *Playboy*) you'll be lucky to get more than a couple of hundred dollars for it.

Take a look at the math. If you're incredibly good and prolific and write a story every two weeks and they *all* sell, you would have 26 stories over the course of a year. If every one of them sold for \$200, you would be earning an annual income of \$5,200. (At least you wouldn't have to pay income tax.)

To earn a living, you must write novels.

Here is another tough truth: the first novel you write probably "won't sell. When you hear stories about a "first novel" that takes the literary world by storm, they're referring to an author's first *published* novel. It might be the second, third, or twelfth novel that the author actually wrote. Those earlier ones just weren't fit to be published.

Almost *nobody's* first attempt at "writing a novel results in anything worth reading—except maybe as a curiosity. (This truth wouldn't necessarily apply to the first attempt at a novel by a seasoned poet, playwright, screenwriter, journalist, or short story writer.)

Why bother to write the first novel if it "won't sell?

For one thing, there is a chance, however slim, that it *might* sell. For another, you have to write the first novel or you'll never get down the line to the one that does sell.

It's a step toward your destination. Without taking the first step, you just don't get there at all.

Okay.

Let's move on—to your first novel that sells.

When you finally hear that a publisher has made an offer to buy your novel, celebrate! No matter what the publisher intends to pay you, this is one of the great moments of your life. *Your book has sold!* Almost everyone *dreams* of selling a novel, but you now stand among the select who have *done* it. Enjoy your triumph. You deserve it. Scream and dance. Call everyone you know and blurt out the news. Break out the adult beverage of your choice. Go to a fine restaurant if you can afford it.

But don't quit your job.

You'll want to.

Oh, boy, will you want to!

In the euphoria of your first novel sale, you'll have an overwhelming urge to quit your job and write full time.

Resist it.

Here's why.

For one thing, the publisher probably won't let you have the full amount of the advance all at once. Depending on your contract, you may get half the money when you sign the contract (known as "on-sign" money) and the other half upon publication of the book. That second half can be elusive. They probably won't publish the book for *at least* a year. Maybe not for a year and a half. After the book *is* published, you'll have to wait two or three months longer before you actually receive the payment.

As for the "on-sign" money—you probably won't see a penny of it for four to six months. A couple of months might pass before the contract is even finalized. After that, most publishers will keep the on-sign money for at least two more months before sending it to your agent. Only the very best agents will then send the payment to you immediately. They have clerical work to do—such as removing their 15% (very few agents take only 10%). Like the publishers, many agents will take their time about sending your money to you. (It appears that they have other uses for it.)

The upshot is, don't expect to see your on-sign money any time soon. My advice: after a month has gone by, start bugging your agent. Ask where the money is. You might get it

faster—particularly if your agent isn't naturally aggressive—if you pester him a bit. (The squeaky wheel gets the oil.) Encourage him to pester the publisher.

In my own situation, I had an excellent agent named Ralph Vicinanza who was very diligent about getting money from publishers. After a reasonable amount of time had gone by, he would start phoning the publisher *daily* to ask about the missing payment. My current agent, Bob Tanner, does a great job of getting the money and sending it to me as fast as possible.

If you have an agent who isn't aggressive about obtaining your money or who doesn't forward it to you promptly—find a new agent. Find one who cares about you, who realizes you *need* that money, sometimes desperately.

Let's move on.

You finally receive the on-sign payment for your first novel—less your agent's fee.

Look at the check.

How long will you be able to live off it?

At the lower end of the scale, you might get only \$1,500 to \$2,000 for a first novel, especially if it's to be published as a paperback original. Somewhat better houses might offer you \$5,000. You'd be lucky to get an advance of more than \$5,000 from a U.S. publisher for a first novel.

At that rate, how many novels would it take to earn a good annual income?

If you wrote *four* books in a year, they all sold and you got the entire amount on each acceptance—you would be up to a grand total of \$20,000 for a year of writing. (\$17,000 after the agent has taken his fee.)

Not exactly a fortune, is it?

And—I hate to write this—but your next novel *might not sell*. Mine sure didn't.

After your first sale, your publisher "will have an option to buy your next work. But they don't *have* to buy it. And for any number of reasons, they might not. You can then try to sell it to a different publisher, but that might not be easy.

The advance money from your first sale could very well be the only writing income you'll get for a "whole year—or longer.

How far can you stretch \$2,000 or even \$5,000?

Of course, your advance *might* be higher. Sometimes, a writer really gets lucky—comes up with the right book at the right time and gets it to the right editor—and your advance might be astronomical. If that happens, you're in a different realm. You can probably do without most of my advice. Enjoy!

The fact is, however, a first novel makes an author rich so rarely that you don't really need to bother your head about it.

Let's talk about more likely sceneries.

Your first novel is bought for \$5,000 or less. About a year later, it is published. Suppose it does *really* well? That can happen. It happened to me with *The Cellar*.

Your initial \$5,000 is an advance against royalties. You might be entitled to 8% of the book's cover price, meaning you get eight cents for each dollar. If the eight cents add up to more than \$5,000, you have earned back your advance and you will be owed additional money.

Say your book sold so many copies that you earn \$80,000 over your advance. The publisher has to send you \$80,000! You're in the chips! Your ship has come in!

Now, at last, you can quit your job!

Well, maybe not.

There are things called "accounting periods" and "monies being held back against future returns."

The first accounting period generally ends about six months after a book's publication date. About two months after the end of the accounting period, your agent should be sent a royalty check. That is at least *eight months* after the book was published—but frequently longer.

But will you get \$80,000? You wish.

You'll get more like \$34,000.

\$40,000 minus \$6,000 for your agent (\$4,000 if you're lucky enough to have an agent that only takes 10%).

The missing \$40,000 of the \$80,000 you think you're owed is being "held against returns."

In truth, it is being held so that the publisher can keep it longer. They use your money for other purposes, such as paying salaries, printing costs, advances to other authors, whatever.

Unless maybe they're just going for the interest on it.

Okay, so you ended up with \$36,000 instead of \$80,000.

No big deal, right? You'll get the rest next time.

Wrong.

Six months later, you should receive your second royalty statement for the book. But it won't be for the \$36,000 you probably expected. It'll be in the amount of \$17,000. (\$20,000 minus your agent's fee.) Six months after that, you'll get \$7,225. Six months later, it'll be half that amount. Six months later...Each payment will be half as much as the previous one until the amount has been whittled down to nothing. Eventually, you do get your full \$80,000. It takes five or six years, though.

If that shocks you, it should.

Somebody is getting screwed, and it is the author.

However, you should consider yourself very fortunate if you have earned out your advance. It is a sign that your book did better than the publisher expected, and that they didn't pay you a high enough advance in the first place.

Many writers never see a royalty check.

Let's get back to advances—something writers *do* see if they sell a book.

If your first novel does reasonably well (but is no blockbuster), you might be offered the same amount for your second book. Or maybe a couple of thousand more. (Or they might dump you. Who knows?)

After a few novels that have all sold reasonably "well, you might be able to get your advance up to \$10,000 or \$15,000.

Which isn't too bad. You're fairly successful if they offer you that much.

But they probably won't buy another book from you for a while because, all other factors aside (such as rejections), most publishers don't want to publish more than one book per year by any author.

So, can you live on \$15,000 per year?

Let's take it to the next step. If you're *very* successful (but still not a bestseller), you might be offered an advance of \$50,000 or even a little more. And maybe you get a contract for two or three books at that amount. Now we're talking real money.

Say it's a three-book contract for \$150,000. Sounds great. And it *isn't* bad.

The contract, of course, will divide up your payment like a pie being fed to the 101st Airborne. You'll get a good chunk of on-sign money. (Which will lead to *owing* a big chunk to your friends at the IRS—you need to pay quarterly estimated income taxes, you know. After the on-sign money, your payments will be divvied out in much smaller portions. You'll get a payment on acceptance of each book, and on publication of each.

Already, we're talking about a seven-way split. If your contract includes both hardback and paperback publication, the money will arrive on ten different occasions. (These matters vary a lot, depending on many factors.)

If all goes well, you'll receive most of your \$150,000 over a period of three years. This would give you an income of approximately \$50,000 per year.

But something might go wrong. Maybe the publisher doesn't *accept* your second book, or your third. Maybe your first book doesn't sell as well as they'd hoped, so they look for ways to get out of the contract.

A lot can go wrong, and usually does.

Many U.S. publishers don't exactly keep their promises...or their contracts.

Even if you're lucky enough to get the entire \$150,000, it doesn't seem like quite so much money after it has been spread over a period four or five years.

On a really bad note, the sales of your first or second or third novel might disappoint your publisher, so you don't get offered another contract. And word gets around that your stuff doesn't sell so well...

I've painted a very gloomy picture, haven't I? Well, plenty of writers will be quick to point out that I didn't paint it gloomy enough.

The thing is, you need to know the score.

You don't want to be taken by surprise by the tough facts of a writer's life *after you've* sold your first novel and quit your job.

Hang on to that job.

Unless you've got income from another source, you'll run into extremely bad times if you try prematurely to make a living from your writing alone.

I don't know much about inherited money. If you've got so much that you don't need a

job, you can write full time without any problems. Whether or not you'd be driven by a hunger to succeed might be a different matter.

If your spouse has a good job and *is* willing to support you and the family while you try to be a writer, that's great. And it may be a real solution if you're a woman and a housekeeper.

In spite of "women's liberation," however, the man is still almost always expected (lip-service to the contrary) to be the bread winner of a family.

No matter how "liberated" your wife might be, you'd better get ready for some big-time resentment if you stay home to write fiction but don't quickly produce some decent money.

Before you know it, your wife will almost certainly start to consider you a loser, a loafer, a freeloader. You'll feel enormous pressure to succeed. And you don't need that.

What you need is a job of your own.

As I realized from hard experiences, a job of your own gives you *great freedom*.

Without it, you're under horrible financial stress. Even if your books are selling okay, you have to wait and wait and wait for payments to arrive. You watch your bank account dwindle away. You watch your credit card balances grow till you hit your limits. You watch bills come in...bills you can't pay. And you watch for the mailman, praying that today, at last, he'll bring you the check you've been expecting and expecting...

Maybe an on-publication payment that's three months overdue. Maybe the check'll arrive in time for you to pay your mortgage or your rent or your car insurance or your income tax. (It almost never does.)

With a job that pays the way, all those troubles vanish.

Don't give it up until you're *absolutely sure* you can get along just fine without it.

A good job is a lifeboat. Though the temptation might be overwhelming, don't jump off it and start swimming at the first sign of an island. The island is probably a lot farther away than it looks.

While it is very difficult to *make a living* as a fiction writer, income derived from writing can be a great source of *additional income*. It's like moonlighting as your own boss.

You work your own hours. Whatever you're able to make, no matter how little, is extra income, like a bonus. And you always have a chance of hitting the jackpot.

You can't exactly *live* on a \$5,000 advance, but you can take a darn good vacation. Or re-roof your house. Or start saving for a rainy day—or for the day you decide to go full-time as a writer. Five thousand bucks is pretty nice when it's frosting on the cake instead of

your annual income.

When is it safe to quit?

It'll never be entirely safe. (But then, *any* job can go down the tubes for one reason or another.)

There may come a day, however, when it no longer makes financial sense for you to hold down a non-writing "real job."

Though I painted a dismal picture in the earlier portions of this piece, excellent money *can* be made by writing fiction.

Writers of bestselling novels earn many millions of dollars every year.

But you don't need to write bestsellers to earn a good income. Even if your novels are being bought for \$10,000 to \$50,000 each, you can make a significant income.

How?

There are many ways to earn money as a fiction writer, but they only work if you *produce*.

You have to write and sell novel after novel after novel. (And perhaps some short stories along the way.) By producing a lot of finished pieces, you can create an *overlapping* of payments.

The secret is to write a lot of books.

This is how it works.

This is how *you* can be a successful, semi-wealthy author without ever having a bestseller...

Ready?

Here is an example (but there are countless possible variations).

During the course of a year, you might receive the on-publication payment for a hardbound edition of a novel that you wrote last year, on-publication money for the paperback edition of a novel you wrote two years ago, on-sign money for a new contract for books you haven't written yet, on-acceptance money for a novel you finished a month or two ago, film option money for a novel that was published three years ago, royalty checks for several of your older books that have sold beyond their advances, payments for a short story or two that you knocked out during the year, money for three or four of your old novels that your agent has sold to a foreign publisher.

And so on.

You may be selling your novels, one per year, to a U.S. publisher for about \$20,000 each. But due to what I'll call the *Pile-On Effect* or (P.O.E.), you might very well earn an actual income of \$50,000 - \$100,000 (or more) over the course of a single year.

The Pile-On Effect is how a normal, non-bestselling writer can earn a good income. The more you write, the better it works.

However, it can't be achieved easily or quickly. It has to be developed over a span of several years. The key to P.O.E. is the number of books you write and get published.

It doesn't work very well if you've only sold two or three books. But by the time you've sold ten or fifteen, it will almost surely be generating plenty of money.

You need to keep a non-writing source of income to sustain you until you've produced enough material for P.O.E. to kick in.

When is it safe to quit the job and write full time?

As soon as you see that the Pile-On Effect is producing a steady, large income. How large? That's up to you and your spouse.

Generally, by the time you see significant results from P.O.E., you should be able to earn more money from writing than from your "real job." At that point, any job other than writing becomes a waste of time and money.

It's quitting time.

My 22 Favorite Poets

1. William Ashbless
2. Rupert Brooke
3. Robert Burns
4. Samuel Taylor Coleridge
5. e.e. cummings
6. Allan Edward DePrey
7. Emily Dickinson
8. Lawrence Ferlinghetti
9. Robert Frost
10. A.E. Houseman
11. Randall Jarrell
12. John Masefield
13. Rod McKuen
14. Kenneth Patchen
15. Edgar Allan Poe
16. Carl Sandberg
17. Robert Service
18. William Shakespeare
19. Robert Lewis Stevenson
20. R.S. Stewart
21. Dylan Thomas
22. William Butler Yeats

My 10 Favorite Playwrights

1. Agatha Christie
2. Sean O'Casey
3. Ira Levin
4. Arthur Miller
5. William Shakespeare
6. George Bernard Shaw
7. Neil Simon
8. John Synge
9. Tennessee Williams
10. William Butler Yeats

Garbage Language

HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED THAT LITERALLY EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK, people are abusing the language?

I just did.

Since when did "literally" come to mean "figuratively"?

That is almost the *only* way you find it used, these days.

"Literally" has stopped meaning literally altogether. It has become a term of exaggeration. And it has, thereby, become literally useless.

It has been turned into a garbage word.

The funny thing about "literally" is that, even when used properly, it is almost always a garbage word. What does it mean, anyway?

It literally means nothing.

Which is a wordy way to express, "It means nothing."

Wordy, but *oh so impressive*. A person sounds so very intelligent when it's "literally" this and "literally" that and "literally" everything under the sun "literally" including the kitchen sink.

And there we have the secret behind the current use and abuse of the poor word.

Saying it makes you sound smart.

At least if your audience isn't.

Writers use and abuse the poor word, but the worst offenders are public speakers: attorneys, politicians, educators, news commentators and reporters, "community leaders" and activists promoting their questionable causes. Such people are often on the air, molding minds, influencing the public's perception of our language.

These same impressive, supposedly highly educated folks (after all, most of them have passed the "bar" examination), not only toss around "literally" as if they're being paid ten bucks every time it pops out of their mouths, but they seem to linger under the impression that the "t" in often is *not* supposed to be silent.

It should be pronounced "off-'n," not "off-ton."

And they labor under the impression that "irregardless" is a word.

It isn't.

The word is "regardless." No *ir*. The *ir* appears to be borrowed from the real word, "irrespective." Apparently, the two words have similar meanings and get tangled in the heads of these highly intelligent people.

On the subject of the errant *ir*—how often do you hear supposedly well-educated people say, "To err is human"? Only it sounds like, "To *air* is human." As if they're talking about farts. Properly pronounced, *err* rhymes with "fur," not "fair." I happen to know that because my old college roommate, Fred Castro, lost a public speaking contest when he erred in the pronunciation of *err*. (Plus, the dictionary provides corroborating evidence.) Bad enough that we are constantly being battered by poor language coming from people who *ought* to know better, but the mistakes are pretentious. Showoffy.

At the very moment that a person is trying to impress us with his erudition by flourishing his "literally," his "oft-en" and his "irregardless," he's erring in front of everyone who knows better.

The person is arguably a pretentious moron.

Arguably?

What's that?

Another precious garbage word. Literally, it means that a person might conceivably argue in favor of the point that is being made.

But basically it means nothing.

I've just hit you -with two more garbage words.

Conceivably. Basically.

They are most often used in such a way that they have little or no meaning at all. They are "smart-sounding" filler.

Garbage.

Arguably, conceivably, basically.

Such words mean virtually nothing.

Virtually!

More garbage. In current usage, it seems to be a synonym of literally.

But is there a viable alternative to the use of such language?

Viable? If any alternative is *not* viable, should it be considered an alternative at all? No. Of course not. If it's inviable, why bother to mention it at all?

But people do.

Frequently.

Just read, just listen.

People are constantly using such garbage, stuffing their sentences with meaningless junk, making themselves sound really smart and— in many cases—cluttering the works so that the audience isn't exactly sure *what* the hell they're getting at.

Maybe obfuscation, as it were, is their intent.

As it were? More garbage, if you will. Dumb filler thrown into sentences for no good reason. Like *if you will*.

In many cases, people are obviously using such language in order to side-step the truth. The same good folks will clutter their language with other junk such as "to be perfectly honest," and "frankly," and "in point of fact."

Such words and phrases always precede an evasion.

A lie.

"In fact" comes before a falsehood.

As does, "Trust me."

As does "absolutely."

As in, "I'm absolutely, 100 percent not guilty."

If you read or hear such language being used, you may be sure that its source is either:

- a. an innocent who has picked up his language skills by watching television,
- or
- b. a charlatan who is hoping to hoodwink you. More often the latter.

I now see that I've been too harsh in my condemnation of garbage language.
Three cheers for it!

God bless it!

Because without such language, we would have a much more difficult time identifying those who are trying to put something over on us.

Instead of being marked with an A like Hester Prynne, these people are branded by their use of the ABC's.

A is for arrogant.

B is for bullshit.

C is for con.

They are not to be trusted.

ON CRITICS (AND FANGORIA)

BACK IN APRIL, 1993, AN ARTICLE THAT I WROTE ABOUT CRITICS appeared in *Afraid: The Newsletter for the Horror Professional*. Here it is.

THE LIZZIE BORDEN SYNDROME OR VICIOUS HACKS WITH A LUST FOR CHOPPING OTHER PEOPLE'S WOOD, FICTION, AND NECKS

Here is a little secret for you reviewers out there who get your jollies by applying forty whacks to our books.

We know who you are.

We know what you're doing.

We're pissed.

Usually, you hear nothing about it. The main reason is, we don't want to waste our time. You see, we understand.

We know that you're taking your shots at us for any of countless petty reasons, not the least of which is envy. We know that you have your little axes to grind. We know that you get a lot of attention from your peers for penning your opinions about other people's creations. Hey, and you get paid, too! On top of that, you look so grand when you dump on us, because it presupposes that you are our superiors. You see? *We do* understand. We also understand that you would probably be writing fiction, the same as us, if only you had what it takes.

You're really just the same as us, you see.

Sort of like a tick is the same as a dog.

Say now, that's quite an analogy! Not only do you subsist by crawling all over us and sucking our blood, but you're also a fundamentally useless pest. You hide in our fur, bite us, get bloated, but do little real damage (unless you're diseased, which I wouldn't

consider unlikely). You're difficult to get rid of. But the folk remedy is lighter fluid on your butt.

Curtain.

Lights come up.

Applause from the writers among the readers of *AFRAID*, smirks from the subjects of this little piece. Oh, I can see them now. Sneering, muttering, thinking—"I'm *really* gonna get that damn moronic pervert, Laymon, next time I get a chance to review one of his pitiful pieces of crap."

To which I proudly exclaim, "Yawk yawk yawk, do your worst, you idjits."

Now, before the more reasonable of you people out there decide I've gone off the beam, I want to explain something. I've kept quiet for YEARS while a small tribe of brainless assassins have been throwing hatchets at me. Their aim is bad and their hatchets are dull, but for just how long is someone supposed to *ignore* the attacks?

Also, these ambushers are disguised as book reviewers. At first glance, they appear to be performing a fairly legitimate task: writing book criticism.

I have no problem with the *real* book reviewers of our world.

Such people are doing writers and readers a service. They usually know good writing from bad, and they try to be objective and fair. Whether or not such reviewers may like my books, I can respect their opinions.

I asked Mike Baker (the publisher of *Afraid*), to print this article because *Afraid* has always seemed to print honest, unbiased reviews. *Mystery Scene* is also a fine magazine with a high standard of reviewing books.

I'm dealing here with *others*.

The tribe of ambushers. The hacks with their axes to grind and the gleam in their eyes. People like David Kuehls, Linda Marotta, Ellen Datlow, and Stefan Dziemianowicz.

Uh-oh, I just named names.

And boy, I bet these four little pundits are mighty surprised to find *themselves* the object of a review by a writer they've been so cheerfully smearing in public for so long.

These four are at the top of *my* list. But not just mine.

Some or all of these same assailants are roundly despised by other writers who have been

targets of their snide, mindless bombast.

Here are a few reasons why my four made the list.

1. David Kuehls. In 1989, I received a letter from Kuehls inviting me to contribute a story to an anthology he had in the works. In his request, he was careful to point out that he is "a book reviewer for *Fangoria*." I, for one, caught a whiff of threat from this invitation.

Nevertheless, I wrote to Kuehls and politely declined to contribute a story.

No doubt it's a simple coincidence, but Kuehls subsequently wrote vicious diatribes against my novels for *Fangoria*. (Hey, if he thought my stuff was so lame, why did he ask me to contribute to his anthology?) I smell foul play.

A friend of mine, who shall go unnamed, received similar treatment at Kuehl's hands. He had also declined to contribute a story to the reviewer's anthology

I must wonder—do the publishers of *Fangoria* know that Kuehls is using their magazine to clobber writers who didn't cough up stories for his book?

2. Linda Marotta. In *Fangoria* #104, this person whom I shall gently refer to as "a piece of work," wrote about *The Stake*, "Just how many times can one use the word 'retarded' in one review? Reading a Richard Laymon novel is like "watching a really dumb splatter flick." And so on, in the same vein.

A few of my fellow writers happened onto the Marotta review during a signing, and started laughing. They asked me what I'd done to this gal to make her hate me. "Did you murder her children or something?"

The truth is, I don't know her. I never even knew she existed until she started pulling her Lizzie Borden number on me.

Furthermore, I don't want to know her.

Whatever else she might be—a subject I don't even wish to contemplate—she is obviously a nasty and bitter... woops, never mind!

By the way, if you think *The Stake* was retarded, you ought to read Marotta's latest novel, entitled...

Woops, again!

Far as I know, there *ain't no* such thing. My mistake, Linda. But what can you expect from a retard?

Anyway, with a couple of cases like Kuehls and Marotta doing the reviews for *Fangoria*,

I quit buying the magazine.

I can't take a magazine seriously when it publishes reviews by the likes of Kuehls and Marotta. I know first-hand the crap that this pair has spewn on me, so I don't care what they say about anyone else.

3. Now, to Ellen Datlow. She appears to share Marotta's view of my work, but she hasn't attacked me as blatantly as her soul-sister. I suppose I should thank her for that. She mostly uses the snub. In her big annual summation of the year in horror a while back, one of my novels was banished from existence, not a word mentioned about it in spite of the fact that she seemed to list every horror novel published during the entire year. I mean *every* one of them. Except for mine. This non-existent book was either *Funland* or *The Stake*.

Maybe I'm paranoid for suspecting that the omission was intentional.

But I'm pretty sure it was.

Hey, it was *her* list.

And this is mine.

Some more on Ellen Datlow. She opened her big, important essay on "The Year in Horror" with a study of *American Psycho*. In the course of that, she wrote, "I don't believe the violence is any worse than that in genre horror writers Richard Laymon and C. Dean Andersson or for that matter in the works of the Marquis deSade." That's such a good remark that I could use it as a cover blurb, but she never intended it to be a compliment.

Somewhere along the line, she also dumped on my stuff in *Night Visions* 7, which was especially annoying because she had written to me and asked me to send her a free copy of the book—and I'd done it! Marotta must be right! I'm retarded!

4. Stefan Dziemianowicz. His review of *Midnight's Lair* in the Winter, 1993 issue of *Cemetery Dance* is what prompted me to write this counterattack. It wasn't much of a review, but it was enough to push me too far. In *his* pithy assault, this chap wrote regarding my characters, "By the end of the story, we know more about their underwear than their personalities." Bravo! Such wit! I am awestruck by his rapier pen.

The line, however, was a standout in a review that was otherwise stunning in its banality. In other words, he pooped all over *Midnight's Lair*, but did a half-assed job of it. I'm sure he'll try harder on future occasions.

I've heard about Dziemianowicz, and frankly it doesn't surprise me at all that he hates my books.

One question, though: if he's such a highbrow hotshot, why doesn't he stop crapping on writers and try to be one himself?

Woops! Maybe he already tried that!

My fellow writers! Maybe I went overboard in the above, but it was lots of fun.

Why should mean-spirited reviewers be allowed to attack us without any fear of retribution?

Most of us, most of the time, tend to laugh off vicious reviews. And many such reviews *are* funny, because they're so idiotic. But the reviews do hurt. You know they do. We read them and we get a sick little feeling in the pits of our stomachs—even when we know the review is trash and the reviewer is a dumb puke.

They make us feel rotten, but we say, "Even a bad review is better than no review at all. Publicity is publicity."

Maybe so.

But a lot of people out there haven't yet discovered our books, and they are being turned against us when they read reviews that make our work look like crud.

Suppose a potential fan hasn't yet read any of your books.

Suppose, before he or she gets the chance, along comes a piece of misleading garbage written about it by someone with a grudge. This person, who might've absolutely fallen in love with your stuff, never gives you a try.

Thanks to someone who hates your guts and has a forum.

Thanks to your tribe of enemies.

My tribe includes David Kuehls, Linda Marotta, Ellen Datlow and Stefan Dziemianowicz.

Their reviews aren't reviews at all, but personal assaults committed on someone they don't even know and had no reasonable cause to hate.

These are ruthless, gleeful muggings.

I want everyone who reads this article to know that their reviews of my work are based on their own little secret grudges and agendas and have little to do with the piece of fiction that they are purporting to review.

I also want everyone to know that I consider the publication of such reviews to be a personal attack on me by the publisher who provides a forum to these muggers.

Furthermore...!

Hey, my friends, let's hear from you. Who is out there nailing *you*? Time to name names and kick butt. The creeps have been mucking with us, unscathed.

Time for us to do some scathing of our own!

Write in!

If nothing else, you'll have a good time, you'll be giving moral support to their victims, you'll be letting a rather significant corner of our horror community know who is out to get you, and you'll really piss off the reviewers who already despise you. Need anyone ask for more?

That's my article. Unaltered, unexpurgated, unimproved.

Mike Baker was happy to publish it exactly as I'd written it.

I felt as if I'd tossed a hand grenade into a crowded room full of enemies.

I wasn't exactly present to observe the results, but I know for a fact that all four of my targets got hit. I heard about it from people who knew them.

And I grinned.

Vengeance is wonderful.

Not only did I strike out at my four reviewers, but I attacked on behalf of every writer who'd been ambushed by such people.

From what I hear, the article caused a stir. Not only were copies of *Afraid* being snatched up, but photocopies of "The Lizzie Borden Syndrome" were making the rounds. Apparently, it was the talk of the "horror community."

Shortly after the article appeared, I received letters and phone calls from several writers who applauded my counterattack.

Their names would be familiar to you, but they might not wish to be publicly associated with this matter, so I'll keep their identities to myself.

I even got a call from Richard Chizmar, publisher of *Cemetery Dance*, the magazine which had printed the Dziemianowicz review. Rich expressed concern that I might be angry with him for allowing the review to be printed. He'd noticed my statement, "I

consider the publication of such reviews to be a personal attack on me by the publisher who provides a forum to these muggers." We had a nice talk. He seemed like a fine gentleman and a really nice guy, so naturally I felt guilty about upsetting him. I assured him that I didn't hold anything against him. We would later work together on numerous occasions and Rich has recently brought out the first and only hardbound edition of *The Cellar*.

In recent years, Stefan Dziemianowicz has been the editor (along with the wonderful Martin Greenberg) of several anthologies. As such, he has purchased some of my short stories.

I no longer bear any hard feelings toward him, and rather regret the nasty things I wrote about him in "The *Lizzie Borden Syndrome*."

I also regret using the phrase "mean-spirited." I have grown to hate those words because of certain unsavory political connotations. I couldn't change them, however, without compromising the integrity of the article.

So I apologize to Stefan—and I apologize for using such garbage language as "mean-spirited."

I never received any sort of apology or explanation from *Fangoria*. Not that I expected anything of the sort. But I'd been a major fan of *Fangoria* (and own some extremely valuable back issues). Before the reviewer incidents took place, I'd had very good feelings about the magazine.

1. *Fangoria* had published a feature article about me, prepared by Stanley Wiater.
2. With my own money, I had purchased a full-page advertisement in *Fangoria* for *The Woods Are Dark*. (What a waste of money *that* was. Except that, in preparing the ad, I did gather some terrific quotes from such writers as Dean Koontz, Dan Marlowe, Al Nussbaum, and Gary Brandner.)
3. I had written *Fangoria* into my novel, *Night Show*. The magazine actually plays a significant role in the plot. This was my homage to *Fangoria*, and probably one of the few times that a periodical has ever played such an important part in a work of fiction.

So the publication in *Fangoria* of several reviews that trashed me and my novels was especially disappointing. I stopped buying the magazine.

Haven't bought a copy in years.

I'm sure they couldn't care less.

But I bet they won't be thrilled to find out what I've written about them here.

60 Favorite Horror Films

UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, ANY FILM ON THIS LIST IS THE ORIGINAL, not a remake or a sequel.

1. ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET...(whatever monster they meet, I like the movie.)*
2. ALIEN
3. THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN
4. THE ANGRY RED PLANET
5. THE BLACK CAT
6. BLACK CHRISTMAS
7. THE BLOB
8. CAPE FEAR
9. CARRIE
10. THE CAT PEOPLE (with Nastassia Kinski)
11. DAWN OF THE DEAD
12. DRACULA (including most of its Lugosi sequels)*
13. THE EXORCIST
14. FRANKENSTEIN (including most of its Universal sequels)*
15. FREAKS
16. FRIDAY THE 13TH
17. HALLOWEEN
18. THE HAUNTING
19. THE HILLS HAVE EYES
20. THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (With Basil Rathbone)
21. THE HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL
22. I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE
23. I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE
24. INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS
25. IT'S ALIVE
26. JAWS
27. KING KONG
28. THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT
29. MAGIC
30. MARATHON MAN
31. MOTEL HELL
32. MOTHER'S DAY

33. THE MUMMY (including most of its Universal sequels)*
34. THE NAKED EDGE
35. NEAR DARK
36. THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER
37. NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD
38. THE NIGHT STALKER (made for TV)
39. No WAY TO TREAT A LADY
40. NOSFERATU (silent version)
41. THE OLD, DARK: HOUSE
42. THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA (silent version)
43. PSYCHO
44. RABID
45. REAR WINDOW
46. ROSEMARY'S BABY
47. THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS
48. STRAW DOGS
49. THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE
50. THEM
51. THE THING
52. THE TOWN THAT DREADED SUNDOWN
53. TREMORS
54. 2000 MANIACS
55. THE UNINVITED
56. WAIT UNTIL DARK
57. THE WEREWOLF OF LONDON
58. WHEN A STRANGER CALLS
59. WOLFEN
60. THE WOLFMAN

"Denotes that this listing is for more than one film. So it isn't a *true* list of 60, but who's counting?

My 47 Favorite Non-Horror Films

1. ADVENTURES OF A YOUNG MAN (about Ernest Hemingway)
2. BATTLE CRY
3. THE BLACKBOARD JUNGLE
4. THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI
5. BULLITT
6. BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID
7. CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF
8. DARBY'S RANGERS
9. DIE HARD
10. DR. No
11. FARGO
12. A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS
13. FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS
14. THE FOUNTAINHEAD
15. FRIED GREEN TOMATOES AT THE WHISTLE STOP CAFE
16. THE GETAWAY
17. GONE WITH THE WIND
18. THE GREAT ESCAPE
19. THE HIGH AND THE MIGHTY
20. HONDO
21. HUD
22. INSIDE DAISY CLOVER
23. LAWRENCE OF ARABIA
24. LONELY ARE THE BRAVE
25. LONESOME DOVE (made for TV)
26. THE MAN FROM LARAMIE
27. THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH (James Stewart version)
28. THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALANCE
29. MEMPHIS BELLE
30. NEVADA SMITH
31. NORTHWEST PASSAGE
32. THE PARENT TRAP
33. PETER PAN

- 34. THE PETRIFIED FOREST
- 35. PULP FICTION
- 36. RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK
- 37. RESERVOIR DOGS
- 38. SOLDIER IN THE RAIN
- 39. THE SUMMER OF '42
- 40. STAND BY ME
- 41. THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS
- 42. A THOUSAND CLOWNS
- 43. To KILL A MOCKINGBIRD
- 44. TRUE GRIT
- 45. THE WILD BUNCH
- 46. THE WILD ONE
- 47. YOUNGBLOOD HAWKE

The Big Picture

HERE is A BARE-BONES BREAKDOWN OF WHAT USUALLY HAPPENS TO A "writer—me—during the entire course of my involvement "with a novel. This is generally the way I've been operating during the last few years on the basis of multiple-book contracts.

1. I write about five pages in the course of a day.
2. The next day, I reread them on the computer screen, revise them, then write about five new pages.
3. After finishing a chapter, I carefully read it from start to finish on the screen, making more corrections. Then I print it.
4. I may be asked to provide my publisher with a description of what the book is about. So I spend a day writing a synopsis.
5. After the entire novel is written and printed up, (about 600 manuscript pages), I read it again from start to finish, marking errors, dog-earing every page that needs to be redone.
6. At my computer again, I make all the changes, reprinting each page that requires a correction.
7. I take the finished manuscript to a photocopy shop and have a single copy made. On white paper with no holes.
8. I pack and mail the copy of the manuscript to my agent. (Keeping my original.)
9. I start working on my next project.
10. After my agent and editor have read my manuscript, they may ask me to make some changes. I usually get a page or two of suggestions, questions, etc. I discuss them with my editor, make whatever changes may be necessary, and fax them to my editor.
11. A month or two later, I receive an "on acceptance" check in the mail. So I have to interrupt my busy writing schedule for a trip to the bank to make the deposit.
12. My editor and I talk about what sort of artwork should go on the cover of my book. He may later send me some rough sketches for my suggestions and/or approval.
13. My editor writes cover material for the book and sends it for my approval.
14. In some cases, I am sent a copy of the "edited manuscript." When that happens, I have to read the entire manuscript to see what's been done to it—and to look for errors. Then the corrections need to be phoned, faxed or mailed to the publisher. They usually give me about a week to do this. Headline, however, does not mess with my work and doesn't usually send me a copy of the edited manuscript.
15. They do send me a copy of the "proof pages" or galleys. This is my novel set to print. This is the "next-to-final" version. It always seems to arrive at the worst possible moment. But it can't be ignored. If I don't catch an error there, the mistake will likely end up in the finished book—and make me look like a numbskull. So I read the pages carefully, mark all the mistakes, then communicate the changes to my editor.
16. After the book is published, I receive several copies that I normally send to friends and family members. I inscribe and autograph each book (usually about twelve), put it into a padded envelope, address the envelope, then make a special trip to the post office with the whole stack.

17. Over the next few weeks, various book dealers bring copies of the novel to my house so I can sign and sometimes inscribe copies for their customers. I may travel to a bookstore for an "autograph party."

18. I receive a check for the "hardbound publication" of the novel. I stop doing everything and rush to the bank.

19. A few months after the hardbound edition has been published, I will receive page proofs for the paperback version of the book. I used to ignore them, since they are based on the hardbound edition. After catching some errors in them, however, I now read and correct these proofs, too.

20. A month or so after the paperback is published, I receive still another check and have to make still another journey to the bank.

21. My publisher and agent send copies of reviews to me. I read them. They often amuse me, sometimes flatter me, occasionally make me angry. I almost never respond to the reviews.

22. My publisher forwards fan mail to me. I always read it. Most of it is wonderful. I almost always respond to the sender (unless he or she seems to be a nut), but it may take a while.

23. In some cases, I will eventually be notified that the hardbound version is being "remaindered." The publisher tells me how many copies are unsold and gives me an opportunity to purchase them at a very low price.

By the time we reach the final stage, the remaindering, I have probably written four *new* books.

A Day In the Life

TO THOSE WHO OBSERVE ME FROM AFAR, I APPEAR TO BE ON permanent vacation.

Unlike most people, I'm not shocked awake each weekday morning by an alarm clock. I don't commute. I don't seem to have "a real job" at all. I am running loose when nearly everyone else is busy at work. Ann and I go out for breakfast or lunch at restaurants whenever we feel the urge. We can—and do—go to movies on "weekday mornings or afternoons. We can—and do—spend a month or two traveling every year.

It's a great life.

I have more freedom than just about anyone I know.

And I have no doubt that some of my friends and relatives resent it. The way I see things, however, I achieved this lifestyle because I aimed for it and worked hard.

They probably could have been writers, too, if they'd had the urge and been willing to do what it takes.

While they're busy envying me, however, they mostly see only the surface. They see how free I am. They can't help but notice that large, new books—supposedly written by me—appear with somewhat startling frequency. But they haven't much of a clue about what really goes on during my daily life.

Here is a look at what happens *in addition to* all that freedom.

During the years that I did have a "real job," I worked full time for my employers, but I also found a couple of hours almost every weekday to devote to my writing. On nearly every Saturday and Sunday, I wrote for four to five hours per day.

Now that I'm a free man, things are different.

But not *that* different.

On most days, I get out of bed whenever I wake up—which is usually about 7 a.m. I like

to be up first in the house. I make my coffee, bring in the morning newspaper, then usually sit around in the living room, drinking coffee and reading a book for about an hour.

Two or three times a week, I take a four-mile hike after I finish my morning read.

At around 8:30 or 9:30 a.m. (mostly depending on whether I take a walk that day), I go up to my office above my backyard garage and start working.

Usually, the work involves writing a novel.

I begin by reading and revising the pages (on my computer screen) that I wrote on the previous day. This not only gives me a chance to repair any sloppy writing, but it pulls me back into the story. When I reach the end of yesterday's pages, it's usually a simple matter to write the next sentence, and the next, and just keep going.

Usually, I write until about 11:30. Then I go into the house for lunch. We may watch half an hour of television while we eat. Then I may read for half an hour, or take a quick nap.

At about 12:30, I return to the office. To get started again, I read the last couple of pages written that morning. Then I resume writing and continue until about 3:30 p.m.

That's the end of the day's writing.

It usually adds up to about five hours.

My minimum goal for a day of writing is five manuscript pages. It doesn't always happen. If a story is going really well, however, I might write eight to ten pages in a single day.

I usually don't push it. (And I like to quit when I still know what's supposed to happen next.)

When I'm done with writing for the day, I return to the house, sit down in my armchair with a beer and a novel and stay there until about 5:00 p.m., when we eat supper.

Ever since the invention of the VCR, we have eaten our supper in the living room and watched a tape of the previous night's David Letterman show. When we can't watch Dave (after all, he's only on five nights a week) we usually watch news shows.

After dinner and Dave, I spend most of my time reading until we settle down to some serious TV watching at either 8:00 or 9:00 p.m. We usually watch TV (network shows, cable, movie rentals, news, whatever) until about midnight.

That's a typical day.

It involves about five hours of writing, at least five hours of reading (mostly fiction), and

about four hours of watching television shows or films.

Naturally, *every* day isn't like that.

At least one day each week, we go off on a shopping trip of some kind (to buy office supplies, a new lamp, new paint for the porch, or whatever) and usually have lunch on the road. At least once a week, we go out to a movie. On Sundays, we have our "traditional breakfast" and I usually don't start writing until about noon. And I sometimes lose a morning of work because I need to run errands: get the car washed, get a haircut, go to the bank or post office or dentist.

Every so often, an entire day or two goes by without a 'word being written by me. This might happen if I need to read and correct proofs, if I have a book signing, if we go to the County Fair or Disneyland, if we attend a convention or go off on some other sort of small excursion.

The schedule gets thrown out the window completely whenever we go on a major trip. We might go away for a week, or even three weeks at a time. During those periods, I usually manage to get a bit of reading done, but I don't write at all. Except to take notes. Some of my best ideas come while we're traveling.

If we go on a long trip before I've finished a novel, getting started again after returning home can be extremely difficult. Once or twice, I've actually been *unable* to do it, and have gone on to a different project. Usually, however, I can get back into a novel by rereading the entire manuscript. It's much better to finish a "novel in progress" before leaving home for any significant period of time.

Also before embarking, a professional novelist will almost certainly have to deal with "page proofs." Publishers seem to have a psychic awareness of every writer's approaching trip.

They may have been in possession of the manuscript for a year or longer, but they carefully time the galleys to arrive at the writer's door just a day or two before he is scheduled to depart. He then finds himself in a mad rush to reread his entire book, mark every mistake, send off the corrections and finish packing.

You see, a writer's life is more than writing.

Among other things, it includes all the chores that surround the creation of a novel.

I not only frequent bookstores, but I'm also a regular visitor to office supply stores, my local photocopy shop, and the post office. I also spend a lot of time at computer stores, replacing and updating my equipment.

If you're a writer, you don't need to be on the internet.

But you really should have a good computer and printer. (A fax machine speeds up communication with agents and publishers, but is hardly essential.) You must also have a big supply of ink and paper and envelopes and mailing boxes.

Thus, you are regularly forced to take breaks in the writing schedule (whether you want them or not) to deal with the somewhat prosaic matters involved in maintaining a workable office.

There are a *lot* of necessary interruptions.

Sometimes they are nuisances. Other times, they come as welcome relief. After a few days of full time writing, I often start to feel a little stir-crazy. I need to get away from the computer, away from the house, and do something—*anything*—other than sit alone in the office and continue chugging ahead with my book.

I love writing.

I have to write.

If I'm away from it for very long, I start longing to get back into action.

But it *is* work. Even if everyone I know seems to think I'm on permanent vacation (and I encourage the image by making cracks about being on early retirement), there is a need for me to sit down almost every day and focus on a story and write pages.

Five pages a day.

Thirty to forty pages per week.

Probably about 1,500 pages per year.

Year in and year out.

When I'm not writing, I'm often *thinking* about it. Toying with plot ideas. Keeping my eyes open for unusual characters, places, and situations that I might use in a novel or short story.

Even when I'm on trips, I'm constantly on the lookout for fresh material.

The "permanent vacation" is no vacation at all. I'm a full-time writer. No matter where I am or what I'm doing, I'm always on the job.

But I'm doing what I want to do.

In spite of all the drawbacks, the writer's life is a great life. If you can manage to pull it off. And I believe that anyone can. All it takes is desire, persistence, guts, and a little bit of luck.

My 10 Favorite Vampire Novels Written By Others

1. *Dracula* - Bram Stoker
2. *Fevre Dream* - George R. R. Martin
3. *I Am Legend* - Richard Matheson
4. *Interview with the Vampire* - Anne Rice
5. *The Keep* - F. Paul Wilson
6. *Live Girls* - Ray Garton
7. *Necroscope* - Brian Lumley
8. *Progeny of the Adder* - Leslie H. Whitten
9. *Salem's Lot* - Stephen King
10. *They Thirst* - Robert R. McCammon

My Books

HITCHCOCK DIDN'T GET AROUND TO MAKING A FILM BASED ON *THE Cellar*. In spite of that, I used to suspect that, no matter what else I might "write, I would be seen as "the guy who wrote *The Cellar*!"

Robert Bloch wrote *Psycho*.

Richard Laymon wrote *The Cellar*.

There are worse fates. It is exciting to know that *The Cellar* had a major impact on so many readers and writers. Still, it "wasn't exactly thrilling to think that, no matter how many other books I might write, I would always be best known for the first.

At least I'd be in good company. F. Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe, Margaret Mitchell and J.D. Salinger, for instance.

At this point, nearly two decades after I wrote *The Cellar*, I still have people tell me that it's their favorite book of mine. But it has been followed by nearly thirty other novels.

It is no longer the work most often mentioned by my fans. In fact, nearly *every* book is mentioned, now and then, as a favorite. At this point, some titles competing with *The Cellar* for favorite status seem to be *The Stake*, *Funland*, and *Savage*.

In the pages that follow, I will tell you a little about *all my* books.

THE CELLAR

Having recently written in exhaustive detail about the creation of *The Cellar* for a limited edition, I won't rehash the same material here. Instead, perhaps readers of *this* book would find it interesting to see my first notes for *The Cellar*. I found them recently. They were typed on my old IBM Executive, single-spaced on six pages of old blue paper. These notes were written for the sole purpose of working out ideas for my new novel, and were never intended for publication.

Except for fixing a few spelling errors and typos, I have changed nothing, omitted nothing. These are my complete notes for the day I started working on *The Cellar*.

Novel idea—May 29, 1977 HOUSE OF THE BEAST

There is an old house—either in a small rural town, or maybe in a city like L.A. Better a small town. On a dare, a boy enters it in dead of night. It's deserted. Nobody had lived there for years. Boy goes in, doesn't come out. People go looking. Find remains. Kid has been eaten. House searched.

Nobody, nothing alive found. They figure an animal from the hills had been inside house. What kind of animal? Mountain lion? This happened, perhaps, in distant past. Maybe story is told by guy who 'was there originally, one who dared the kid to go inside. Returns, as adult, to solve the mystery. Finds that the house is still there. Nobody had lived in it since the bit with the kid.

It has been converted into the town historical museum. The Historical society has it open during the day. Nobody there at night. Maybe guard on grounds. Could have scene in which something happens to guard—hears something inside, goes to investigate, never seen again.

So whatever is in house, only bothers people at night. (Maybe use Winchester house as loose model for it.) Climax, main character(s) enter at night to find out secret.

Best if there is real person inside. But is the person the beast? Make it real, not a spirit. What has it been doing during the twenty years since it killed the kid? Maybe it's something that sleeps in the house, only kills people when they enter at night and wake it up.

Most logical, it's a real person. Hey! It is an entrepreneur, who wanted house to be legendary, wanted tourists.

Could be a family tradition. It is responsibility of current generation to keep the legend alive by occasionally eating someone in the house at night. Maybe only needs to do one per generation, to keep legend going.

Place is actually called HOUSE OF THE BEAST. Has been an attraction in the town for as long as anyone can remember.

Owners of HOUSE must arrange for someone to enter it at night, once in a while. As kid, main guy was unwitting partner in the plot. He was curious, talked to owner (at ticket window). So owner knew he was thinking about entering. Maybe he enters with another kid. They get separated. He finds body, runs in fright.

Must be very careful not to let this stuff get too much like *Salem's Lot*. Which also has guy returning. What was his motive for returning?

Maybe go goes back for different reason. A friend is getting married, maybe, and he's to be best-man. Maybe it's his brother. Somebody else shows up for wedding, a friend of the bride. They start seeing each other. For fun on an afternoon, they enter HOUSE OF BEASTS.

People come from all over country to see the famous house, and tour it. Tickets about five bucks apiece. A real goldmine.

Souvenir shop, etc. Maybe even restaurant.

He is reluctant to enter, but goes ahead. This is point at which reader finds out his involvement with house. His name is in there, at an exhibit. "This is spot where body of young _____ was found. He and his friend, (our hero) entered on Halloween night 1961..."

New owner, about his age, is a friend. Not friend, acquaintance. Always a weird kid. His father still runs the place. Maybe has a large family, and they're all in it together. When hero starts snooping, they take steps to eliminate him.

Chapter One: Main character enters town, sees House of the Beast.

Has been expanded since he saw it last. Now has restaurant and gift shop. Makes him sick to see people capitalizing on tragedy—but also makes him sick because he had special situation with house. Don't tell yet. Is in town for his brother's wedding.

Meets girl.

Possible Scenes

Boys enter house, when hero is kid. Make this prologue, maybe.

One kid comes out alive. He turns out to be guy who is returning to town.

Tour of the place. Guy takes his new girl friend, at her insistence, into house. A guided tour led by a charming young gal. Very professional. Like Winchester tour. I'll need to create an entire history of the house, so we can have a good tour. At one point of tour, guide brings up his name in connection with the boy's death.

Girl asks him how it all came out. He tells her. Tell story like flashback, not in dialogue. Maybe have a few chapters, while he's telling her in detail. This takes away need for prologue. Maybe get it 20 pages or so.

IDEA!—Interest in tour maybe dropping off, so owners decide to stage a "night in the house." This could be first, or maybe it's an annual event. People come from all over country for the night in the house. Cost is very high, like \$1,000 per person. Say, only five

allowed. Maybe they have auction! Five or ten available tickets, they auction them off on a certain day each year. Maybe this is the first and only time. Or first annual. Owner gets idea for it after the night watchman is killed.

Prologue—Night watchman hears sound from inside the house.

Goes in, for first time at night. Fright! Is killed.

Night—Hero and girl friend allowed as part of the tour free because of his intimate knowledge of the place. He decides to go, hoping to learn something about his friend's death, and maybe expiate his guilt.

Climax of book could take place during the night.

Have auction scene.

Maybe get viewpoints of several characters, all who will be staying the night. They could all be pov characters.

Characters

Hero—who was part of house's history. He's invited to enter free, as part of the attraction. He goes out of curiosity, and also hoping to breach secret of the house. Though he doesn't really hope for much.

Hero's girlfriend—She thinks he should go in house to help rid himself of the guilt. She insists on entering with him.

Possible idea—he won't let her, but she makes special arrangement with owner to go in. Her appearance at The Night is a surprise to him.

Old Owner—Guy who ran the place when hero was young. He still runs it, with help of his family.

Owner's Son—Contemporary of our hero. Always a bit "weird. He is main business man of organization. Maybe he is participant in the Night.

Night participants—What type of people would pay large sums to spend night in the House of the Beast?

1. Adventurer—maybe a hunter, tracker, wants glory of spending night there, and the excitement.
2. Bored rich woman who has seen everything—or so she thinks.
3. Rich woman's friend, younger male perhaps, gigolo type.
4. Writer—figures he can get (or she can get) a good story out of the thing. Considers

payment an investment. Perhaps has already sold the story—book length.

5. Prospective buyer. Is thinking of buying the house, taking over tours, turning it into a bigger enterprise.

Wants to see what he'll be buying. Could have big plot repercussions.

6. Psychic—To give everyone a thrill. Senses presence of evil. No, this too much like other stories.

7. Town cop who knows entire story of house. He and hunter both armed. Cop rather old. Perhaps he pays because he is suspicious. Wants, like hero, to know secret of the house.

In house that night:

1. Hero

2. his girlfriend

3. young owner

4. town cop

5. adventurer

6. rich lady

7. her lover

8. writer

9. prospective buyer

10. THE BEAST

Each (except hero, owner) paid \$10,000 dollars for privilege of spending the night.

THE BEAST wants to kill hero, his girlfriend, cop, adventurer, rich lady, her lover. Six dead. This will give surviving writer plenty to write about, make it Crime of the Century. Will really boost asking price for sale. Or maybe they have no intention of selling. What they really want is to make the place more famous, bring up flagging tourism, expand operation in much the same way the buyer had in mind. So buyer is supposed to die, too. That makes seven dead, if all works out.

THE BEAST—the owner family. The old guy, his wife, his children, maybe even grandchildren. They have a part of the house sealed off. They are secreted all over the place. Kill people one by one.

That's it.

I made those notes about nine months after making the trip up the California coast during which Ann and I visited Hearst Castle and the Winchester House. And I made them less than three weeks before starting to write *The Cellar*. (I was calling it *Beast House* at the time.) I waited the three weeks because I was employed as the librarian (or media specialist) at John Adams Junior High School in Santa Monica. I put off beginning work on the new novel until after the start of summer vacation.

The notes reveal quite a lot about the way I work. Basically, after coming up with a vague concept for a novel, I sit in front of the typewriter (now computer) and "play" with the idea. I try to flesh out the basic premise. I figure out generally where the story might go,

what sort of scenes it might have, what sort of characters I might want to throw in, sometimes even noting what I need to avoid.

Readers of *The Cellar* will find that the book turned out to be *very* different from the way I'd imagined it in my original notes. It is almost unrecognizable.

The main plotline (Donna and Sandy fleeing Roy) just isn't there at all. Strangely enough, I noticed (in typing up the notes) that what was supposed to be the main plotline—the "hero's" return to Beast House—ended up mutating into the Larry Usher situation.

The "writer" is one of many characters from my original notes who never showed up at all in *The Cellar*. The writer, however, finally appeared six years later when I wrote the sequel, *Beast House*. In *Beast House*, the main plot involves a writer who comes to Malcasa Point in hopes of writing a book about Beast House.

Neither *The Cellar* nor *Beast House* dealt in any way with the idea of an "overnight tour" of the house—which was a main focus of my original notes. However, I have finally returned to Malcasa Point for a novel that will be published in 1998. It is the third book of the Beast House series, greater in scope and size than both the previous books combined, and it is called, *The Midnight Tour*.

As things have turned out, the Midnight Tour doesn't cost \$10,000 or even \$1,000 as suggested in my old notes. Instead, it is an affordable \$100 per person. As my guide Patty explains, "It's quite an event. Saturday nights only. A trip through Beast House starting at midnight, with our best guide leading the way. It's a hundred dollars per person, but the price includes a picnic dinner on the grounds of Beast House—with a no host bar for the drinkers among you—followed by a special showing of *The Horror* at the town movie theater, and finally the special, unexpurgated tour in which you learn all the stuff that's too nasty for our regular tours."

On June 18, 1977, I started writing *The Cellar longhand* in a spiral notebook. The initial draft filled 266 pages, and I finished it almost exactly two months later, on August 17. After listening to a talk by agent Richard Curtis at a Mystery Writers of America meeting, I decided the novel was too short. So I spent two weeks writing seventy new pages about Roy.

The story of his pursuit, written almost as an afterthought, contains some of the most shocking material in the book. When I was done writing Roy's scenes, I slipped them in among the novel's previously written chapters.

By September 6, 1977, I had a novel with sufficient length to make it saleable. I then went back to work at the John Adams library. In my spare time, I worked on revisions. I finished them on March 3, 1978, and mailed the manuscript to my agent, Jay Garon.

On January 26, 1979, Warner Books bought *Beast House* for an advance of \$3,500. On

October 30, 1979, New English Library bought it for approximately \$24,000.

Because of the movie *Animal House*, Warner Books changed the title of my book to *The Cellar*.

They also decided to make it their lead title, meaning that they would put a lot of publicity behind it. They did a great job of advertising *The Cellar* ("The Fear Trip of 1980") and put a terrific cover on it. When it was published in December, 1980, it appeared in large quantities in just about every paperback outlet in the country.

It sold like hotcakes. I could *see* it vanishing from the paperback racks and shelves of nearby stores.

It appeared on the B. Dalton bestseller list for four weeks, and sold a total in the Warner edition of at least 250,000 copies.

Eventually, the rights reverted to me and *The Cellar* was reprinted by Paperjacks in 1987. In the United Kingdom, New English Library published *The Cellar* in 1980. W.H. Allen (Star) published it in 1989, and Headline brought it out in 1991. The Headline edition is still available, and is in its eleventh printing at the time of this writing. Through Headline, *The Cellar* is available in most of the English-speaking world, including such areas as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the Bahamas, etc.

Foreign language editions of *The Cellar* have been published in Italy, Spain (including Mexico and much of Latin America), Turkey, Japan, Germany, Bulgaria, Lithuania (in Russian) and France.

By the time this book is published, *The Cellar* will have seen its first hardbound edition. Richard Chizmar has arranged with me to do a signed, limited edition of the book. Bentley Little wrote an introduction for it, and I wrote an "afterward" in which I tell quite a few things that aren't mentioned here.

YOUR SECRET ADMIRER

On February 21, 1979, I sent my young adult suspense novel *Your Secret Admirer*, to Jay Garon. He found it "to be especially good for a young adult novel." On May 18, 1979 we received a contract from Scholastic Books. They paid a \$3,000 advance for the novel. It was published in 1980, sold 174,700 copies and earned royalties of \$8,559.00. Though the first edition sold out, Scholastic never reprinted *Your Secret Admirer*.

Because my editor at Scholastic was aware of *The Cellar*, she insisted that I use a pseudonym. I chose Carl Laymon. Carl is my middle name, and was the first name of my mother's father, Carl Hall.

To me, it seemed that *Your Secret Admirer* did pretty well for Scholastic Books. It not

only made triple my advance, but resulted in piles of fan mail from teenagers who thought it was wonderful. However, I would never be able to sell another book to Scholastic.

Could it be that, pseudonym or not, they didn't want to be associated with the author of *The Cellar*? I think so.

Anyway, *Your Secret Admirer* is a suspense novel about a teen-aged girl who is getting mysterious letters from a secret admirer. She and her friend go through some adventures trying to find out who is writing the letters. Maybe it's a really cool guy. Maybe a pervert. Who knows? Some spooky things happen before the novel reaches its tricky conclusion. The conclusion was *so* tricky, in fact, that quite a few readers didn't get it.

THE KEEPERS, DEAD CORSE and SECRET NIGHTS

Warner Books had bought *Beast House* (*The Cellar*) on January 26, 1979. On May 7, Jay Garon sent my novel *The Keepers* to them. On June 21, Warner books gave me a three-book contract that amounted to an advance of \$15,000 per book. On July 21, I sent my novel, *Dead Corse*, to Garon. On September 7, I sent my novel, *Secret Nights* to Garon.

The Keepers, *Dead Corse* and *Secret Nights* might have fulfilled the three-book contract and made me \$45,000, but the folks at Warner didn't like them. Eventually, all three novels would be rejected.

As I recall, *The Keepers* was a partial about a school teacher with a classroom full of bad kids—they had driven his predecessor to suicide.

Secret Nights was a finished novel. You may read of its fate in the July 30, 1981 entry of my Autobiographical Chronology.

Dead Corse (corse being an archaic term for corpse) was a contemporary tale about a female Egyptian mummy named Amara.

She comes to life and goes on a rampage. I thought the book had some very nifty stuff in it.

My editor wrote that *Dead Corse* wasn't "the right book to follow *The Cellar*."

Though *Dead Corse* has never been published, the mummified remains of a beautiful female *did* turn up in one of my later books. In the later novel, she had a stake in her chest.

Odd how things work out. If Warner Books had accepted and published *Dead Corse*, I would've "used up" the alluring female mummy idea. *The Stake*, if written at all, would have been a very different book.

I'd rather have *The Stake* than *Dead Corse*, so thank God for rejections!

THE WOODS ARE DARK

This is the bomb that blew up my writing career.

When Warner Books gave me the three-book contract, I considered myself to be well on the way to becoming a major player in the field of horror fiction.

But matters quickly went south.

Even before *The Cellar* was actually published, the folks at Warner had either rejected or remained silent about three manuscripts I'd sent to them. (They had also turned down some of my books submitted to them *before* they bought *The Cellar*.) So they'd established a long and glorious record of dumping my stuff.

The fourth book sent to them after their acceptance of *The Cellar* was *The Woods Are Dark*. I mailed it to Jay Garon on December 4 1979—approximately the same time that *The Cellar* was finally starting to appear in bookstores.

Hoping for blurbs, I sent my manuscript to a couple of writers. IT. response to it, my friend Dean Koontz wrote, "*The Woods Are Dark* plunges forward like a Tobe Hooper film based on a scenerio by Charles Manson. Gruesome, frenetic, blood-curdling." (An odd tic-bit: though I didn't know it until recently, Dean had written a book. *Dark of the Woods*, which "was published in 1970.)

My old buddy Gary Brandner wrote, " *The Woods Are Dark* is \A roller-coaster ride through hell. More disgusting than *The Cellar*:" (Gary has always had a fine sense of humor.)

When the good folks at Warner Books read the same novel as Dean and Gary, however, they didn't think it was very good.

My editor told me what he thought was wrong with it. He also offered a bunch of suggestions on ways to improve it.

Well...

The Woods Are Dark, as originally read and praised by Dean Koontz and Gary Brander, never got published.

It came as quite a surprise—and not an altogether pleasant one—for Dean when he found out that his blurb had appeared on a version of *Woods* that he'd never read.

The version that Dean and Gary read is gone.

Gone with the wind of editorial tampering.

I was young and scared and I caved in.

In a letter dated January 25, 1980, I wrote to my editor:

As for *The Woods Are Dark*, I'm glad you like the concept. I haven't had enough time, yet, to figure out a new direction for the book, but I'll go along with revisions based on your suggestions:

- a.) Dump the castle-MacQuiddy story line
- b.) More on the village people
- c.) More on the Krulls

I'll write the book on a 'broader canvas.'

Man, did I cave! Pathetic. All I really cared about, at the time, was getting those people at Warner Books to accept the novel. I had almost no self-confidence at all. If *they* said the book had problems, I figured it must have problems. I was more than willing to do just about anything they asked of me.

After discussions with my editor, I did major revisions that involved the abandonment of entire story-lines.

The Woods Are Dark became a very different book.

I certainly liked the new version, but I still feel a little sorry about some of the nifty stuff that got aborted.

Anyway, the good people at Warner Books eventually accepted my revised version. Then some sorry illiterate excuse for a line editor *really* revised it, but nobody bothered to send me a copy of the editorial revisions. All of a sudden, I received the proof sheets—*The Woods Are Dark* set in print. I was given a week or two to read it and fix what were supposed to be nothing more than the typesetter's errors. But I found, to my horror, that someone had *rewritten the book*.

Apparently, an editor hadn't appreciated my terse style, so he or she had "fixed" it for me. Fixed it, all right.

Sentences strung together by this imbecile no longer made sense. Entire paragraphs were removed. Time sequences were distorted. Changes in punctuation created grammatical errors. In several places, the pronoun "she" was replaced by a character's name—the *wrong* character. The same once-thrown knife got picked up twice. A fight got moved by

accident to a different and impossible location. I can't begin to describe how badly the novel had been decimated.

I was so overwhelmed and frustrated that, at one point, I actually broke down in tears.

But I corrected every single mistake and returned the proofs to Warner Books.

In a letter to my editor, dated November 16, 1980, I wrote, "Obviously, I was shocked by all this. Somebody spent an enormous amount of time on my manuscript, creating the very problems that a line editor is hired to correct. It caused great problems for me, and I'm sure the printer will have to do an enormous amount of extra work. The book, in its final form, will undoubtedly reflect the mess."

Soon afterward, an executive from Warner's finance department phoned me. He explained that it would cost Warner Books a fortune to make all the corrections. To save the company money, couldn't I possibly remove any corrections that weren't absolutely necessary?

I told him they "were *all* necessary.

Eventually, my prediction that the final product would reflect the mess came true. *The Woods Are Dark* was published containing nearly forty of the mistakes that I'd corrected on the proofs. As a result, several passages in that edition make almost no sense at all. The problems were eventually corrected in British editions of *The Woods Are Dark*.

But the fun wasn't over yet.

Several months before the publication date, I was sent a sample of the cover. And it was *brilliant!* If you have a copy of the old 1981 Warner Books edition of *The Woods Are Dark*.. you know, the one with the horrible green foil cover... turn it over. On the back is a beautiful, terrified young woman wearing a red parka and a handcuff. Now turn the book upside down and you'll see how the cover was *supposed* to look.

To this day, I believe in my heart that *The Woods Are Dark* would've outsold *The Cellar* if they had used their original cover idea...which ended up on the back of the book, upside down, out of sight and rarely seen.

The revised version of the cover "won some sort of prize for its creators.

But it killed the sales of *The Woods Are Dark*.

Warner Books did an excellent job of getting the book distributed. I saw it on the racks *everywhere*. Unfortunately, it was staying on the racks. Whereas I'd been able to see copies of *The Cellar* disappearing as if by magic, I saw *The Woods Are Dark* sitting on the store racks, untouched, unbought, unread.

Nobody seemed to be buying it.

Well, I may be prejudiced about the situation. But I have always suspected that people didn't refuse to buy *The Woods Are Dark* because they thought it was a lousy book. It is, after all, a pretty good trick to read a book (thereby discovering its lousiness) until *after* you've bought it.

They weren't reading it first, then deciding they didn't -want it.

They weren't even lifting it off the book racks.

As a result, *The Woods Are Dark* was a disaster.

It stayed in the stores (selling only about 70,000 copies) and it blasted away my writing career in the United States. My career in the U.S. has *never* recovered from the damage done by the Warner edition of *The Woods Are Dark*.

Probably the question I most often hear is, "Why are you so big in England, but not in your own country?"

You've just read the answer.

After the publication of *The Woods Are Dark* in the U.S., it was published in the U.K. by New English Library, later by W.H. Allen, then by Headline. Foreign language editions have been published in Hungary, Bulgaria, Spain, Italy, and France.

As of August, 1997, the Headline paperback edition is in its eleventh printing.

OUT ARE THE LIGHTS

I started writing *Out Are the Lights* immediately after mailing the manuscript of *The Woods Are Dark* to Jay Garon in December of 1979, and finished *Lights* on July 30, 1980. It was meant to be book number two of my \$45,000 three-book contract with Warner Books.

They accepted it in January, 1981. Later, before getting around to publishing *Out Are the Lights*, they would receive and reject two candidates for book number three of the contract, *Allhallow's Eve* (Feb. 1981) and *Beware!* (June, 1981).

Over in England, where my career hadn't been blown out of the water by *The Woods Are Dark*, New English Library published *Out Are the Lights* in 1982—before the U.S. edition came out.

The N.E.L. edition of *Lights* has a great cover with gold lettering, a bald executioner, a

bloody headsman's axe, and the severed noggin of a good-looking young woman. My British editor at the time, Nick Webb, called *Out Are the Lights* "a spectacular piece of horror writing if I may say so."

Already, England had pulled ahead of the U.S. in publishing my works.

When the American version came out...

Have you ever seen a copy of the 1982 Warner Books edition of *Out Are the Lights*?

The cover shows three teenagers looking oddly startled. Two of the three appear to be Patsy and Joanie from *Happy Days*.

What I want to know is, *Where the hell is Richie Cunningham?*

Where's the Fonz?

Oh, well, can't have everything.

On the back of the cover, readers are provided with a rare opportunity to find out *every major plot trick* in the book. *Out Are the Lights* is built around a couple of major gimmicks, which are supposed to remain secret until discovered by the reader. Anyone who reads the back cover, however, learns every secret—including the final one, which is revealed about six pages from the end of the book.

This was a case of being *stabbed in the back cover*.

It would be rather as if the producers of *The Usual Suspects* had revealed the identity of Keyser Soze in the posters and prevues of the film.

How could a publisher be so stupid?

Or *did* they give away my plot because they "were too stupid to know any better? I always thought so. Looking back on it now, however, I have to wonder. Do I detect the stench of malicious intent?

I was so upset by the situation that I taped an index card over the back cover of every copy of the Warner edition of *Out Are the Lights* that I gave away, so that my family and friends wouldn't have the story ruined.

Anyway...

For better or "worse, hardly anyone had an opportunity to see this remarkable cover. *Out Are The Lights* was the second book of my three-book contract with Warner. (*The Cellar* preceded that contract.) Since *Lights* followed the fiasco of *The Woods Are Dark*, it

barely got published at all.

I do know it was published, however. I once saw a few copies in a drug store. Actually, records indicate that the Warner edition sold about 28,000 copies. I think that's very good for an invisible book.

But it "was the end of the line for me and Warner Books.

We mutually agreed that my three-book contract would become a two-book contract, and that *Out Are the Lights* would finish off my relationship with them.

In summary, my encounters with Warner Books resulted in a highly successful edition of *The Cellar*, a mutilated version of *The Woods Are Dark*, the "walking wounded" *Out Are the Lights*, the carcasses of *Take 'em*, *The Keepers*, *Dead Corse*, *Allhallow's Eve*, *Secret Nights*, and *Beware!*, and the destruction of my writing career in the United States of America.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, the New English Library edition of *Out Are the Lights* did fine. Foreign language editions have subsequently been published in Spain, France, Russia and Hungary. In 1987, *Out Are the Lights* was optioned by a film company in Spain. The film, however, was never made.

In 1993, Headline published a hardbound edition of *Out Are the Lights*. To give the book a little more heft, the novel itself was followed by my stories, "Mess Hall," "Dinker's Pond," "Madman Stan," "Bad News," and "The Tub." Book Club Associates bought 15,000 copies of the hardbound. A paperback version of the same book, including the stories, "was published by Headline later in 1993.

NIGHTMARE LAKE

I wrote *Nightmare Lake* in 1980, finishing it immediately after *Out Are the Lights*. It wouldn't be published, however, until 1983.

By the time I wrote *Nightmare Lake*, I was pretty sure that Scholastic wouldn't want it. But I figured someone might. Though the novel was intended for young adults, I wrote it pretty much like any other novel. Obviously, I kept it "clean."

No sex, no bad language. I tried not to go overboard with the violence, but the story did end up more violent than most novels written for young adults.

It would be my first published vampire novel.

After the "success" of *Your Secret Admirer*, I thought I might work on parallel careers writing adult horror and young adult thrillers. I wrote it "on spec"—without a contract and with no specific publisher in mind. In other words, I just wrote it because I loved the idea.

Nightmare Lake is the father of *The Stake*.

A couple of teenagers, a brother and sister, are on a family vacation in Wisconsin. Out exploring a lake one day, they visit a small, deserted island with their dog. Fooling around, the brother tosses a stick for the dog to fetch.

It comes back with a stick, all right. But not the same stick the kid had thrown.

This stick is actually a stake plucked by the dog from the ribs of a skeleton.

The skeleton of a vampire?

And so begins a pretty creepy story.

Too creepy for juvenile editors, in fact. My agent, Jay Garon, couldn't sell it. Then I noticed a mention (I believe in *Publishers: Weekly*) that Dell was starting the *Twilight* series—scary books for young adults. So I told Garon about it. He submitted my book to them, and they bought it in 1982.

There were problems, though. (Aren't there always?)

Here are bits from a letter sent to me by the editor:

We must remove or replace any religious references, i.e. the Devil, the monk's robes and the crosses. Of these, the cross seems to pose the hardest problem.

Manuscript must be shortened to fit specs.

Burt and Sammi come across as the same age. Burt must be made "older."

The characters are a little flat. Work on atmospheric logistics. Heighten the visual perception of their situations *and* descriptive reactions; i.e., instead of "I don't want to think about it," said Sammi. -try- "I don't want to think about it," said Sammi, backing into the corner of the room and sinking into the old battered armchair, -or- "This place gives me the creeps!" she said, as the wet grass lapped against her legs sending chilling drops down into her shoes.

... (and so on)

Don't let any of that throw you. We like the book *very* much. We like it so much that we are putting it in the front position in our scheduling.

There were actually two full pages of comments, criticisms and suggestions. Some made sense, but many didn't. I wrote a three page response, then knuckled down and wrote a major revision of *Nightmare Lake*.

At some point in all this (possibly when I first wrote the novel, or maybe in response to the criticisms), I wrote an "alternate ending." In the alternate, the whole story turns out to be nightmare the boy had while taking a nap on the island.

I made it clear that editors could feel free to use the alternate ending as a way to mollify people who might find the book too scary or violent. With the dream ending, we give the illusion that none of the bad stuff actually happened; there're no such things as vampires; nobody got killed; everything's fine and dandy, kids—it was just a bad old nightmare.

I feel that I redeemed the cop-out factor in my own eyes by throwing a curve (a trite curve, but the best I could do under the circumstances). When the kid wakes up from his nightmare, along comes his dog with a strange stick in its mouth.. So is the bad stuff about to start for real?

I am especially fond of *Nightmare Lake* because it is based so closely on my experiences as a kid when my family went on vacations to Wisconsin. It's sort of a Nick Adams story as done by Richard Laymon.

Unfortunately, an editor messed with my language. This is my *only* published book in which significant parts of the writing don't reflect my own style.

I was paid an advance of \$5,500 for *Nightmare Lake*. The book was published as *Twilight #11* in 1983 and sold (so far as the royalty statements indicate) a total of 53,505 copies. It has never been reprinted anywhere and is very hard for readers to find.

As a result of doing this piece on *Nightmare Lake*, I've taken steps to get the rights reverted to me. Maybe "my version" of the book will be published one of these days.

ALLHALLOWS EVE

Though *Allhallow's Eve* was first published in 1985, after both *Night Show* and *Beware!*, I actually wrote it before either of those novels. I wrote *Allhallow's Eve* in 1980 after finishing *Out Are the Lights* and *Nightmare Lake*.

As of 1980, I'd been working for several years as a library clerk, then as the librarian (or media specialist) at John Adams Junior High School in Santa Monica.

And it shows.

I have just reread *Allhallow's Eve*, and found myself amazed by the details of school life that fill the book. Back in those days, it was all fresh in my mind—I was living it daily. I knew first-hand about hall passes, the dangers of the school restrooms, the petty tyranny of the "popular" kids like Aleshia. I saw the viciousness of the bullies like Nate and the vice principal, Mr. Doons. I knew their victims, who spent their school days in terror of

being hurt and/or humiliated. And I knew great, caring teachers like Miss Bennett.

Reading the book after so many years, I was surprised to run into Mr. Carlson, who was obviously based on myself. When I ran the library, it was a sanctuary for kids like Eric who were being chased by kids like Nate. I remember them bursting through the library doors during the lunch period. And I remember' throwing the bullies out, sometimes with a bit more roughness than was necessary or legal.

Quite possibly, the best thing about *Allhallow's Eve* is its accurate portrayal of secondary school—the institution and the variety of kids, teachers and administrators who inhabit it. Structurally, it seems to be a mystery novel. A crime is committed at the beginning of the book and much of the action involves the police trying to figure out who did the dirty deed. The structure also, however, brands it as a horror novel. Almost from the very start, we are being led toward a climactic Halloween party at an old, creepy, abandoned house. Someone has been fixing it up. Someone has put bars on the windows—on the inside. Inevitably, all hell is going to break loose when everyone is gathered there for the big party.

Re-reading the book yesterday, I actually got the creeps, myself, when I encountered a scene near the end of the book.

A scene involving monkey suits suspended from the window bars.

My overall reaction was a mixture of delight and regret.

Allhallows Eve has a lot going on in it. And that is an understatement. I found myself fascinated by many of the characters and scenes. And by several twists in the plot. I particularly like the ironies. My favorite irony has to do with who "saves the day"—to the extent that the day does get saved.

My main regret is that the story is too fast-paced. Every scene shoots by so fast that, if your mind strays for a moment, you might miss something vital. I was an equal opportunity writer; I wrote every scene as if it were just as important as every other scene. They all seem to have about the same weight.

Why did I write that way? For one thing, I believed (and perhaps still do) in a "deadpan" approach. I'm just a writer telling what happened. Let the readers decide where the emphasis should go.

Also, however, I was dead-set against boring my readers. I hated to read books in which the writer lingered on detailed descriptions. I wanted them to *get on with it*. So *I* got on with it.

Excessively.

Part of it was the result of self-doubt. I felt that I would lose the interest of my readers if I devoted a little time to character development or if I used more than about one sentence to describe *anything*.

Dean Koontz pointed this out to me several times during my early years. He told me that I needed more confidence in myself, that I was a good enough writer that I didn't *need* to have constant breakneck action, that I should slow down and linger and broaden the scope of my stories.

He was, of course, right.

In *Allhallow's Eve*, I plunged forward like a sprinter. But I should've strolled. I should've lingered -with *so* many of the characters and scenes. Dean always talks about "ringing all the bells." In this book, I left far too many of the bells unrung.

If I'd written it ten years later, it would've been two or three times as long, and possibly twice as good.

But I didn't.

Allhallow's Eve is what it is, for better or for -worse.

In an interview, I once stated that I -would like to do a major revision of *Allhallow's Eve* and develop it into the novel it should be.

But I've changed my mind about that.

It almost seems as if novels are living creatures. A major revision of an old novel often kills it. Like the critters in *Pet Sematary*, the resurrected, changed novel doesn't come back quite right. It comes back without its soul.

If I should ever have an opportunity to rewrite *Allhallow's Eve*, I would make very few changes. I might add an extra page here or there to clarify a couple of matters. I would want to get rid of half a dozen printing errors, if possible. (Sam's name turns into Sun at one point, and years become gears.)

I would definitely omit about a thousand commas. Apparently, in those days, I was comma crazy.

But I wouldn't tamper with the big stuff.

Allhallow's Eve has its faults, but it also has its charms. I'd hate to risk killing those.

Whatever charms it might possess, they weren't apparent to my editors at Warner Books. I shipped the book off to Jay Garon on January 24, 1981. It was supposed to be the third book of my three-book contract, but my editor at Warner rejected it.

It would be published by New English Library in 1991. A year later, a British small press named Kennel would publish a limited edition hardbound—without my knowledge or consent but apparently with the blessings of NEL. An oddity of the Kennel edition is that its dust jacket illustration depicts the "Cadillac Desert." My book has nothing to do with the Cadillac Desert, but I believe that Kennel was also involved with publishing Joe Lansdale, author of the short story, "On the Far Side of the Cadillac Desert With Dead Folks." Maybe a dust jacket designed for Joe ended up on my novel.

Allhallow's Eve would be reissued by NEL with a new cover in 1992, and bought by Headline in 1993.

BEWARE!

I started working on *Beware!* on March 13, 1981—less than two months after finishing *Allhallow's Eve*. I finished the first draft approximately three months later, on June 19. Warner Books rejected it.

Somewhere along the line, Dean Koontz read a copy of the manuscript. At that time, it contained some sort of involved subplot full of international intrigue, or something. Dean gave me a very good piece of advice. He said it's not a good idea to overload readers with *too much* stuff that's far out. My main character was invisible. That's enough weirdness for one book.

Lose the oddball subplot. (Dean didn't actually use those words, but that was the jist of his suggestion.) I not only wrote a major revision based on Dean's advice, but I've been keeping it in mind ever since. And I think the revised version of *Beware!* was a major improvement over the original.

It was bought by New English Library in 1982 (at the same time as *Night Show*). Because NEL had a backlog of my books, however, *Beware!* wouldn't be published until 1985. I've always been a bit surprised that anyone *dared* to publish it at all.

At book signings, I usually get into conversations with the people who've shown up for autographs. To break the ice, and because it interests me a lot, I usually ask fans what they do for a living. They're normally glad to tell me. But they're even *more* eager to tell me which of my books they like the best.

Every so often, the favorite book is *Beware!*

I usually laugh and say something like, "Uh-oh. Gotta watch out for *you!* If *Beware!* your favorite, you must be a pretty weird guy."

Nowadays, I usually advise the *Beware!* enthusiast to run out and find a copy of *Endless Night*.

I haven't actually studied my books. But my *impression* is that *Beware!* and *Endless Night* are probably my most vicious, nasty excursions into bad behavior.

While *Endless Night* is about a gang of horrible thrill-killers, *Beware!* is about just one fellow. He's a sadistic homicidal maniac hitman rapist who is also invisible.

Though there have been several "invisible man" books and movies, they generally avoid the sort of activities that my guy, Sammy Hoffman, engages in.

Visits to shower rooms, for instance.

And much, much worse.

Sammy Hoffman has *no* conscience, figures he is invincible, and goes on his merry way doing whatever pops into his sick little mind.

A very unsavory character.

But loads of fun, if you like that sort of thing.

THE LAWMEN

Almost immediately after mailing off *Beware!*, I started writing *The Lawmen*. I'd been all set to embark on *The Cellar II* (*Beast House*) at the time the contract for *The Lawmen* arrived on July 14, 1981. The completed manuscript was due on November 15, 1981. That gave me only four months. I dropped everything else, wrote the book, and sent it Express Mail on November 16, 1981.

The Lawmen, a western novel to be published under the pseudonym Lee Davis Willoughby, was a big detour for me. It would be my first novel to take place entirely in an earlier historical period. It would be, by far, my *biggest* novel so far. And it would be my first "ghost-writing" job. That is, I would be paid to write under a pseudonym and tell a story conceived by someone else.

My agent, Jay Garon, had arranged the deal. He told me I could earn \$10,000 by writing a book for *The Making of America* series. The series was being packaged by a friend of his, James Bryans (who had once worked "with Jim Thompson, I recently learned) and published by Dell. Garon was asking several of his clients to do books for the series.

At that time, my "real" stuff was getting rejected by Warner Books a little too often and I needed the money. Also, it seemed wise to branch out and try some non-horror material. Plus, I'd always been a fan of the western genre and was eager for the challenge of making my own contribution to it. So I agreed to write the book.

I was sent a fairly involved plot outline about a real-life Pinkerton man named Charles Siringo who spent many years on the trail of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. My book was supposed to be based on the outline. However, I was encouraged to veer off on my own if I felt the urge.

As a result, I pretty much wrote *The Lawmen* my way.

I began by doing a lot research. I studied the old west and especially Butch Cassidy and his Hole in the Wall gang. To my chagrin, I discovered that Butch was generally considered to be a very nice, friendly guy.

But I couldn't let that get in the way of my story.

I turned him into a horrible, murdering sadist.

Though the book is full of real historical characters—including most of the well-known members of the Hole in the Wall Gang—I threw in a lot of fictional extras. Including a one-eyed psycho named Snake who would've been more at home in a horror novel.

I threw in a few plot twists that I think were pretty nifty, too.

I'm especially happy "with the book's ending, which I've always thought should include a footnote such as: "With my thanks and apologies to William Goldman."

The finale of *The Lawmen* is based on a historical fact.

The fact is this: a couple of outlaws from North America were gunned down in a Shootout with the Bolivian military, but nobody knows for sure who they were. Many people *assume* they were Butch and Sundance.

But who knows?

While my finale stands on its own, it achieves its real potential by playing off the reader's familiarity with Goldman's movie, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*.

I've just finished re-reading *The Lawmen*.

Though several scenes had remained vivid in my memory over the past fifteen years, I found that I'd forgotten much of the story. I read the book with nearly fresh eyes. And liked what I read.

It's full of colorful characters, some horrific violence, a bit of humor here and there, romance and love and sex, unexpected plot twists, accurate historical and geographical details, and a birth scene and some infant behavior that had obviously been based on my own experiences.

(My daughter was two years old when I -wrote *The Lawmen*)

And then there's Thirty-Three, the book's penultimate chapter. Unable to recall exactly how I'd pulled off certain tricks, I entered it with some trepidation.

And grinned as I read it.

Amazed that I'd been able to pull off such a stunt.

The Lawmen laid much of the groundwork for my next "western" novel, *Savage: From Whitechapel to the Wild West on the Track of Jack the Ripper*, which would be published ten years later. Aside from the knowledge I gained by researching and writing *The Lawmen*, it gave me an additional boost of confidence. The idea of writing *Savage* didn't seem quite so overwhelming because I'd already written one western novel, and it had been published.

The Lawmen, a paperback original selling for \$3.25, came out in July, 1983. As the cover proclaims, it was the "fortieth book in the bestselling series, *The Making of America*." And the only one 'written by me. According to the first royalty statement after its publication, it apparently sold about 20,000 copies.

The 1982 paperback, so far, is the only edition of *The Lawmen*.

NIGHT SHOW

On December 18, 1981, a month after finishing *The Lawmen*, I started "writing a novel called *Chill Master*. While working on it, I was also busy with revisions of *Beware!* and struggling with my secret project, *Hollywood Goons*. Two months into the writing of *Chill Master*, my three-book contract with Warner Books came to an untimely end, one book short. I finished the book on April 30, 1982. Before sending it to Garon, I changed the title to *Night Show*.

By then, my career in the U.S. -was down the toilet. But things were still popping along in the U.K. In November, 1982, New English Library purchased *Beware!* and *Night Show*. They published-*Night Show* in 1984—a year *before* they would publish *Beware!*, which I'd written earlier.

Night Show didn't get published in the U.S. for two more years. That's because word had gotten around in the New York publishing circles...

There was at least one editor who intended to buy *Night Show* until the sales department of her company got in touch with Warner Books. The offer (for a two-book deal) was withdrawn.

Because of the disaster at Warner, most publishers in the U.S. would not touch a Richard Laymon book. The situation caused a four year gap between the publication of *Out Are the Lights* and my next book to be published here, *Night Show*.

Thomas Doherty Associates—Tor—eventually came along and took a chance on me. Tor offered me a contract for *Night Show* in April, 1985 and published the book a year later. *Night Show* is sort of a companion piece to *Out Are the Lights*. Both -were largely inspired by my regular visits to the Culver Theater.

During the heyday of the "slasher movie era," the Culver showed a new horror movie almost every week. And I went to most of them. Kelly was a baby then, so Ann stayed home and took care of her while I drove off, one night every week, to see whatever scary movie happened to be playing at the Culver.

Though I felt guilty about leaving Ann and Kelly behind, I felt that it was my professional obligation to see the movies.

After all, I considered myself to be a horror writer. I needed to see what was being done in the field. So I went anyway. By myself.

The Culver Theater -was an old place across Washington Boulevard from the Culver City studios of MGM (now Sony). Once a "movie palace," it had been split up into a crazy patchwork of small theaters with stairways leading in strange directions. The seating for one of the screens actually seemed to be the former balcony.

The place had real atmosphere.

And it had colorful patrons. Some were certainly devoted film and horror fans, like myself. Others seemed a bit shady.

I sat by myself, never spoke to anyone, and usually felt creepy about the whole experience.

Which added to the flavor of the films, no doubt.

After watching movies like *Halloween* or *Prom Night* or any of a hundred others, I always had to leave the theater alone and "walk through the empty streets to reach my car. If the movie'd been good enough, the walk back to my car could be harrowing.

I not only had to worry about *real* thugs, but about the likes of Mrs. Vorhees or Michael Meyers coming after me.

I know, I know. They don't really exist.

I *knew* they couldn't get me, but the power of certain movies set me on edge. I'd hurry down empty sidewalks (and an especially creepy passageway alongside the theater),

glancing over my shoulder, goosebumps often skittering up my spine. At the car, I'd always be careful to check the back seat before climbing in. Then I'd lock the doors. And on the short drive home, I always worried that I might arrive home and find that someone had butchered Ann and Kelly in my absence.

A grown man.

Hey, I was in my early thirties at the time.

But frequently spooked.

Though I always felt guilty about going to those movies, my Culver Theater experiences not only kept me current with what was going on in the world of horror cinema, but gave me *loads* of firsthand material.

Though many of my novels and stories contain references to horror films and movie theaters, such matters are at the very heart of *Out Are the Lights* and *Night Show*.

"The Haunted Palace" in *Out are The Lights* was inspired by the Culver Theater.

And so was the movie theater in *Night Show*.

Night Show is about a creepy fellow named Tony who *loves* to frighten people with cruel and frightening tricks. He drives a hearse. His ambition in life is to become a special effects makeup artist for slasher movies, and he wants to study under the best in the field, Dani Larson. (She is something of a young, attractive female version of Tom Savini.) Now, Dani doesn't want an apprentice. But Tony won't take no for an answer.

It is very much a book for horror movie buffs. I never could have written it if I hadn't spent those years making my "weekly pilgrimages to the old and creepy Culver Theater.

The Culver still stands, and I see it on the other side of Washington Boulevard now when I make my weekly visits with Ann and Kelly to the Culver Mann theaters.

For years now, it has been closed.

Abandoned, it seems spookier than ever before. I wonder if the rows of torn seats are still there, shrouded in dust and darkness. And I wonder who might be sitting in them now.

TREAD SOFTLY

On June 15, 1982, less than a month after finishing *Night Show*, I started to write my novel, *Curse*. During the time I spent working on it, I also wrote several short stories, spent time collaborating with Robert Colby on *The Dump* (never finished) and working on the first draft of my secret project, *Hollywood Goons*. Because of so many other

activities—and because *Curse* was significantly longer than my previous horror novels, I didn't finish it until January 27, 1983.

On February 1, I changed the title to *Tread Softly With Care*. It would eventually be published as *Tread Softly*, and later as *Dark Mountain*.

The writing of this book marked a new stage in my career.

Largely due to the influences of Dean Koontz, I'd decided to "mainstream" my horror novels. He'd not only advised such a step personally, but he'd given detailed advice on how to go about it in his book, *How to Write Best-Selling Fiction*. Taking his suggestions to heart, I was determined to enlarge the scope of my material so that my next book would be more than simply a "horror genre" novel.

Before *Tread Softly*, my horror novels were short and to the point. They never lingered. They never elaborated. The scenes shot by rapid-fire, with a breathless pace that never paused for a description, rarely for an explanation. The stories raced along non-stop from start to finish.

In Dean's opinion, I insisted on the slam-bang pace because I lacked confidence in my ability to hold the readers' interest.

I was afraid I might bore them if I didn't plunge from one wild, over-the-top scene to the next.

He was right, of course.

On my way toward getting a high school diploma, a B.A. in English and an M.A. in English literature, I'd been forced to read huge amounts of fiction. Much of it "was great, exciting stuff. But much of it had bored me.

From a very early age, I was a rebel against boring fiction.

I equated "boring" with lengthy descriptive passages and with scenes in which nothing much seemed to happen. I always wanted the writer to "get on with it."

Therefore I was determined, in my own fiction, to avoid any writing that didn't move the story forward at a good, quick clip.

I'm still a great believer in lots of fast action, but my early novels show a commitment to *almost nothing else*. Dean told me that I wouldn't lose anything by slowing down a bit. I didn't need to worry about boring my readers, because even if I slowed *wayyyy down*, I - would still have more happening at a quicker pace than most other writers. And I might pick up *new* readers by "painting on a broader canvas"—that is, by writing bigger books with more scope, more descriptive passages, more elaborate plots, more fully developed characters and themes. And it couldn't hurt to play down any supernatural aspects of the plot.

With *Tread Softly*, I put Dean's advice into action for the first time. If you compare it to any of my previous horror novels, you won't be able to miss the difference.

And the difference *made* a difference.

A huge difference.

While Tor eventually bought *Tread Softly* for the same amount as *Night Show* (\$7,500), it was on the strength of the new book with the "broader canvas" that Dean's British agent, Bob Tanner, agreed to take me on as a client. Bob immediately sold *Tread Softly* to W.H. Allen, where it would be published as my very first hardcover.

(It would carry the Richard Kelly pseudonym in order to avoid interference with New English Library, which was continuing to publish my books as paperback originals. They had refused to do *Tread Softly* as a hardcover, so Bob Tanner had taken it elsewhere.)

Gaining not only my first hardcover sale but a great new agent thanks to the new approach, I was won over.

Tread Softly marked a major change in the course of my career. It truly was a "mainstream" novel, not "genre horror."

From then on, all my novels would be published as hardbounds in the United Kingdom. The numbers of my readers and fans would increase dramatically. And so would my advances.

Tread Softly is about a group that goes backpacking into a wilderness area of California's High Sierras. They run into some nasty trouble—including an old hag who fancies herself a witch. She puts a curse them.

When they get back to their normal lives in Los Angeles, things begin to go wrong. Badly wrong. Maybe they're just having a spell of bad luck. Or maybe it's the curse. If it *is* the old woman's curse, what can they do to save themselves?

That's it, in a nutshell.

Writing *Tread Softly*, I wanted a plot that would be somewhat ambiguous in its treatment of the supernatural. Is there *really* a curse, or not?

Also, because it was to be a much longer book than usual, I wanted an "infinitely expandable" plot. (I'm always looking for infinitely expandable plots.) Such a plot is one with a loose structure, one that permits the writer to add episode after episode after episode until he gets to the size or scope he's looking for. In *Tread Softly*, for instance, the plot needed to include examples of incidents going terribly wrong due to "the curse." I needed several such incidents, but there was no limit to how many I could use. This gave

me the freedom to make the book pretty much as long as I wished.

Though I made the book long enough to break new ground for myself, I'm fairly sure it doesn't get boring.

In fact, I know it has made some of its readers a little bit edgy about taking trips into the wilderness. In some small way, it has accomplished for tents what *Psycho* did for showers.

In writing *Tread Softly*, I used up vast amounts of my own firsthand experiences. As a youth, I was an active Boy Scout and spent lots of time on camping trips in forested areas of Illinois and Wisconsin. After moving to California in 1963, my brother and I joined an Explorer post and took our first, harrowing backpacking trip into the high Sierras. During the next several years, I did a lot of hiking and camping (illegal, mostly) around Marin County: Mount Tamalpais, the Dipsey Trail, Stinson Beach. And I made numerous excursions into the Sierras. I trekked the back country in and around Yosemite, Mineral King, Lake Tahoe, and places I couldn't even name. I've climbed mountain trails, trudging up endless switchbacks. I've roamed and camped in areas so desolate that we saw no other human beings day after day. I've slept in forests and pastures, on peaks, by alpine lakes and by roaring streams. And doing so, I got the holy crap scared out of me on several occasions.

Tread Softly makes use of my experiences during those years.

So it is not only a scary novel, but one that is sure to have a special impact on any reader who has spent much time in the wilderness.

It is probably my *main* wilderness novel. But there are several others that also deal with experiences in desolate areas:

The Woods Are Dark; Darkness, Tell Us; Savage; Island; After Midnight, and many of my shorter works—especially my novella, "The Wilds" which has not yet come out.

The first hardbound edition of *Tread Softly* was published by W.H. Allen, using the Richard Kelly pseudonym, in 1987. The same year, a paperback original was published in the U.S. by Tor—using my own name. If the name difference didn't cause enough confusion, more was added in 1992 when Headline published a new hardbound edition of the book. This not only used the Richard Laymon name, but changed the title to *Dark Mountain*. Seems that Headline had already published a romance novel by the title, *Tread Softly*.

THE BEAST HOUSE

As both an avid reader and a movie fan, I am wary of sequels. They are nearly always inferior to the original. Because of *The Cellar's* reputation, I felt a special responsibility

and reluctance about writing a sequel.

Also, since *The Cellar* was my first published novel, I didn't want to create the impression that my scope was limited to books about Beast House.

So I didn't rush into it. Instead, I waited more than six years and wrote quite a *few* novels before making a return trip to Malcasa Point.

Waiting was a good idea. It gave me a chance to grow, to learn more about writing and about myself, so that I was not the same guy by the time I sat down to face *The Beast House*.

That's probably what saved it from being "one of those sequels."

A sequel, by its very nature, has some built-in problems.

The most obvious difficulty is that, as a writer, you're competing against yourself. In my case, the new book would be going up against *The Cellar*. Considering the reputation of *The Cellar*, which is often called a horror classic, the sequel stood a great chance of disappointing my readers. In fact, it would've been unrealistic of me to think that I could take on *The Cellar* and win.

So my strategy was to avoid a head-on clash.

I would write a book so different from the original that direct comparisons would be difficult to make. And since *nothing* stood a chance of surpassing *The Cellar* in the minds of some readers, I figured not to let it worry me.

Aside from the fact that you're being challenged to out-perform one of your best performances, writing a sequel has another inherent drawback. As a writer, you're forced to address two different groups of readers: those who had read the first book, and those who hadn't.

For those who'd already read *The Cellar*, I was returning to familiar territory. They had already been to Malcasa Point, taken the Beast House tour, seen the "beast" in action, etc. They already knew what to expect, so they weren't likely to be surprised or shocked a repeat of the same situations that may have grabbed them the first time around. Yet, certain situations *had* to be repeated for the sake of those who hadn't read *The Cellar*.

The trick was to give an exciting ride to *both* sets of readers. Not an easy task, but it's one that every writer of a sequel must confront.

I set myself a different goal for each set of readers.

For those who hadn't read *The Cellar*, I wanted *The Beast House* to stand completely on

its own. Just as if there *had never been* an earlier book on the subject.

For those who *had* read *The Cellar*, however, I wanted *Beast House* to be a really unusual, special experience. I saw the sequel not as a chance to revisit or continue the experiences created in *The Cellar*, but as a chance to expand and "play off" them.

While *The Beast House* has an entirely different plot from *The Cellar*, the stories have numerous connections. Being unaware of the connections won't hurt those who haven't read *The Cellar*, but *catching them* adds a fairly major diminution to the enjoyment of reading *Beast House*.

And vice versa.

Not only does *The Beast House* play off *The Cellar*, but the reverse is also true. Information obtained by reading *The Beast House* actually reflects back on *The Cellar* and changes the reader's understanding of what was really going on in that book.

A sequel doesn't have to be a merely a rehash or continuation of the previous story. The second book can and should be a fully developed entity that stands on its own. And there's no reason it can't be *better than* the original.

Here is the real potential—In writing a sequel, there is an opportunity to create a mirror effect in which each book reflects the other, distorts and expands the other, leading to effects that no single book would be able to achieve by itself.

I started writing *The Beast House* on January 31, 1983. Its working title was *The Cellar II*.

During the months that followed, I also wrote numerous stories for young adults, a non-fiction book about driving (*Driving Me Nuts*, never published), and began working as an office temporary. With so many other situations getting in the way, I didn't finish the first draft of *The Cellar II* until October 13, 1983. I didn't get around to completing the final version and sending it to my agent until January 13, 1985, more than a year after finishing the initial draft.

Tor, which would later buy and publish my previously written books, *Night Show* and *Tread Softly*, was offered *The Beast House* but rejected it. Reading between the lines of the rejection letter, I figured out that the editor had misgivings about the propriety of certain events that take place in the book.

"In all good conscience," she couldn't publish such a book.

(I'm sure she would've rejected *The Cellar* on the same grounds, given the chance. And who knows, maybe she did.)

Overseas, *The Beast House* was purchased by New English Library in April, 1985, at the same time as *Allhallow's Eve*. It was published in 1986. It saw U.S. publication in 1987 when brought out in a very limited fashion by a short-lived Canadian house, Paperbacks. Back in England, it was re-issued a couple of times by New English Library, then taken over by Headline, who published it in 1993. In 1995. Book Club Associates brought out a hardbound "double book" containing *The Beast House* and *Allhallow's Eve*.

Oddly enough, publishers and reviewers have rarely linked *The Beast House* to *The Cellar*. So far, the connection between the two books is pretty much a secret to everyone except my real fans.

Before leaving *The Beast House*, I want to throw in a disclaimer. A major plot line of the book belongs to a writer who comes to Malcasa Point in hopes of doing a non-fiction book about Beast House. The writer is the scum of the earth. His name is Gorman Hardy.

At the time, I didn't know that Gorman could even be a name. I thought I had invented it. Subsequently, however, I became very good friends with the writer, Ed Gorman. Far from being the scum of the earth, Ed Gorman is the salt. If I'd known Ed at the time I wrote *The Beast House*, I would have given my dispicable writer a very different name.

Ed has never brought my attention to the matter. But it is something that has bothered me over the years, so I thought this would be a good time to mention it.

A STRANGER'S ARMS and PASSION STORM

Immediately after finishing the first draft of *The Beast House* (and part of the reason that more than a year went by before I could actually finish whipping it into its final shape), I received a contract to write two contemporary romantic suspense novels. The deal, arranged by Jay Garon, was with James Bryans, the same packager who'd been behind *The Making of America* series.

I'd gotten \$10,000 for writing *The Lawmen*.

I would be getting \$500 each for these.

At that point, \$500 sounded pretty good. Lousy pay for writing an entire book, but more than my monthly income. I could use it. In a bad way. So I accepted the contract.

I was sent general guidelines for each book. I recall doing some research on the logging industry and paper mills.

And I actually had fun writing them.

I stayed home from my temporary office work and churned out about twenty pages per day. This was at least four times my usual output. And it suffered no revisions. My first

draft was my only draft.

As each page came out of my typewriter, so it was sent to the publisher.

Oddly enough, I've always looked back on the "fast writing" of those two books as a significant learning experience. I was forced to plunge ahead, commit to paper pretty much the first thing that occurred to me, leap into the flow of the story and let it carry me along in its currents, write by instinct and the seat of my pants.

It taught me something about how to move along with the currents...

And it taught me that I'm capable of writing twenty pages a day if I have to.

I finished the two books ahead of the deadline and got paid my handsome sum. *A Stranger's Arms* by Carla Laymon was published by Blue Heron Press in 1984, and also published in Germany. To the best of my knowledge, *Passion Storm* has never been published.

I was told that Blue Heron had gone out of business before they could get to my second book. If *Passion Storm* ever did get published, nobody told me about it.

ALARUMS or ALARMS

I wrote the original version of *Alarums* in 1985 and it didn't get published for eight years. It was part of my plan to open a second front as a suspense author. The 1985 version of the novel (unpublished) bears the Richard Kelly pseudonym.

The plan didn't work.

Alarums went unsold until 1990, when Mark Ziesing expressed interest in doing a special limited edition of one of my works. He wanted a book that had never been published. *Alarums* seemed to fit the bill, so I did a major revision of the 1985 manuscript.

Since Mark's plan was to publish a Laymon book, we dumped the Richard Kelly pseudonym.

We also changed the title to *Alarms* because Mark figured that the more archaic spelling, with that weird "u", would confuse readers.

Though Mark bought the book in 1990, it didn't actually get published until either the end of 1992 or the beginning of 1993.

In the meantime, it had been bought by Headline, which would publish it in 1993 using the original title, *Alarums*.

I had chosen to call it *Alarums* instead of *Alarms* because I wanted the Shakespearean aspects of "alarums," which are outcries of warning.

My book is about warnings, alarms, and false alarms.

It is about Melanie, who experiences (or maybe doesn't) premonitions about such things as her father falling victim to a hit-and-run accident.

Because of her psychic abilities, she knows it was no accident.

And she knows who did it.

All she needs is proof.

Alarums might seem a little similar to *Hamlet*. It is *more* than a little similar, but more than a little different, too.

I intended it to be a contemporary, distorted version of the Shakespeare play. If you aren't familiar with *Hamlet*, no harm is done. *Alarums* stands on its own. But if you *do* know *Hamlet*, you'll find connections, parallels and detours that might add to your enjoyment of *Alarums*.

While my book was intended to be "suspense" instead of "horror," it contains all the elements usually found in my horror novels. And it has a very special ending.

FLESH

I started writing *Flesh* on January 25, 1986. Along the way, it went through two different working titles, *Parasite* and later *Snatchers*.

By the time I began writing *Flesh*, Tor had already bought *Night Show* and *Tread Softly* for its new horror line and I figured my career in the U.S. was on the road to recovery. It took me four months to write *Flesh*. I finished the first draft on May 20, and sent it off to my agents (Bob Tanner in the U.K., Ray Peuchner in the U.S.) in July.

The origin of *Flesh* was unusual for me, in that it was inspired by a short story. About a year before starting *Flesh*, I wrote a "Fastback" short story called "Night Games." It is a haunted house story. To win a bet, a teenaged girl intends to spend the night in a haunted house. If she leaves it before morning, she loses. Well, she intends to win. Inside the house, she handcuffs herself to a radiator so she can't leave, *no matter what*.

The gimmick really intrigued me.

It provided the starting point of *Flesh*. All the rest of the plot was developed to set up the

wager about the overnight stay in a creepy place (which becomes a deserted restaurant), and to follow it up.

In "Night Games," the spooky house wasn't haunted by a ghost. The threat came from "a slobbering, dead-white beast from the pit of a nightmare." (I think it actually came from Malcasa Point.) I didn't want to use such a beast in *Flesh*, so I came up with a snake-like creature that burrows under a person's skin, latches onto the brain stem, and takes control. It likes to eat people. So it turns its host into a raving cannibal. If you kill the host, the creature pops out and comes after *you*.

For many readers, however, the star of the book isn't the creature, it's Roland.

Roland is not a very nice guy.

As for me, the star of the book is Kimmy, the four-year-old daughter of the police officer, Jake. Kimmy comes pretty close to being non-fiction. Her appearance, mannerisms, dialogue, and even her buddy "Klew" represent my attempt to create a portrait of my daughter, Kelly, at that age.

Flesh was my third novel (after *Tread Softly* and *Beast House*) using the new "mainstream" approach. Though it has a genre-type beast doing mayhem, it is 'written with a large scope.

A *lot* goes on. There are several characters who are "fleshed out" in much more depth than you'll find in my early books. With *Flesh*, I was beginning to get comfortable with the "larger canvas." I took my time and *played* with the material, trying out different styles, lingering over portraits, in absolutely no hurry at all to get on with the story.

The important thing is not the destination, it's the trip.

Again, the "mainstream" approach brought great results.

Flesh, published by Tor with a magnificent cover, was named "Best Horror Novel of 1988" in *Science Fiction Chronicle*, and was nominated (short-listed) for the Bram Stoker award of the Horror Writers of America in the novel category.

My fans often mention it as a favorite, and the Headline paperback is presently in its 14th printing.

MIDNIGHTS LAIR

In the summer of 1986, shortly after I'd mailed off *Flesh*, Ann and Kelly and I took a trip to Ann's home town in upstate New York. Our three-week visit included a side trip in which we drove through various areas of New York and Vermont. Along the way, we stopped at such places as the Baseball Hall of Fame and Howe Caverns.

We *always* stop at caverns. And mines.

They're creepy. And the guides often tell strange tales about things that have happened in them. At Howe Caverns, we joined a small group of tourists in the gift shop. Then we were led into an elevator that took us down to the cave.

The elevator shafts had been sunk into the rear end of the main cave because its natural opening, a couple of miles away, was no: very accessable.

At the bottom, we exited the elevator and were led through a well-lighted area of cave. A walkway, bordered by a railing, followed a stream for some distance. Eventually, the stream widened into a small, underground lake. At the lake, we boarded a boat. The guide, standing, propelled the boat along by pulling at iron spikes that were embedded in the walls of the cavern.

When we reached the far end of the lake, we were shown an opening like the mouth of a tunnel. Behind it was total darkness. Hanging across it "was a thick, heavy chain.

We had seen only half of Howe Caverns. On the other side of the chained opening, the water from the lake ran through the "undeveloped" section of the cave for about a mile to the natural opening. In that section, there were no walkways, no railings, no lights.

The guide explained that, if anything should go wrong with the elevators, *that* would be our only way out. "And I've got the only flashlight," she joked.

Well...

Imagine the impact of such a possibility on a horror writer sitting in the boat.

A group of tourists gets trapped in the cave. The only way out is through the "undeveloped" section. Instead of a chain across the opening, there's a stone wall. And on the other side of the wall— something horrible.

We "were walking through the cavern on our way back to the elevator "when I said to Ann and Kelly, "I've got to write a book about this place."

I was terribly excited by the idea. And also fearful.

Could I pull it off?

The entire story "would have to take place in a very restricted setting, and certain scenes would have to take place in absolute darkness. It seemed like a huge challenge. But the story seemed to have such potential that I couldn't resist giving it a try.

I didn't get to it right away, though. After returning home, I resumed "work on a novel called *Intruder*, which I'd started in May and hadn't been able to finish before our trip. I "was also still working at the law office. While finishing *Intruder*, I also wrote a short novel called *Spooky Skater*, intended for young adults. (Neither *Intruder* nor *Spooky Skater* has ever been published.)

I began to work on *Cavern* or *Cave* on October 28, before I was finished with *Intruder*. I didn't finish *Intruder* until January, 1987. And I probably didn't get into the serious writing of the cave novel until after that. I finished "writing it on March 14, 1987.

Wanting a better title than *Cavern* or *Cave*, I decided to go literary. I searched for a nifty quotation to use, and chose "The Explorer," by Allan Edward DePrey. The verse included the very appropriate lines, "Remember me, before you dare/To journey into midnight's lair." And thus, my title.

I had a lot of fun with the book.

One of the main characters, a horror writer, is based somewhat on myself. And his family is similar to my own.

In fact, bits of dialogue that appear in the book are based on things that were really said by us while we were in Howe Caverns.

Another of the characters, a crusty old varmint named Calvin Fargo, is my rather exaggerated and fictionalized portrait of the writer, Clayton Matthews. (You may have read more about him in my piece about the Pink Tea.)

Fans are always curious about bits that might have been deleted or added at the suggestion or insistence of an editor.

In the case of *Midnight's Lair*, both Bob Tanner and Mike Bailey felt that it ended too abruptly. Figuring they were probably right, I added a few pages to the ending (several months after sending out the "finished" manuscript).

My original version stopped after the sentence, "Chris heard the soft impact, and tears blurred her vision as she saw Hank spin, crushing the girl against him." Everything after that (about three pages) was added to please my agent and editor.

The extra pages please me, too. These particular gentlemen are almost always right.

Between finishing the first draft of *Midnight's Lair* and receiving my contract for the finished manuscript, I split with Tor over contract problems, wrote all of *Resurrection Dreams*, started writing *Funland*, and experienced the major earthquake that provided the inspiration for *Quake*.

I received the contract from W.H. Allen on December 9, 1987.

Meanwhile, in the U.S., *Midnight's Lair* was getting rejected by every publisher who saw it. My U.S. agent explained the book's problem to me: "It's too linear." After he gave up on it, I tried Dark Harvest. They didn't get back to me, but I was having lunch with the publishers at Dean Koontz's house one day, so I asked them about *Midnight's Lair*. I was told, "Oh, I see it as a really *hot* paperback for beach-goers. But it's not the sort of thing we're looking for."

Apparently, my cave book wasn't deep enough to suit his taste. Or too linear.

In England, however, things went along in the usual, wonderful way. *Midnight's Lair* was published hardbound by W.H. Allen in 1988 with the Richard Kelly pseudonym. It was picked up by the Smiths/Doubleday Book. In 1992, Headline published the paperback version, dispensing with the pseudonym. It was picked up by Book Club Associates. Also, a large print edition was published.

The attention given to *Midnight's Lair* in England, combined with the efforts of my great British agent, Bob Tanner, led to Thomas Dunne's purchase the book for St. Martin's Press. They gave me an advance of \$5,000. (Back in 1992, that was *real* money.) The book was published hardbound in 1993. The *Publisher's Weekly* review (November 9, 1992) called it "fast-paced and tightly constructed," a book that "combines the best elements of psycho-slasher thrillers, disaster epics and classic supernatural horror tales," a book that "horror fans will relish." It was picked up by the Doubleday Book Club.

But the St. Martin's edition was not promoted at all, and only two or three copies ever seemed to show up in any major bookstore. So it didn't exactly sell like hotcakes.

Later, without asking, St. Martin's sold paperback rights to Zebra for \$2,000, of which I would get half. In other words, I got a thousand smackeros for the paperback edition. Zebra did a pretty good job of publishing *Midnight's Lair*.

They were nice enough to consult me about cover ideas, and they sent me a large number of free copies. They brought out the book in September, 1994, and it appeared to get very good distribution.

In the U.K., of course, *Midnight's Lair* is still in print.

The original W.H. Allen version had a very small printing. It is extremely rare, and one of my most collectable books.

Here is my most recent experience in connection with *Midnight's Lair*.

At a book signing at Dark Delicacies bookstore in Burbank earlier this year, a young woman came up to me and said, "You know your book, *Midnight's Lair*? Was it inspired

by Howe Caverns in New York?" I told her that it certainly was. "Thought so," she said, and went on to explain that she'd been to Howe Caverns more than once, and had recognized them as the basis of Mordock Cave. Then she astonished me by saying that she had reread *Midnight's Lair* in preparation for a return visit to Howe Caverns so that she could tour the cave as if she were visiting scenes from the novel. Made my day. Made my week.

RESURRECTION DREAMS

Zombie was my working title. All along, I knew it wouldn't be the final title. In an attempt to come up with a final title for the book, I made the following list:

Spark
The Spark of Life
Vital Sign
The Dead and the Quick
Breath
Stir
Conjure
Hoodoo
Necromancer
NecRomancer
Spellbound
Raise
Raising
Wake

I then narrowed it down to three finalists: *Spark*, *NecRomancer*, and *Hoodoo*. I decided to call my book *Hoodoo*, and the manuscript bore that title when I mailed it to my agents.

At this point, I don't recall the details of the name change. Somebody—probably an editor, didn't think my novel should be called *Hoodoo*. I'm fairly sure that I came up with *Resurrection Dreams* as an alternative title. But I wish it had remained *Hoodoo*.

Most authors have very little control over such matters as the titles of their books. If the publisher *likes* the author's choice of title, fine. If not, the author usually gives in and changes it to suit the publisher. In the course of reading this book, you'll find numerous instances in which I was persuaded to change titles of my novels.

With *Resurrection Dreams*, not only did my title undergo a forced alteration, but so did the content of story itself.

On March 27, 1987, I made my initial notes for the book I was calling *Zombie*. They are written longhand in a spiral notebook, and fill five pages. I considered duplicating them here, as I did the notes for *The Cellar*. Upon reading them, however, I found that they

very closely describe the story as it actually turned out. Apparently, I developed most of the major plot and character ideas while writing those five pages, and never "went very far astray from them as I wrote the novel.

So I don't think much would be gained by publishing them here.

I started writing *Zombie* the day after making the notes.

I'd been working on it for almost two months when I took a break to write my short story, "Mess Hall." The tale had been requested by Skipp and Spector for their zombie anthology, *Book of the Dead*. So I interrupted the writing of my zombie novel to write a zombie short story.

But the interruption didn't delay things much. I finished *Zombie* on September 9, less than six months after starting it. Then I changed its title to *Hoodoo*, made two copies and mailed them out.

I sent one copy to my new American agent, Ralph Vicinanza, and one to Bob Tanner in England. Ralph submitted it to Tor. As I recall, my editor there didn't like Melvin's way of resurrecting people. She thought it seemed too easy. But I'm sure there were other problems, too. For whatever reasons, she rejected the book. (This was in the same year that Tor published *Flesh*, which would be nominated for a Bram Stoker award. For the Stoker awards banquet, I was invited to sit at the Tor table. As we waited for the winners to be announced, the owner of Tor, Tom Doherty, found out for the first time that I was no longer being published by him. He seemed rather surprised.)

Back to *Resurrection Dreams*—Ralph phoned in December, 1987, to tell me that Onyx, an imprint of New American Library, was interested in buying the book. A month later, Bob Tanner called from England to inform me that W.H. Allen had made an offer.

And thereby hangs a tale.

The actual offer from Onyx came through near the end of March, 1988. They would purchase *Resurrection Dreams* as a paperback original for an advance of \$9,000 and *Funland* for \$11,000.

I was delighted.

However, I soon found out that the editor, John Silbersack, had a few suggestions. He thought the book needed some "fine tuning." He phoned me on June 6, 1988, and I took notes.

Then, doing as he asked, I made a number of fairly significant changes in the novel. For the U.S. edition.

But not for the British edition.

As a result, W.H. Allen published my original version of *Resurrection Dreams* in hardbound and Onyx published a paperback containing all the changes I'd made at the request of John Silbersack.

So *two different* versions of *Resurrection Dreams* got published.

And here's another tale.

A true tale, as these all are.

A tale "told out of school," as publishers like to say.

The American version of *Resurrection Dreams* was published *without* any endorsements (quotes from famous writers) at all. Not on the cover. Not inside.

But we had provided Onyx with a doozy—composed by one of the biggest bestselling authors in the country.

Dean Koontz had written of *Resurrection Dreams*, "Fast-paced, weird, gruesome fun in the unique Laymon style. No one writes like him, and you're going to have a good time with anything he writes."

Dean had rushed to read the manuscript and "write the quote and get it to the people at Onyx. We know that it got to them in time. But somehow they failed to use it.

The Onyx edition got no push whatsoever from the publisher (not even a cover blurb), and apparently sold about 18,000 copies. As a reminder, the Warner Books editions of *The Woods Are Dark*, which I blame for destroying my career in the United States, had sold 70,000 copies.

My, what a fall!

At present, non-English editions of *Resurrection Dreams* have been published in Turkey, Denmark, Russia and Spain. In England. Headline brought out a paperback edition based on the W.H. Allen text—now in its 7th printing.

Resurrection Dreams is often named by fans as their favorite of my books. Apparently, the black humor appeals to them. They frequently mention Chapter 20, in which Melvin tries to re-kill Charlie. And has a rough time of it. A very rough time. How do you kill somebody "who is already dead?"

Recently, a movie trailer (preview) of *Resurrection Dreams* was filmed by a production company consisting of Clifton Holmes (writer, director, videographer and editor),

Dwayne Holmes (sound, videographer, initial funding and assistant editor), and starring Jeff Jacobson as a deliciously strange Melvin. They have taken an option on *Resurrection Dreams* and are hoping to make a complete film based on Clifton's screenplay of the book. Their trailer marks the first time (to my knowledge) that anyone has ever filmed anything I've ever written. My hat is off to them!

FUNLAND

On September 9, 1987, I finished writing *Resurrection Dreams*.

On September 10, I wrote the additional 3-page ending for *Mid--night's Lair*.

On September 11, I started writing *Funland*.

If I should now write about the unusual events that inspired the writing of *Funland*, it would amount to a "remake" of an article I wrote at the request of Ed Gorman back at the time that the book was published. The piece appeared in *Mystery Scene*, Number 24, in 1988. Having just read it, I think the best course of action is to reprint it here—complete and unabridged.

FUNLAND: WHERE TRUTH MEETS FICTION AND HITS THE FAN

Funland got its start in 1984 "when my career was in the dumper. I was trying to make ends meet and put meat on the table by writing some fiction for young adults. My wife, daughter and I traveled to the Bay Area, where I met with publisher Mel Cebulash of Pitman Learning. After concluding a deal for me to "write a series about a trio of spook-busters (the S.O.S. stories for those of you interested in my early stuff), we decided to make a side-trip to Santa Cruz.

I had never been to Santa Cruz. But the place appealed to me for a couple of reasons. First, a rather large number of random murders had taken place over the years in the regions surrounding that coastal community. Serial killers seemed to be operating in the area, and I'm intrigued by such things. Second, Santa Cruz had a boardwalk (concrete, actually) with one of California's few surviving old-time amusement parks.

I really like those old, tacky amusement parks. When I was a kid in Chicago, I had some great times at Riverview before it bit the dust. I moved to California too late for Pacific Ocean Park in Venice. By the time I saw POP, it was closed and fenced—a ghost park occupied, I understand, by derelicts. I used to stare at the remains, wondering what it "would be like to wander at night among the skeletons of its rides, explore its boarded stands, its funhouse. I imagined winos and crazies skulking about its dead midway after dark, taking refuge in the ruins.

I never got to see the Long Beach Pike, another fabled amusement park. But I heard stories about it. A show being filmed there (*The Six-Million Dollar Man*, I believe),

required a chase scene inside the Pike's funhouse. An actor, dashing along, bumped into one of the dummies put there to frighten folks. Its arm fell off. It wasn't a dummy, after all. It was a corpse. There'd been a real dead guy in the place, all those years, spooking the funhouse visitors. (Our coroner, Thomas Noguchi, later identified the body as that of an old-west outlaw. The mummified remains had been a sideshow exhibit at about the turn of the century. Somewhere along the line, his succession of keepers apparently lost track of the fact that he wasn't a fake, and stuck him into the funhouse along with the dummies.

All the above, I suppose, is by way of indicating my longtime fascination with those old, tacky amusement parks. To me, they've always seemed both romantic and spooky—places where anything might happen.

So I was delighted with the chance to visit the amusement park in Santa Cruz. Here was Riverview, Pacific Ocean Park and the Long Beach Pike—still in operation!

I got there after making my deal with Mel. And I wasn't disappointed. This wasn't Disneyland. This wasn't Six Flags.

This was the real McCoy. Old, tacky, and great fun.

But teeming with your basic Skid Row types.

During our first evening in Santa Cruz, we were approached by half a dozen ragged beggars.

Trolls, as they were called by some of the area's residents.

Looking through a local newspaper, my wife discovered an article about the situation. Apparently, folks were sick of being accosted by the panhandlers. Some vigilante action was going down. Trolls were being stalked, beaten, and given the "bum's rush" out of town. Mostly at night. Mostly by roving gangs of teenagers. We saw bumper stickers and various other signs supporting the kids, the "trollers."

Nasty business.

Funland was born.

My book is about the Funland amusement park in Boleta Bay, California. It's about the trolls who lurch along the boardwalk after closing time, the teenagers who use themselves as bait to catch and torment them, a beautiful banjo-picking girl and a pair of cops who find themselves caught in the middle. It's also about what happens on a Ferris wheel late at night. And about Jasper Dunn's abandoned funhouse.

Things happen in the funhouse. What happens there? The novel's climax. About a hundred pages of the worst stuff I could imagine.

I do wish to emphasize, here, that the book takes place in an imaginary place called Boleta Bay. The town and amusement park were inspired by what I found in Santa Cruz, and much of what I describe in the book will seem familiar to those you who've been there. But this is not Santa Cruz. It's a fictional place. I don't want to get lynched when I return there.

Funland itself is a fabrication. It's the Santa Cruz park, but it's also Riverview and POP and the Long Beach Pike. It's the L.A. County Fair, Coney Island, and every other rough, mysterious amusement park or carnival I've ever explored in person or in my fantasies. Trolling happened. But not the way I described it in *Fun-land*. It was going on in 1984.

When we returned to Santa Cruz in the summer of 1988, we encountered no trolls. Not a one.

Strange.

Finally, I can't write a piece like this without mentioning the recent quake. Santa *Cruz* was devastated and several people lost their lives. That is the stuff of real horror, and my heart goes out to all those who have suffered in the disaster. Those of us who have been to that wonderful city, however, were gladdened by the news that the old amusement park survived. It's still there, exciting and tawdry and mysterious, waiting for our return.

Strangely enough, I'd been working on *Funland* for less than a month when we had a major earthquake of our own. The 6.1 magnitude quake struck early in the morning of October 1, 1987, while I was working alone in the Law Offices of Hughes and Crandall. The incident inspired my later novel, *Quake*.

In February, 1988, Ralph Vicinanza asked me to send him sample chapters and an outline of *Funland*. I mailed him the first 440 pages, which he submitted to Onyx. I then went on with the novel, and completed it on March 26.

Three days later, Ralph called to tell me about the Onyx offer for both *Funland* and *Resurrection Dreams*. He later handed the contract to me when we met in May in Hollywood.

In September, Bob Tanner called with the offer from W.H. Allen. They would be doing a hardbound edition of *Funland*, and paying me an advance (in British pounds) amounting to about \$15,000.

In February, 1989, I received a five page, single-spaced letter from my editor at Onyx, John Silbersack. He indicated that *Funland* was "a terrific, creepy novel... There is, however, a significant amount of cutting you need to do." He wrote in detail about areas where he thought matters should be clarified, tightened up, and trimmed. Following his instructions, I went through my manuscript with a black marking pen, striking out

sentences, paragraphs, and full pages.

W.H. Allen published *Funland* hardbound in 1989 with my name, not Richard Kelly, as the author. They used the version of the manuscript that I'd revised for Onyx, so this time there aren't two different novels out there.

Onyx published the book in February, 1990—with a very nice cover which included a piece of the endorsement that Dean Koontz had -written for *Resurrection Dreams*.

Funland was later nominated (short-listed, as they call it in the U.K.) for a Bram Stoker award. It has been brought out in foreign language editions by publishers in Germany, Russia, Hungary and Turkey. As of this writing, it is in its 13th paperback printing from Headline.

THE STAKE

I started writing *The Stake* on March 28, 1988, two days after finishing *Funland*. Though my career was going fairly well on both sides of the Atlantic, I continued to work at the law office. (You don't quit the day job quite so easily the second time around.) A fellow named Bob Phipps shared the office with me at the time. Every so often, he would ask how my book was coming along.

The book was *The Stake*. Whenever Bob asked about it, I would say, "I don't really know. Nothing seems to be *happening* in it." I often called *The Stake*, "My book in which nothing happens." When I called it that, I smiled.

Actually, a *lot* happens in *The Stake*. But I was trying to write my most mainstream novel up to that point, so I spent a lot of time developing "in-between" stuff—scenes that occur in-between the scenes of mayhem.

I thought *The Stake* had a great potential to be my "breakthrough" novel.

To me, it seemed to have a very high concept plot: a horror writer, wandering through a ghost town, finds the mummified body of a beautiful "woman with a wooden stake through her heart.

Who is she? Who killed her? Is she a vampire? Fascinated, he sneaks the body home and hides it in the attic of his garage. He plans to 'write a book about it—and eventually pull out the stake.

This seemed like the best idea I'd ever had.

Why did it seem so good to me? Probably because it was simple, unusual, but something that could actually happen in real life. There was nothing outlandish about the plot. Nothing supernatural— unless the corpse *does* eventually turn out to be a vampire.

As far as I knew, there had never been a vampire novel like this.

The idea seemed so good that I was determined not to waste it by rushing recklessly from scene to scene. With this one, I would slow down and develop every aspect. People, settings and actions would not be presented in brief sketches, as they'd often been in my previous work. In *The Stake*, they'd be full color portraits.

I included some scenes—such as Larry's long day and night of drinking while he wrote—simply for the sake of writing something interesting. Not because they led swiftly to a shocking act of violence.

I played with the story.

I allowed subtleties.

I was writing my first truly mainstream novel.

I'd been working toward this for a long time. But with *The Stake*, I finally broke through. I had somehow achieved a state of self-confidence that allowed me to relax with my material, to linger with it, to write full and colorful descriptions, to explore all the possibilities, to "ring all the bells."

So even though *The Stake* didn't exactly hit the bestseller charts, it was a major breakthrough for me as a writer. It is the Continental Divide of my novels. On one side, you'll find about a dozen novels that have shocking content, wild plots, breakneck paces, but not very full development of characters or settings or themes. Then comes *The Stake*. Nearly every novel from *The Stake* to the present is very different from the early ones. Strange and shocking things still happen. The books still have a pace that shouldn't allow readers to get bored. But there is *a lot more to them*.

It's almost as if I reached a sort of maturity just in time to write *The Stake*.

Not that I was particularly aware of it. I just knew that I felt very relaxed about this book. And that I was somehow being *compelled* to slow down, take it easy, let the story grow slowly and naturally out of itself.

I was so used to "getting on with it" that the slower pace of *The Stake* seemed very strange to me.

But "the book in which nothing happens" turned out to be the book in which *everything* happened and came together in ways that seemed almost like magic.

In August of 1988, about five months into my work on *The Stake*. I finally quit the day job and returned to full-time writing.

Not yet finished with *The Stake*, I worked from November 6 through December 11 writing original material for the Dark Harvest anthology, *Night Visions VII*. I also wrote "Dinker's Pond" for Joe Lansdale's anthology, *Razored Saddles*. And I spent a lot of time working on plot ideas and partials at the request of John Silbersack, who felt sure that—with the proper guidance—I might be able to come up with a "breakout" novel.

Still about two months away from finishing *The Stake*, I went with Ann and Kelly and our friends, the De Larattas, on a trip to Death Valley. Here is the write-up of our adventures there as published in *Mystery Scene*, Issue 30, July/August, 1991.

THE STAKE

For me, a ghost town ranks right up there with a haunted house, a cavern, or a seedy old amusement park. It's a place that intrigues me, gives me the willies and triggers ideas. We were heading for one, that gray November morning.

Frank drove. I sat in the passenger seat of his dune buggy. Our wives and daughters followed in the van. More than once, I wished I was with them.

The floor of Death Valley had been pleasantly warm at the time we set out. We were dressed for warmth, not for the frigid wind that roared around us as we made our way up the mountain road. Before long, I -was shuddering with cold. Frank's flask helped, but not enough.

We joked about freezing. We laughed a lot. I figured we might end up as stiff as Hemingway's leopard on Kilimanjaro.

We couldn't turn back, though.

Frank *had* to get me to that ghost town. He doesn't read my books, but he knows about them. He and his wife, Kathy, are always eager to lead me somewhere strange.

So we braved the weather, and finally reached the ruins of Rhyolite high on a ridge above Death Valley. This was no tourist ghost town. This was the real thing—deserted, grim, its main street bordered by the remains of a few broken, windowless buildings from the turn of the century.

We joined up with our families and thawed out as we began exploring. The kids climbed on rubble. My wife picked up a dry husk of tumbleweed and figured she might bring it home for our garden. We climbed on rubble, crept through doorways where we found trash and mouldering blankets in the darkness.

We found enough to know that the town was not entirely abandoned. It had those who dwelled in its ruins. Sometimes.

Floors were littered with junk. Walls were scribbled with graffiti.

Scrawled on a building's front, in a jumble of white letters that roamed across most of its stone wall, was this peculiar inscription: "LEAVE RYLIGHT COST FACE UP OR THEREE FACE YOU DOWEN."

Shortly after reading that, we found the body.

I got to feeling a bit edgy as we "wandered up a dirt track toward a cluster of old buildings: shacks, a ramshackle dwelling that looked like someone's home, and a bottle house. All of them were surrounded by the rusty hulks of old cars and trucks, refrigerators, bath tubs, tires, and every manner of junk. We didn't see anyone.

Even though Frank tried to assure us that the place was deserted, he called out, "Hello!" half a dozen times. Nobody answered or appeared.

If I'd just been "with my wife and daughter, my fears of being confronted by strangers would've stopped us. We were with friends, though. That made it easier to be brave.

While the ladies explored nearby, Frank and I went to the bottle house. Its walls had been constructed, during the boom days of Rhyolite, out of whiskey bottles from the local saloon. The necks of the bottles were turned inward so they wouldn't whistle in the wind.

We climbed the porch. The front door stood open. Frank called, "Hello!" a few more times. Then we entered. The place was cool and dank inside, dark except for the murky daylight that came in through the door and windows.

We roamed from room to room, down dark hallways. A few things had been left behind by someone: scattered furniture, magazine pictures hanging on the walls, some bottles and nicknacks, even a carton full of old record albums.

We didn't linger in there.

I was glad to get out.

Back in the gray daylight, we wandered about to look at the assortment of castoffs that littered the grounds. While we were at it, our wives and daughters entered the bottle house.

"Dick!" Kathy shouted. "Dick! Get in here quick!"

The way she sounded, I thought somebody'd been hurt.

Frank and I rushed into the bottle house. We found our wives and daughters in a small,

dim room, standing over a coffin.

Somehow, Frank and I had missed it.

The black coffin rested on the floor in a corner of the room. It had a glass cover. Beneath the glass cover, shoulders tight against the walls of the narrow coffin, lay a human skeleton.

We were fairly amazed and spooked.

We photographed it. We videotaped it. Kathy slid the glass aside and poked a railroad spike between its ribs. It wasn't a wooden stake, but it looked like one.

We puzzled over a few things. Who 'was this dead person?

What was he or she doing here, left alone in a deserted bottle house in a ghost town? Should we notify the authorities?

Should we take the skeleton with us?

We left it where "we'd found it—the spike removed from its chest and the glass returned to its proper place.

Maybe it's still there. Someday, I suppose we'll go back and find out.

The American hardbound of my new novel, *The Stake*, will be published in June by Thomas Dunne of St. Martin's Press. It's about a horror writer, his wife, and their two friends who go exploring a ghost town. While looking through an abandoned hotel, they find the mummified body of a woman in a coffin. She has a wooden stake in her chest.

Who is she? Who left her body in the deserted hotel? Should they go to the authorities about their grim discovery? Should they take her with them?

Is she a vampire?

What will happen if they pull the stake from her chest?

The writer decides to do a nonfiction book about his find.

The cadaver ends up in his home. Investigations turn up plenty of material for his book. He finds out who she is. He suspects the reason for her death. But his book won't be complete until he pulls out the stake.

All except the final pages of *The Stake* had been written *before* we went to Rhyolite and found the skeleton.

There, my *Mystery Scene* article ends. Weird, huh? Also weird is that the outing which takes place at the beginning of *The Stake* (when they find the stiff) is closely based on a trip we'd taken with Frank, Kathy and Leah in February, 1987. We had explored ruins in the desert, but we certainly hadn't found a body. The character of Larry Dunbar was closely based on myself. The character of Pete almost is Frank De Laratta. Pete's wife and Larry's wife and daughter, however, were *not* based on our own family members. In spite of that, I ended up getting ribbed quite a bit because of my portrait of Pete's wife, Barbara—and Larry's feelings about her. I *still* hear about it.

Because Frank is a character in *The Stake*, he actually read the book. This is the first and only novel he has read since high school. And he assures me that he'll read his *second* novel if I write a sequel to *The Stake*.

Because so much of *The Stake* was inspired by our earlier desert explorations, with some characters based on ourselves, the discovery of the actual skeleton in the ghost town resulted in a real-life scene that was amazing in its parallels to what I'd already written in the book. Some of the dialogue was identical.

Later, we rather wished that we *had taken* the skeleton with us.

Because we did make a return visit to Rhyolite several years later. By then, the bottle house had a chain-link fence around it. And there was a caretaker/moneytaker. Pay him, and he'd take you on a tour.

Over the years, visitors (vandals) had helped themselves to souvenirs. All that remained of the skeleton was a single thigh bone.

I finally finished *The Stake* on January 19, 1989. About ten months after starting it.

W.H. Allen gave me a two-book contract for *The Stake* and an untitled (unwritten) second book for a total advance of 36,000 pounds, or about \$54,000 dollars. From St. Martin's, we received an advance of \$15,000.

Before W.H. Allen could publish *The Stake*, however, they were consumed by a larger company and vanished. For a while, things looked dismal for my career. But Headline came along and saved the day. They took over the W.H. Allen contract and published *The Stake* hardbound in 1990.

Here in the states, Thomas Dunne published it as a hardbound for St. Martin's Press in 1991.

St. Martin's later (without my knowledge, consent, etc.) sold the paperback rights to Zebra for \$2,000 of which half would go toward my unearned royalties. While I was extremely upset to find out that *The Stake* and *Midnight's Lair* had been sold to Zebra—and for such trifling sums—I did find myself pleased with Zebra's handling of me and

both books. They really did a pretty good job of getting the books into the stores.

Over the years, there has been a lot of TV and movie interest in *The Stake*. It was optioned on at least three different occasions. Some real Hollywood types actually wrote screen adaptations of it. But the story has never made it to the big screen or the little screen.

It has, however, been published in Italy, Spain (and Latin America) and Russia. The Headline paperback edition is now in its 12th printing.

Many of my fans consider *The Stake* to be their favorite book of mine. What some of them say they like best is the portrait of the writer with its behind-the-scenes information about the things that *really* go on in a novelist's life. *The Stake* is the only book I know of that delves into such nitty-gritty details. And takes jabs at the publishers.

I don't know if any publishers were offended. Those handling *The Stake* seemed quite amused, and kidded me about it.

Anyway, the book didn't become a bestseller. Not here in the U.S., anyway. But it did gain me quite a lot of recognition among my fans and fellow writers.

It is still probably my most mainstream book. It is the least outrageous and offensive, and one of my best overall accomplishments. It is the book I'm most likely to recommend to a reader who has never tried anything of mine.

ONE RAINY NIGHT

Though I began writing *One Rainy Night* on January 21, 1989, two days after finishing *The Stake*, I had already spent a great deal of time thinking about what my next novel should be.

After finishing *One Rainy Night* on May 11, I sent a copy to my English agent, Bob Tanner. He was not exactly delighted by the book, and let me know about his problems with it in three letters that I received in early December, 1989.

To give you a special insight into several matters, here is the letter that I wrote in response to Bob's criticisms.

Dear Bob,

I just received your three letters regarding *One Rainy Night* and thought I should respond to your comments right away.

First, thank you for giving me your honest reaction to the book. I much prefer criticism to being kept in the dark. Also, I've been heeding your advice and writing my books

accordingly ever since *Tread Softly*, and I'm sure that my career has improved as a result of it.

As for some of the characters not "ringing true," I am concerned. I tried to make them as real and multi-dimensional as possible, but maybe I failed. As far as Trev goes, I regret it if he seems wishy-washy, but I never intended him to be a "hero." He's just a normal guy (a grown man who's nervous at the start of the book about asking Maureen for a date) who gets caught up in a mess and tries to deal with it. In attempting to make my characters seem like real people, I give them weaknesses as well as strengths. But as I say, maybe I screwed up with some of them.

To address your concern about me "reverting" to the "Kelly" type of novel, I have a few observations.

I wrote *One Rainy Night* after I had written *The Stake* but before I got any reactions to *The Stake*. During the entire writing of *The Stake*, I was extremely nervous about it. I thought of it as "my novel in which nothing happens." I rather expected you to find it a disappointment. I thought you would probably tell me that it doesn't have enough horror. (This was, in fact, the reaction of some editors here in the States. Bantam, which had been eager for *Resurrection Dreams*, wanted nothing to do with *The Stake* "while those at NAL considered it a great step forward.)

Therefore, while writing *One Rainy Night*, I was completely unaware that *The Stake* would be appreciated at all.

So I was writing a book that I intended to be more true-to-form.

In fact, I intentionally went in the opposite direction from that I'd taken with *The Stake*. My purpose was to write prime Laymon, fast-paced with loads of action and violence.

I do, however, think *One Rainy Night* is no more a "Kelly" book than -were the dozen "Laymon" books that came before *The Stake*.

Here are a few things that I think are strengths of *One Rainy Night*.

1. Like *The Stake*, it is not very occult or supernatural. It isn't a monster story. It's mostly about the reactions of normal people to a crisis situation that happens to have been brought about by supernatural means.
2. It is probably my first book with a rather serious theme. At its core, this is a story about the effects of racism. It might almost be seen as a parable. More than just another trashy blood-and-sex book.
3. From the outset, it is non-stop. I tried to create a few likable main characters, put them into deep trouble, and keep the trouble coming to the very end. I think this book probably has more forward narrative thrust than any book I've ever written. Its action takes place almost in "real time." The entire story occurs over a period of about five hours. And I

think that an enormous amount of suspense, action and shock goes on from beginning to end, almost without letup.

4. I don't think it will disappoint any of my readers who like such books as *Funland*, *Resurrection Dreams*, *Flesh*, *The Cellar* and so on.

However, as I indicated above, I wrote it during a period when I had no confidence in *The Stake*. I do think that the way to go in the future is toward mainstream books with more characterization and somewhat tamer nasty stuff. I realize that it may present difficulties to publishers if I keep switching back and forth. At the same time, it seems important to give readers enough of the shock to keep them interested. I'm trying to strike a balance of sorts.

I do hope that W.H. Allen will accept *One Rainy Night* as the second book of the contract. We're after the audience that likes my stuff, plus people who enjoy books by such people as Koontz and King. While this book is a trifle rougher than what readers would get from those two fellows, I think it will help hold onto the people who like Laymon—some of whom I'm afraid might find *The Stake* a little timid for their tastes.

My next book, let me assure you, is more along the lines of *The Stake*. It is unfilled, as yet, though I'll be done with it in a couple of months and it should run over 500 pages. It is about six college students who embark on a quest for treasure—on the advice of a Ouija board. It is also about their professor and her boyfriend, who realize the kids may be heading into trouble, and set out to find them. It's part mystery, part adventure, and part horror. And it's one of those books in which "nothing happens."

Again, thank you for letting me know how you feel about *One Rainy Night*. After what happened with *The Stake*, I had rather expected (with some dread) a bit of negative response. But of course, *One Rainy Night* "was already done by the time I found out that I'd made a big stride forward with the previous book.

I hope all is going well with you and that you have a great holiday season.

Best Regards...

The main problem was that, while I had felt that *The Stake* -would be my most significant book to date, I'd had strong worries that my agents and publishers might see it otherwise. I figured there was a good chance that everyone would think it too mild. "Just not what we expect from Laymon." But I didn't wait around to find out. Before I got *any* reactions to *The Stake*, I went ahead and wrote *One Rainy Night*.

I wrote it like the old stuff.

Only more so.

But surprise, surprise! The general opinion was that *The Stake* was a giant improvement over my earlier stuff. So some people saw *One Rainy Night* as a giant step backward.

Indeed, it was rejected by Onyx, publishers of my two previous books, *Resurrection Dreams* and *Funland*. According to an editor at Onyx, they turned down my book because the "black rain" was caused by a black man to get revenge for the killing of a family member. If that *is* the reason *One Rainy Night* was rejected by Onyx (and editors don't always tell authors the truth about such matters), then my book was a victim of the "political correctness" that has been sweeping away free expression in our country for the past decade or so.

However, *One Rainy Night* "was accepted in England by W.H. Allen as the second book of my contract. When W.H. Allen went under, it was taken over by Headline, and a hardback edition was published in March, 1991.

The book club in England also gave it a try. They ordered 500 copies. Then they ordered 4,500 more copies. Then 1,000 more. Then 2,000 more.

In a letter telling me about the book club situation, Bob Tanner wrote to me, "This letter is sent to prove "what a lousy judge of a book I am! I am now off to drink a cup of cold poison!!!"

(He is actually a terrific judge of books—and has a great sense of humor.)

One Rainy Night was subsequently published in paperback by Headline. Foreign language editions have been published in Spain, Lithuania, and Belgium.

It has never been published in the United States.

DARKNESS, TELL US

This is the Ouija board book.

After finishing *One Rainy Night* on May 11, 1989, I wasted some time with a false start on my third Beast House book. Then I answered some interview questions, spent a week in New York City (where *The Silence of the Lambs* beat me out of the Stoker award), and wrote the short story "Slit."

I finally got started on *Darkness, Tell Us* on June 28. My "working title "was *Ouija*.

This was to be another "mainstream" novel along the lines of *The Stake*.

Like *The Stake*, the supernatural elements were played with ambiguity. Sure, the characters seem to be getting coherent messages from a Ouija board. But what is *really* going on? Are the messages really coming from a spirit named Butler? Maybe not. Maybe someone is guiding the pointer. Who knows what is going on when these Ouija boards seem to make sense?

I sure don't.

But I do know that, for some reason, the darn things do sometimes seem to communicate in a coherent fashion.

They frighten me.

I dedicated *Darkness, Tell Us* to the Boyanskis—Chris, Dick and their children, Kara and Kyle. Chris was my wife's childhood friend, and we get together with her and Dick whenever we visit Ann's hometown of Clayton, New York. We always have a great time when we see them. And we usually tempt fate.

In 1980, I had my first experiences with a Ouija board late one night at Chris and Dick's house.

It was an old, dark house.

The four of us sat in the kitchen and messed around with their Ouija board. We did it by candle light, which increased the eeriness and made it impossible to read the writing on the board.

I was very skeptical at first.

But wary. After all, I'd heard stories about Ouija boards.

I'd spent quite a lot of time in Roman Catholic schools, and knew that priests and nuns considered the boards to be extremely dangerous. Not only does using such a device break the First Commandment (and is therefore a sin), but it may open the way for evil forces to enter your life.

And of course I'd seen and read *The Exorcist*, in which all the trouble begins with a Ouija board.

I'd heard other stories, too. Frightening tales, purporting to be true, about awful things happening to people who fooled with the things.

Still, I sat down to play with the Ouija board in the Boyanski house with a strong expectation that nothing would happen.

I was so wrong.

We sat around the kitchen table, fingertips lightly resting on the plastic pointer, and asked questions. And the pointer soon began to glide around as if it had a life of its own. Each time it stopped, one of us would shine a flashlight on the board to see what response

it was making.

The responses started to make sense.

But not because anyone in our group was manipulating the pointer. For one thing, you can easily feel the difference if a person pushes it; instead of gliding, it shoves heavily across the board. Secondly, none of us could see well enough in the dark to direct the pointer to anywhere specific.

And yet the answers made sense.

The pointer drifted all over the board, answering "Yes" and "No," spelling out actual words, actual sentences.

Over the course of time, our "spirit" identified himself as Timmy. He told us that he'd died in the house, at the age of sixteen, a long time ago. He told us a lot.

Strange enough that the sliding pointer should seem to be communicating with us—but the communications reflected a definite personality.

And then another.

It seemed as if we had an intruder. While one personality (Timmy) seemed childish and sad, the intruder seemed sly and malicious.

I spent a lot of time muttering things like, "Holy shit!" and "I don't believe this," and "This can't be happening."

But it was.

We had a great, spooky time that night. And I've been very nervous about Ouija boards ever since.

When I wrote *Darkness, Tell Us*, I tried to recreate some of the realities of what I experienced that long-ago night with Ann, Chris and Dick in the dark kitchen.

I also called upon my rather vast experiences as a university student to create the "end of semester" party that gets everyone into such trouble. Over the years, several of my teachers held night classes at their own homes. These were usually the very best of teachers, confident and relaxed. We had memorable times, but nobody ever dragged out any Ouija boards.

Darkness, Tell Us is also another of my camping books.

As with *Tread Softly*, much of its action takes place in high mountain wilderness areas.

Where you're on your own.

I tried to make *Darkness, Tell Us* a book with many different facets. It's a Ouija board story. It's an adventure story about a treasure hunt in the mountains. It's a love story. It's a rescue story. A survival story.

And it contains what is, in my opinion, the most shocking material I've ever written.

I'm referring to what happens near the end of the book.

At the bus.

The writing of that scene made me feel physically ill.

And then—as if a malevolent spirit (Butler, perhaps) had decided to have some sport with me—the entire chapter got dumped out of my computer due to a loose electrical plug.

I lost it all.

And had to write it again.

I finished *Darkness, Tell Us* on February 6, 1990.

It led to a new, three-book contract from Headline at about \$45,000 per book. Though the paperback is currently in its 8th printing, there was never a foreign language sale.

Never a sale to the United States.

Never a book club sale.

Never a movie or TV option.

Nothing.

Maybe it's a lousy book (though I personally think it's one of my best).

Or maybe, in writing a novel about Ouija boards, I wandered into territory where I wasn't wanted. And somebody decided to teach me a lesson.

P.S. Perhaps writing about the "curse of the Ouija Board" somehow put a jinx on it. I no sooner described my suspicions, above, than my agent sold *Darkness, Tell Us* to Russia. Strange, after seven years of nothing.

Seven years?

Wooooo.

BLOOD GAMES

On March 6, 1990, I started working on a novel that I called *Daring Young Maids*. This was to be my *most* mainstream novel up to that point.

I'd learned my lessons. Starting with *Tread Softly*, I'd seen my success increase dramatically each time I intentionally enlarged the scope of my novels.

So I gave this story my largest scope ever.

Along with the main story—a rather creepy tale about five young women having an adventure at an abandoned lodge—I included chapters called "Belmore Girls." (Belmore is the name of their university.)

Each of the "Belmore Girls" chapters is about an incident that is complete in itself. One tells how the five young women met during their first year of college. Another shows how they wrought terrible vengeance on a fraternity. Another tells about a memorable Halloween escapade. In one of the tales, they even make a student film based on my short story, "Mess Hall."

There are quite a few chapters dealing with the early adventures of these five friends. All of them are not scary. They pretty much cover the gamut of emotions.

And they are interspersed throughout the main story—stopping it dead in its tracks.

Of course, once again I worried.

A lot of very nasty stuff happens in the book—but so do a great many other things. I - worried that people might think I'd gone *too* mainstream. I worried that the "Belmore Girls" passages might bore some of my readers.

Naturally, I didn't let any of those concerns stop me. I wrote the book the way I wanted to write it.

Always do.

But *why* did I want to write it that way?

Several reasons.

1. Without the Belmore Girls chapters, I would've had nothing but a standard, fairly shallow, genre horror tale. It would've been little more than a "slasher film" in print.
2. Without them, I would've had to find a way of doubling the length of the main plot.

My contract with Headline called for a book of at least 140,000 words. That's a lot of words.

Rather than trying to find ways of stretching the main story line, I chose to expand the size of the book by writing the "back story" of the five friends. Their back story was what I call "infinitely expandable." It could be 100 pages, 300 pages, 600 pages—however many I needed. (I'm always on the lookout for "infinitely expandable" plots and subplots. It's a necessity when each novel has to be at least 600 manuscript pages in length.)

3. Though I needed the "Belmore Girls" chapters in order to make the book long enough, I would've had to write them anyway because I felt that they would be the essence of the book. To my way of thinking, these were fascinating young women. They had wonderful times together and great adventures and I felt compelled to write their *whole* story, not just the big finale of it.

I finished *Daring Young Maids* on November 8, 1990.

Headline wouldn't go for the title. They needed a title that would shout to everyone that it was a horror novel.

We settled on *Blood Games*, I'm not crazy about it. Aside from other considerations, *Blood Games* is the title of several other books and some films.

But what can you do?

If I was a little annoyed about the title situation, I was delighted by the way Headline got behind the book. Among other things, they gave it a full-page color advertisement on the cover of *The Bookseller*, the U.K. version of *Publisher's Weekly*.

Book Club Associates took it on as their main selection for February, 1992, with an initial hardbound printing of 18,000.

While a lot of critics lambasted the book, it sold well. And it is often mentioned by fans, who tell me how they especially enjoyed the "Belmore Girls" episodes. Not only did they like getting to know the gals so well, but many of them were reminded of their own college days.

In the United States, *Blood Games* has never been published. No foreign language sales, either. Hmmm. Is it laboring under the Ouija board jinx? Or is something else going on—something less sinister? Maybe something about the book doesn't appeal to folks in Russia or France or...? Maybe somebody's ticked off because I didn't kill off Finley. Who knows?

The Headline paperback edition is currently in its 7th printing.

SAVAGE

On May 31, 1990, Bob Tanner was in town and took me out to lunch. He explained that, since my books were doing so well in the United Kingdom, perhaps I should try setting one of my novels in the British Isles or bringing an English character into a story...something along those lines.

I told him that it seemed like a good idea.

However, I had little or no intention of following his advice.

Ann and I had done a tour of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales for about three weeks back in 1978. We hadn't been back since then. So I didn't feel that I knew enough about the areas to use any of them in a novel.

After my lunch with Bob, I returned to my work on *Daring Young Maids*.

And suddenly, a couple of weeks later, an idea popped into my head. Popped? It *exploded!*

For years, I'd been fascinated by true crime stories. And especially by Jack the Ripper. I knew a lot about him. I knew, among other things, that he had apparently vanished forever after butchering Mary Kelly in November, 1888.

The idea that exploded into my head was this: what if someone happened to be hiding under Mary Kelly's bed at the time of the murder? A kid. A teenaged boy. And what if, after the slaying, the boy gave chase to the Ripper? Somehow, the kid then follows Jack across the ocean. They end up in America, where he follows the Ripper out west and eventually brings him down.

It seemed like a great idea. The greatest idea I'd ever had. By far.

It seemed to have epic portions.

If I could only pull it off...

The project seemed too big, too ambitious. But the idea seemed like such a natural that I *had* to attempt it, no matter what. I told myself that, even if I couldn't do the story justice, it would still make a terrific novel. Done only half-right, it might be better than anything else I'd ever written.

I decided to go for it.

This was to be a picaresque novel in the tradition of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *True Grit*, *The Travels of Jamie McPheeters* and even *Tom Jones*. Early on, I realized that it needed to be written in the first person point of view—in the voice of its main

character, Trevor Wellington Bentley.

Having Trevor tell his own story would give it a lot of added flavor. And humor.

Also, Trevor would give me some leeway. No matter how much research I might do, I couldn't possibly find out *everything* about the world of 1888-1890. Writing in the first person viewpoint, however, I didn't *have* to know everything. I only needed to display Trevor's level of knowledge. The reader would be seeing through his eyes, not through the eyes of a supposedly omniscient author.

If I couldn't have written *Savage* in the first person viewpoint, I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have attempted it at all.

Since the whole novel would be "told" by Trevor, I needed a special voice for him. I decided that he would "write" the book in Tucson, Arizona in 1908. His language would have to be that of a boy who'd spent his first 15 years in London and most of his next 20 years in America's old west. So he might talk like a cross between Huck Finn and Sherlock Holmes.

So that's the language I created for him.

In preparation, I reread several books by authors such as Mark Twain, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and Ian Fleming—taking notes along the way. I also listened with special interest whenever I talked to Bob Tanner or Mike Bailey. I made lists, jotting down all sorts of words and phrases that seemed colorful. And I later used a great many of them while writing on Trevor's behalf.

The trick was to blend everything together so that Trevor's language would *add* to the experience of the book, not get in the way. So I kept things fairly simple. The entire novel has the flavor of Trevor's voice—his way of looking at things—but I used such expressions as "fantods," "chums," "dicey" and "I reckon" sparingly.

The language probably does get in the way for some people. Those who aren't very good readers might need to struggle a little more than usual to figure out what's actually being said.

But I think that Trevor's voice adds such richness to the book that I can't imagine *Savage* being written any other way.

This is the only book, so far, for which I've done vast amounts of research. Not only did I pick through half a dozen books to find colorful words and phrases, but I needed to find out what London was like in 1888. I needed to learn about sailing across the Atlantic ocean in winter. What was Coney Island like during that period: What about railroad routes across America? What did people eat or the plains? How much did a horse cost?

I read books about gunslingers, lawmen, and the Indian wars.

And a lot about Jack the Ripper.

While I wanted all the novel's background information to be accurate, I was especially interested in getting my Ripper information correct. In particular, I wanted everything about the Mary Kelly murder to be as detailed and accurate as possible.

With the exception of a kid under her bed.

I read and studied plenty of books.

But my research for *Savage* included a lot more than book-learning. I had been to England, briefly, and paid a visit to the Whitechapel area. I'd been to Coney Island. When I was a kid, my parents had taken my brother and I on train ride from Chicago to Yellowstone Park. I have some vivid memories of that trip, and made use of them when Trevor embarked on his railroad journey to the west. While writing the book, I took a break and we made a research trip to the Law's Railroad Museum in Bishop, California.

Savage contains a fair amount of gunplay. And I've been playing with guns since I was a kid at Boy Scout camp shooting .22 rifles to earn NRA patches and medals. So the firearms scenes didn't require much new research.

Neither did descriptions of the old west, where I've done a lot of traveling over the years. To top everything off, however, we spent a week at a Wyoming "dude ranch" before I finished writing *Savage*. There, we rode horses over rough mountain trails. I got the treat of watching some real cowboys in action, and met some real rattlesnakes. While most of *Savage* had been written before our adventures in Wyoming, my experiences during the trip had a major influence on the final hundred pages.

In a sense, I started writing *Savage* the moment the notion struck me on June 17, 1990. After thinking about things for a while, I sat down and wrote the book's prologue. It starts, "London's East End was a rather dicey place, but that's where I found myself, a fifteen-year-old youngster with more sand than sense, on the night of 8 November, 1888." It goes on for just a couple of pages. After writing those pages, however, I knew I could write the book—and that it had the potential to be the best thing I'd ever written.

Over the next six months, I continued my work on *Daring Young Maids {Blood Games}*.

During that period, I made extensive notes about the plot and characters of my Ripper book. Bob Tanner found me some information about the Thames River. I also read book after book to get myself ready for the task of actually writing my novel.

After finally getting finished with *Daring Young Maids*, I sat down to write *Savage* on November 18, 1990. I finished writing it on September 6, 1991. My working title had

been *Ripper*. But I chose to call my book, *Narrow Calls*—which comes from the prologue: "Had some narrow calls. Run-ins with all manner of ruffians, with mobs and posses after my hide, with Jack the Ripper himself. But I'm still here to tell the tale. Which is what I aim to do right now."

Headline liked the title, *Narrow Calls*, about as much as they'd liked *Daring Young Maids*. They preferred to call it something along the lines of *Blood Savage*. We compromised, got rid of the *Blood* and kept the *Savage*. I added the subtitle:

From Whitechapel to the Wild West on the Track of Jack the Ripper. Unfortunately, the subtitle didn't make it onto the cover.

Headline accepted *Savage* as part of my three-book contract.

Book Club Associates placed an initial order for 8,000 copies.

On March 5, 1993, it was bought by Thomas Dunne of St. Martin's Press for an advance of \$10,000.

It has been published in Germany and Hungary.

At the time of this writing, the Headline paperback of *Savage* is in its 8th printing.

I had extremely high hopes for *Savage*. It seemed to have so many things going for it. It was about Jack the Ripper. It was a boy's adventure in the tradition of *Huckleberry Finn*. It was a sprawling western in the tradition of *Lonesome Dove*. It was a love story in the tradition of...*Love Story*? It was exciting, poignant, nostalgic, violent, erotic, scary, gruesome and often extremely funny.

If that weren't enough, it had Jesse Sue Langley!

With all that going for it, I thought it should be a bestseller.

And in the United Kingdom, it pretty much was.

But here in the U.S., it received no star treatment; it received the usual "let's ignore it" treatment. The publisher gave it no publicity whatsoever. If a person looked real hard, he might find two copies, spine-out, in the back of some bookstores.

Business as usual.

But it annoyed me *more* than usual.

Savage is a book that should've gotten noticed. It should've been published in a big way. If a book like *Savage* gets ignored, what does it take? It takes a shrug, that's what. And a

turning of the back.

In spite of the book's commercial failure in the United States, I know that it is successful as a work of art.

To my own way of thinking, I somehow managed to "pull it off." It turned out to be everything I'd hoped it might be.

People have called it "a masterpiece."

People have compared it to a novel by Dickens.

People have said that it's the book I'll be remembered for.

A lot of people love it, and so do I.

A GOOD, SECRET PLACE

Near the end of June, 1991, the Horror Writers of America held its annual convention in Redondo Beach, California. One night during the weekend, I was approached by John Scoleri. I knew John from his activities at the B. Dalton bookstore in Santa Clara, where he'd been a real promotor of horror fiction and had even published a newsletter, *Scars*, in which he reviewed new horror releases—and their covers. I'd first met John after he invited me to a book signing for *Night Visions VII*.

At the 1991 HWA meeting, John came up to me and introduced his friend, Peter Infantino. Along with Robert Morrish, they were involved in publishing the magazine, *The Scream Factory*, and their small press had already produced a couple of limited edition hardcovers. They asked if I would consider letting them publish a collection of my short fiction.

I liked these guys. Perhaps more important, Ann liked them.

She is my career-guard, warning me away from people and projects that rub her the wrong way. Instead of suggesting I should have nothing to do with John and Peter, she thought I ought to pursue the situation.

As we discussed the possibilities, the guys assured me that they would be very flexible about the terms of the contract—and the content of the book.

We very quickly hit upon the idea of putting together an assortment of old and new stories. My "Author's Note" explains it:

This book contains every adult short story of mine that was sold and published from the start of my career through "Bleeder" in 1989. Eleven of the fifteen early stories have

never been anthologized, and until now were available only in old copies of the magazines in which they originally appeared...

They comprise about half of this volume. The other half is made up of previously unpublished stories. The new ones are not from "the trunk." They were all written in the fall of 1991, especially for this collection.

At the time I was approached by John and Peter, I was in the midst of writing *Savage*. I continued with *Savage* and finished it on September 6, 1991. On September 10, I began to write original short fiction for the collection.

Between that date and October 20, I wrote five new stories.

It was a great experience. I felt completely free to write about whatever suited my fancy. (Most often, stories are 'written "to order," and must fit into the theme of a magazine or anthology.) These could be about anything.

I considered it an opportunity to write novellas as well as short stories, so the five tales added up to a fair chunk of material. "The Good Deed" was 39 pages long, "Joyce" was 29 pages, "Stickman" was 27, "The Mask" was 34, and "A Good, Secret Place," the title story, was 42 pages in length.

They represent, in my opinion, some of the best short fiction I have ever written.

We asked my friend, fellow writer Ed Gorman, to provide an introduction for the collection. He came through with a wonderful piece.

We asked my friend, Larry Mori, to prepare artwork for the book. I'd been introduced to Larry by Joan Parsons when we visited the Dark Carnival book store during our trip to the Bay Area for the *Night Visions VII* signing arranged by John Scoleri. (It all ties together.) Larry specializes in creating very bizarre and mysterious collages. He did several terrific pieces for *A Good, Secret Place*. He also provided suggestions about the design of the book.

In 1993, it was published by Deadline Press (John, Peter and Bob). It consisted of 574 individually signed and numbered copies and 26 individually signed and lettered copies. Every copy was signed by me, Ed Gorman and Larry Mori.

Thanks to the imagination and persistence of Bob Morrish, each of the 26 lettered copies "was bound in leather and came with a built-in lock. They looked like diaries. I thought this was extremely cool, since the title of the book was *A Good, Secret Place*.

Both editions sold out, and copies are now rare.

A Good, Secret Place was nominated (short-listed) for a Bram Stoker award for

excellence in the "collection" category for 1993. The awards banquet took place in Las Vegas during the first weekend in June, 1994. While I was at the banquet not winning the award (it went to Ramsey Campbell), Peter Infantino sat beside me—and his wife Margaret was downstairs winning a ton of money at the slot machines.

Because of my great experiences in connection with *A Good, Secret Place*, I was eager to work again with John, Peter and Bob.

And the book you now hold is the result.

ENDLESS NIGHT

Apparently, I was "at loose ends" after finishing *Savage*.

I wasn't quite sure where to go from there. So instead of embarking on a new novel, I wrote all the original material for my short story collection, *A Good, Secret Place*. I wrote several other short stories, had a false start on a novel entitled, *The Caller*, then started work on *Quake*. After spending about four months on *Quake*, I gave it up. I felt overwhelmed by it. So I wrote my novella, *Wilds*. Then, on May 6, 1992, instead of returning to *Quake*, I started writing a novel called *Sleep Over*.

I wanted—needed?—to write a fast-paced, straight-forward book with non-stop action. I wanted to write another *Midnight's Lair*, another *One Rainy Night*.

But I had trouble coming up with a suitable plot.

Then one afternoon, Ann and I "were watching a rental video on our VCR. It was called, *Tower of Evil*, and had something to do with murders at a lighthouse.

While I am watching television shows and movies (or doing most anything else, for that matter), my mind often wanders. It did so during *Tower of Evil*. A scene in the movie set me to thinking how neat it would be to take the big finale of a horror story (after all, that's when most of the cool really stuff happens) and *start* a story with it.

Instead of *building up* to the awful, bloody climax, why not *begin with it*.

And keep on going from there.

The climax just goes on and on. ..for the whole book!

To me, it seemed like a brilliant idea.

(Naturally, I do understand that a climax is not actually a climax if it happens at the start. I use the term simply to get across the idea that the effect I wanted to create would be *like* the climax of a book or movie in its intensity.)

It is the concept that led to *Endless Night*.

After coming up with the general idea of what I hoped to achieve, I needed the particulars. In particular, what would happen during the big opening scene?

I wanted it to be *really scary*.

So I sat down and asked myself, "What's the scariest situation I can possibly imagine?" A babysitter being interrupted on the job by a madman is about the most creepy situation I can imagine. She's a teenaged girl in a strange house late at night, has nobody to depend upon for help, and *someone* is coming for her. Yikes!...But there are great, classic movies covering that territory.

I wondered what *other* set of circumstances might lead to feelings of vulnerability similar to those created by the babysitter scenerio.

And I came up with an alternative that seemed perfect.

Suppose a teenaged girl is having an "overnighter" at the house of her best friend? In the middle of the night, intruders break in. They butcher *everyone in the house*. Everyone except the girl, who hides, then risks her life to save her friend's brother. The girl and boy run outside, the killers in hot pursuit.

Exactly what I was looking for.

When I wrote the book, I started with the girl being awakened late at night by the noise of breaking glass. I then kept the opening sequence going for 87 manuscript pages of frenzied, terrifying action.

I'd experimented with this technique somewhat in my novella, *Wilds*, which is told in the form of a journal. I wrote *Wilds* immediately before embarking on *Endless Night*, so the Simon tapes seem to be an extension of my experiments with the technique. I soon would take the "real time telling" all the way in *Island*.

A couple of characters in *Endless Night* are fictional portraits based on real life.

Jody's father was inspired by an L.A.P.D. officer I observed during the course of a televised trial. I came to admire his guts and integrity.

A little white dog that attacks Simon was inspired by Bogart Harb, who lives with us when its owners, Sally and Murray, leave town on trips. My Deadline Press short story collection, *A Good, Secret Place*, was dedicated to Sally, Murray, and Bogart.

I finished writing *Endless Night* on December 2, 1992 and sent a copy to Bob Tanner.

Headline published it in 1993, and Book Club Associates bought 12,000 copies. It was also bought for publication in Italy and Spain.

Endless Night has not been published in the United States.

As of this writing, the Headline paperback edition is in its 7th printing.

While I would not recommend *any* of my books to squeamish or prudish readers, I have to say that *Endless Night* is more extreme than most. It contains some of the most vicious and disgusting material I've ever written.

But it also contains the story of a gutsy girl named Jody who risks her life to save her friend's brother—a boy she hardly knows.

And it tells of her smart, courageous father (an L.A.P.D. officer) who will do *anything* to keep his daughter from harm.

Jody and her father have a very sweet relationship—something that you'll rarely find in books and movies. For some reason, teenagers are most often portrayed as egocentric jerks and their parents are insensitive louts who never understand them. If a father does appear to be sensitive and understanding toward his daughter, it turns out that he's molesting her in secret. Not so in *Endless Night*. Like so many people you find in real life, Jody and her father are simply good, caring people.

Going up against a perverted, sadistic killer.

IN THE DARK

Endless Night took care of my urge to write a straight-forward, lightning-fast story. After finishing it, I was ready to settle down and develop something more complex.

I'd pretty much given up on ever finishing *Quake*.

I embarked on *MOG* on February 15, 1993. *MOG* was short for *Master of Games*.

The basic idea of the plot was simple.

A small-town librarian finds an envelope with her name on it. Inside is a fifty-dollar bill and a note that reads:

Dear Jane,
Come and play with me. For further instructions, look homeward, angel. You'll be glad you did.

Warmest Regards,

MOG (Master of Games)

Mystified but curious, Jane searches out the library's copy of the Thomas Wolfe novel, *Look Homeward, Angel*. Inside, she finds another envelope. This one contains a hundred dollars, and another note. The note gives her more instructions.

And so it starts.

Each time she deciphers the instructions, goes to the required place and finds the next envelope, the amount of money doubles.

Very soon, we're talking *real money*.

Jane finds herself getting into some very bizarre and dangerous situations, but she keeps accepting the challenges, keeps pushing the limit. She likes the money. Also, however, she is caught up in the game. She hopes to find out, sooner or later, what it's all about.

Though the basic idea of the plot seemed fairly simple, I saw that it had some real potential.

It was *exactly* what I wanted.

An adventure story. A treasure hunt. A deep mystery. And plenty of room for suspense, scares, and horror.

Also, it was "infinitely expandable." There was no built-in limit to the number of adventures Jane might experience. So I would have no trouble writing my minimum 600 pages.

Not only could I expand the story to my heart's content, but it had an "open" format. MOG could send Jane just about anywhere. The possibilities -were staggering.

In interviews, I have often said and written that being a horror writer does not have to be limiting. The horror category (and probably any other fiction category) is pretty much an empty bag. You can throw in whatever you want. Sure, you're under an obligation to scare your readers now and then—but that's about it. In addition to creeping them out, you have opportunities to make them laugh, make them weep, make them think. You can write about "love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice." (Faulkner) You can write about "the good and the bad, the ecstasy, the remorse and sorrow, the people and the places and how the weather was." (Hemingway)

In fact, you *have to* write about such matters if you're going to be any good.

An "open" format such as I had with *In the Dark* (and with *Blood Games* in the "Belmore Girls" chapters), makes it especially easy to explore all sorts of possibilities. It is rather as if the novel's plot structure provides empty spaces that can be filled by a wide variety of

short stories.

In the case of *In the Dark*, the stories were about Jane's adventures each time she -went hunting for the next envelope.

I had a great time coming up with those adventures.

In a sense, I *was* MOG.

In a very *real* sense.

I was controlling Jane. I was assigning the tasks, pulling the strings.

But MOG is also a character in the book. And I think he gives it a depth that can't be found in many (or any?) of my other novels.

Who is MOG? Why is he playing this game with Jane? How does he come and go (and sometimes carve messages on her skin) without being seen? Is he a demented man getting his kicks by toying with her? Is he a phantom, a demon, a monster? Is he God? All of the above? None of the above?

And then there is Jane.

What are her real motivations? And how far will she go?

Even as I wrote *In the Dark*, I realized that I was dealing with a major subject and that my book was obviously operating on more than one level of meaning.

I didn't set out to write a "deep" book, but I let the story go where it had to go. Stories do have a certain internal integrity. They take you naturally into certain directions. If you force a story *out* of its natural direction, you risk ruining it. *In the Dark* needed to be following a certain path. I "was tempted to drag it the other way— and give it a pat ending, explaining all about MOG and tying up the loose ends. But I felt that the pat ending would destroy the whole thing. So I let the story have its way.

As a result, *In the Dark* ends up being a statement—and asking questions—about the nature of life.

Why do we do what we do?

Are strings being pulled?

If so, by who or what?

Do we have free will?

What the heck *is* going on?

The ending of *In the Dark* leaves some of my readers in the dark.

Some are confused.

Others think I "blew it."

Still others figure it out—or figure *something* out.

I finished writing *MOG* on July 20, 1993.

Headline gave it a nice push. They even had a contest for booksellers and handed out lovely black matchbooks embossed in gold with the book's title. Matches. Get it?

In the Dark was a World Book club selection and appeared on U.K. paperback bestseller lists.

It was published in Taiwan.

It has never been published in the United States.

QUAKE

I've experienced numerous earthquakes big enough to rattle my nerves, and three extremely nasty quakes during which I half-expected to be killed.

But the idea for *Quake* came to me in the wake of the Whittier shaker that occurred on October 1, 1987. At that time, I was still employed at the Law Offices of Hughes & Crandall.

(This was during the period of writing *Funland*.) Due to the nature of my work, I was allowed to keep very unusual hours.

Monday through Friday, I got up every morning at 4:30, drove through the dark streets from my home in West Los Angeles to the law offices in Glendale (about thirty miles away), and started work at about 5:00 a.m. I would do my eight hours and leave the office at 1:30 to 2:00 p.m. With this schedule, I was able to avoid most of L.A.'s nightmarish traffic congestion.

PLUS I got home early enough to work on my novel for a couple of hours every afternoon.

And I'd be home each day when Kelly returned from school. It was a great schedule—though getting out of bed in the morning was tough.

Because of my great but oddball schedule, I was completely alone in the law offices at 7:45 a.m. when the earthquake struck. I was on the second floor of the building, and the epicenter was in Whittier, quite nearby. I thought the building was about to come down. With the floor rolling like a stormy ocean (or so it seemed), I ran through the office and down the stairway and made it outside at about the time the quake ended.

My only concern, then, was getting home to Ann and Kelly.

For all I knew, the quake might've been worse in the area where we lived. For all I knew, our house might've come down on them.

They were thirty miles away—on the other side of the Hollywood Hills—and I had to get home fast.

My car was in the office building's subterranean parking lot. The lot had an electrically operated gate. Fortunately, the area hadn't lost its electrical power. The gate was operational, so I was able to get my car away and drive home as fast as I could.

I don't remember much about the trip. As I recall, however, I got away from Glendale so quickly that I was ahead of any majors jams that might've been caused by the disaster.

At home, everything was fine. The quake had been somewhat milder because of our distance from the epicenter. Ann and Kelly and the house had gotten shaken up considerably, but there was no damage.

Though I continued to 'work at the Glendale office for nearly a year after the quake, I never again parked in its lot. Every morning.

I left my car on the street to avoid any possibility that an earthquake might trap it behind an electrically powered gate.

People are often asking writers how they get ideas for their stories.

That's how I got the idea for *Quake*,

But I didn't immediately sit down and write myself a novel on the subject. The quake happened on October 1, 1987, and I didn't start working *Quake* until December 14, 1991.

What took so long?

For one thing, my big idea consisted of a guy trying to get home after a major earthquake. He would have a lot of adventures along the way. Meet people. Help people. Fight for survival against looters, etc. I needed something more, but wasn't sure what.

Also, I wasn't eager to embark on a "disaster novel." The scope of such a thing seemed overwhelming. A major Los Angeles earthquake? Good grief, how could I even *begin* to get a handle on such a thing? How could I do it justice?

Plus, there had already been several major movies about earthquakes. While playing with ideas for *Quake*, I actually saw a made-for-television movie that featured a young woman *struggling to get home* after a big one. It seemed a bit too much like my idea.

And then there was one more factor. A minor thing. Nothing I took very seriously. On occasion, however, elements of my fiction have a disturbing way of coming true. (*The Stake*, for one.) So I did rather feel that writing an earthquake novel might be "tempting fate."

What finally prompted me to go ahead with *Quake*?

As of December 6, 1991, an attempted novel entitled *The Caller* wasn't going well. So I sat down at my computer and fooled around with ideas for a different novel. I came up with several possibilities, but nothing I really liked. So I tried again on December 10 and wrote, "Actually, an earthquake novel could be the answer. Several main characters. Mainly a guy who is at work many miles from home. And his family at home—wife and a kid or two. He urgently wants to get to them, but roads unusable."

Going on from there, I decided that the wife should be alone in the house. "Someone is after her. Wants to use the quake, maybe, as cover for his crime. Wants to nail her."

When I came up with that idea, I knew I would do the book. Suddenly, it was not just a disaster story. It was no longer like any of the earthquake movies. It was suddenly a "Laymon story."

I'd found myself a nifty plot setup.

Could the husband get home in time to save his wife from the sadist who wants to ravish and kill her? Would she find a way to save herself? Maybe she *wouldn't* be saved.

The "kid or two" turned into a teenaged daughter. For a while, I thought that she would be in her high school at the time of the quake. Then I decided to put her in a car, instead—out taking "driver's education" lessons with some other students and an adult instructor.

And that was it.

I'd come up with the basics of a major, three-way plot.

It went like this.

After a major earthquake strikes the Los Angeles area, the husband is desperate to get

home. Because of the massive destruction, however, it will probably take him all day. In the meantime, his wife is trapped in her bathtub under the rubble of their house—with a perverted neighbor trying to get his hands on her. While all this is happening, the teenaged daughter is trying to get home after being stranded in downtown Los Angeles—which is *not* a good place to be.

All three plots needed to be coordinated, the distances and timing worked out so that everything would intersect properly.

I ended up making very extensive notes in which I developed all three plot-lines. The single-spaced plot synopsis turned out to be 15 pages long and contained a total of 62 different scenes. Each scene description included the time of day at which it was supposed to happen.

Because I felt that the climax should take place after dark—with Daylight Savings Time in effect—the final events of the story were scheduled to take place after 9:00 p.m.

This was to be my "working outline."

As I worked on the novel, I checked off each scene on the outline after writing it.

Along the way, the story grew overwhelming.

The pages piled up, I checked off scenes, but there were still *so many* scenes still to go. I soon realized that, if I actually followed the outline, the manuscript would end up over 1,000 pages long.

I was in over my head.

(In retrospect, it seems ironic that my first real experience with getting "in over my head" occurred while working on the most carefully thought-out and outlined novel of my career. That's "what is supposed to happen when you fly by the seat of your pants, not when you outline.")

Befuddled about what to do with the situation, I quit writing *Quake* on April 3, 1992. Maybe I would get back to it someday, maybe not. After leaving it behind, I wrote *Endless Night* (a nice, simple story) and *In the Dark* (less simple, but still a long distance from the complexity of *Quake*).

Just a few days *before* quitting *Quake*, however, I'd sent a synopsis and sample chapters (a few hundred pages, I think) to Bob Tanner. I did this because Headline had asked for information about my new project.

Bob had not only sent a copy to Mike Bailey at Headline, but he'd also submitted it to Tom Dunne at St. Martin's Press.

I had no idea that he might submit it anywhere.

About the time I was finishing *In the Dark*, Tom Dunne made an offer on *Quake*.

I was shocked, delighted and aghast.

Suddenly, I would have to finish writing *Quake* whether I wanted to or not.

I suppose I could have turned down the offer...

But I figured, *why not go for it?*

So I returned to *Quake* and analyzed the problem with my plot. The problem was easy to identify: there was too much *of it*. And why did I need so much? Only in order to stretch everything out so the climax could take place in the dark.

My solution?

Scrap the darkness. Let it all take place in daylight.

Suddenly, my problems with the novel evaporated.

On September 30, 1993, I received a letter from Tom Dunne in which he praised what he'd read so far of *Quake* and offered several useful suggestions about revisions and ways to go with it in the future. The next day, I resumed writing the novel—on the sixth anniversary of the Whittier quake that inspired it.

Remember what I wrote about "tempting fate"?

On January 17, 1994, about two months before I finished writing *Quake*, the Los Angeles area was struck by a 6.6 magnitude earthquake. We were shocked out of sleep at 4:31 a.m., the house roaring and shuddering around us. "This is it," I thought. "This is the Big One." There was massive destruction. Buildings toppled. Freeways went down. The power was knocked out. Quite a few people were killed, and hundreds were injured. In our own case, a lamp fell on Ann's head and I cut my foot on broken glass. Kelly, the lucky one, somehow slept through most of the quake. We were briefly trapped inside our house, but finally made it to the safety of our parked car. There, we waited in the darkness.

When dawn came, we were startled and delighted to find that our house was still standing—mostly intact. We entered to survey the damage and clean up. Bookshelves and television sets, window blinds and framed pictures had fallen to the floor. Most of our cupboards had thrown their contents onto the floors. Our bed was broken. The inside of our fireplace had collapsed and our chimney had broken away from the house. The walls were cracked.

And about 500 manuscript pages of *Quake*, stacked on top of a wobbly television tray in a back room of the house, remained neatly stacked on top of the tray as if nothing had happened.

I do realize of course, that I didn't *cause* the earthquake by writing *Quake*. But I may resist the temptation to write a novel about the end of the world.

I finished *Quake* on March 24, 1994.

The manuscript came in at 679 pages.

It's certainly not the biggest book in history, but large and complex enough to present special problems.

When writing a small, less complicated novel, I don't have much trouble keeping track of things. If I want to remind myself of certain details (such as what a character is wearing), it's a fairly simple matter to leaf through the earlier pages.

Not so easy, however, when there are multiple plot lines, a crowd of important characters, and hundreds of pages.

So I want to tell you about a few methods I've developed to help me keep things straight. If you're a writer, you might find some of this useful.

First tip. Outline if you need to. Even though I am generally opposed to the use of outlines, they become almost a necessity if you're trying to write a complex novel with several intersecting story-lines. You have to coordinate the events, or you'll end up with a *real* disaster. Just don't feel compelled, when writing the actual book, to follow every detail of the outline. Follow it like a map, but feel free to take detours.

Second tip. Make "character notes." Whether writing a small novel or a monstrosity, it's a very good idea to keep a page of notes about each character. I don't work out sketches of my characters in advance; I let them develop as I create them in the course of writing. But *while* I'm creating them, I take a few moments to jot down their hair color and style, their age (if it matters), what they're wearing, and other details such as unusual traits or mannerisms. But here's a trick—don't just make a note of each detail—*write down the number of the manuscript page* on which it appears. That way, you'll have an easy time finding it again. Later on, you may want to double-check what you wrote there, or even change it. Having the page number handy can save you a lot of time and frustration.

Third tip. Draw rough diagrams and maps of any settings that might be revisited later in the book. It's very easy to forget the layout of a house or a neighborhood or a section of wilderness (where was that lake again?). Maps and diagrams can make your life easier. I suggest you do the drawings as you go along, based on what you've just written.

Fourth tip. Create a "log book" for your novel. This is something completely different from your "working outline." You should create the log book as you go along. It is your record of what you've written—labeled by chapter and page numbers. Here is a sample of my "log book" for *Quake*.

PLOT

Chapt. 1—Stan pov. Earthquake hits. 8:20 a.m. Friday.

June. Afterward, he murders his mother.

2—Clint pov. Quake hits. Runs from office.

Car accident. He joins up with Mary Davis.

They'll drive together.

3—Barb & others at time of quake. Driver's ed. Teacher heads downtown speeding dangerously.

4—p. 50. Stanley goes over and finds Sheila.

They talk, but she is still covered & out of sight.

The purpose of the log book is to give you a quick reminder of what happened and "where, and to provide an easy "way for you to relocate passages that you may have written months earlier. It can be a major help.

Quake was published by Headline in January, 1995. It "was chosen to be the main selection of World Book Club, -which ordered 24,000 copies.

In the U.S., it was published by Thomas Dunne, St. Martin's Press, in June, 1995. It was given no publicity by the publisher. A couple of copies ended up in some stores.

Other stores received no copies at all.

Like *Savage* and *The Stake*, *Quake* "was a novel that "coulda been a contenda." I feel that those three books in particular, treated properly by a publisher, would have sold extremely well in the U.S. I think they could have been bestsellers here, just as they were bestsellers in Great Britain.

Instead, they were flops in this country.

They never had a chance of selling in the U.S. because most readers never had a chance to find out that they existed. Even if I had done something to bring attention to the books, they had been printed in such limited quantities that interested readers would've had a terrible time finding a place to buy them.

Authors are always taking it on the chin.

But one of the worst blows of all is to write a book, sell it to a reputable publisher, wait for its publication date, then make the rounds of the bookstores and find that very few are carrying it—or ever will.

After discovering that some of the major U.S. chain bookstores had ordered no copies whatsoever of *Quake*, I decided that I would no longer play the game.

I make enough money from the U.K. and the rest of the world that I don't *need* money from America.

I don't need it badly enough to put myself through the agonies involved in watching my novels get "thrown away" by one publisher after another.

Quake was my last novel to be published in the United States, and I intend for it to remain the last.

At least until a publisher makes me an offer I can't refuse.

So far, that hasn't happened.

ISLAND

I didn't get started on *Island* until May 25, 1994, about two months after finishing *Quake*. What led me to write *Island*?

I suppose that I've always had an urge to write about people who have been marooned on a tropical island. It's a naturally great setup. The people are isolated. They are reduced to the basics of survival. And they are on their own—with no easy way out.

On top of that, who knows what dangers may be lurking elsewhere on the island?

The problem, of course, is that almost everyone is familiar with *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Swiss Family Robinson*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Lord of the Flies*, "The Most Dangerous Game," and *Gilligan's Island*. Plus a ton of lesser-known books, short stories, movies and television shows about people who get stranded on islands and in other desolate areas.

Writing a "marooned" story is a bit like writing a vampire story. At first glance, it might seem that just about everything has already been done.

But there are always fresh approaches.

I wanted to give it a shot.

Instead of being marooned when a storm destroys their ship, my group is already ashore, picnicking on an island when their yacht blows up. Within a few hours after that, one of the castaways is found hanged.

I employed a special technique in the writing of *Island*.

The whole story is told by a young castaway who is keeping a journal. We see the entire adventure through his eyes.

What makes this different from the usual first-person narrative (such as I used in *Savage*) is that the writer of the journal is telling the story as it happens. And the writing of the journal becomes part of the story.

Most first-person novels seem to have been written years after the events of the story occurred. We usually don't know what has prompted the narrator to tell his or her story. The telling seems unrelated to the actual events of the story. And it is generally obvious from the start that the narrator survived to tell the tale.

Not so with *Island*.

We know why Rupert is keeping the journal. We know when he is making entries in it. We know where the journal is at all times

during the course of the novel. But -we never know what may happen next—or whether Rupert will even be alive to finish the story.

Because he is writing the journal as he goes along, *anything* can happen.

The technique opened up a lot of new ways to play with the story, new ways to surprise myself and my readers.

Rupert's journal was actually a variation and expansion of the tape recorder technique that I used in the "Simon Says" sections of *Endless Night*. I simply changed the tape recorder to a written journal... then took the possibilities as far as I could.

With *Island*, I developed no plot outline. It is a fairly straight-forward story, all of it told from Rupert's point of view. I put together a group of characters who seemed colorful, placed them on the island, blew up their boat, then just let the plot unfold in the ways that seemed most natural.

This is not to suggest that I allowed chaos to rule the story.

Every story has its own integral logic.

One of the major tricks, in writing, is to discover the natural logic that is inherent in a story's basic situation, then release it. Develop it. Explore it. Exploit it.

Let's take *Island* as an example.

The situation is this this: a small group of people, vacationing in the Bahamas, are having

a picnic on an apparently deserted island when their yacht blows up.

What happens next?

Do they sing "Deck the Halls"? Do they toss around a Frisbee for a while? Do they split up to go bird watching?

Of course not.

Not unless they're nuts.

What would people with common sense do?

Easy. They would take their dingy out to the site of the explosion and try to recover any items that might prove useful for their survival. Such as food, utensils, weapons, clothing...

This almost has to be done first, before the salvageable items are washed away, eaten by fish, or otherwise lost to the sea.

What next?

After salvaging everything useful from the wreckage, any reasonable person would probably embark on a limited exploration of the island—looking for a source of fresh water, signs of civilization, and generally taking note of any nearby resources or hazards.

And so on.

To a large extent, the story is writing itself, telling the writer what should happen next. Or at least giving him a limited selection of reasonable alternatives,

As new elements are added to the story (such as a member of the castaway group being murdered in the middle of the night), the situation changes. And the new situation gives the writer certain ways he *has* to go if he wants to tell the story correctly.

If one of your castaways gets killed, what naturally follows?

Shock. An investigation into the cause of the death. Disposal of the body. Maybe a funeral. Discussions about who might've done the deed and how to keep the rest of the group safe. A gathering of weapons for self-defense. Cautions against going anywhere alone. A buddy system for leaving the camp to get firewood, relieve oneself, etc. Guards to be posted overnight. And so on.

These are matters that almost *have* to be dealt with, because they would naturally come up if ordinary people are marooned and one of their number is murdered.

Every good author, given those circumstances, would feel compelled to write about the shock of discovering the death, the preliminary investigation, the disposal of the body, etc.

In certain fundamental ways, their stories would be the same. Because the story itself *demands* to go in certain directions.

In other fundamental ways, however, the stories would be very different from each other. For one thing, every author wouldn't be able to *detect* the integral elements of a given story. Plus, there would be legitimate differences of opinion about what *is* or *isn't* an integral element. But even if every author should agree about such matters, they would certainly not handle them in the same manner. Each writer would emphasize different aspects, depending on the needs of his characters and his own preferences and compulsions.

So, given any basic plot setup and the story's natural logic, ten different writers would develop the story in ten different ways. But there would almost certainly be basic, inevitable similarities among most of them.

And some of the stories could be so similar that people might be led to suspect plagiarism—though no plagiarism occurred.

In my opinion, a major characteristic of a good writer is his ability to unearth the natural logic of a story, use it and develop it.

As an author, how do you discover a story's internal logic?

If you have common sense and a store of good, general knowledge, it should be easy.

Consider the situation of your story. Then say to yourself, "If that happened, then what would probably happen *next* in the real world?" Let me stress, the *real world*, not the make-believe crap that usually tries to pass itself off as reality in the movies, on TV and in a lot of fiction. Say to yourself, "If that happened, then what would I do about it?" Don't ask what Clint Eastwood or Bruce Willis or Drew Barrymore would do, ask what *you* would do. You, or real people you know.

Keep asking yourself those questions. Each time you find a good answer, use it. And you'll find that, for the most part, your story will develop easily and naturally. You'll feel as if you're *following* your story, not making it up. You actually *are* making it up, but it won't feel that way. You'll sense that the story has a life of its own. If that happens, you can be pretty sure that you're writing a good story.

Having expounded on this topic, I feel compelled to qualify things. Obviously, some of your characters will not behave as *you* 'would behave in certain circumstances. And obviously, you don't always want to go with the first event or course of action that pops into your head. Obviously a lot of other things. I'm not trying to cover every aspect of

writing; I just want to pass along certain observations and suggestions about a few matters that I've discovered during my years as a writer.

The deal is, you'll be better off as a writer if you're aware that stories *do* have certain underlying, secret structures.

You need to find the natural elements of the story you're trying to write. Show them to your reader, manipulate them, play with them, possibly mutilate them—but ignore them only at your peril.

In writing *Island*, I let the story develop in its own way and I mostly just followed along to see what would happen next. But I helped it along, too. I was MOG. My game was to keep things moving along at a quick pace and to see how far I could go.

I pretty much pushed the situation and the format to its limits.

And on the final page of my manuscript, 594, I tossed a hand grenade (figuratively) into the works.

As for the ending, I didn't know I'd do it till I *did* it.

I knew I *might*, but it was almost as if I left the final decision up to Rupert.

To my way of thinking, that's the way it should be. Let the story lead the way. Be the chronicler of what seems almost inevitable. And don't shove the story out of its natural path, even if the path appears to be leading toward a cliff.

That way, you surprise yourself and your readers.

I finished writing *Island* on January 23, 1995. Headline published it later that year, and Book Club Associates ordered 23,000 copies. In 1997, *Island* sold to Russia.

The Headline paperback edition is presently in its 7th printing.

BODY RIDES

As of January 25, 1995, I was done with *Island* and ready to embark on a new novel. I sat down in front of my computer. At that point, I didn't have a clue about the subject of my next novel. So I went through my usual routine. In order to give you a look at how I get started on a new novel, I'll reprint some of my early notes.

The notes will give you a close-up look at the way my mind operates when I am trying to get started on a new novel. Though I've already shown you my initial notes for *The Cellar*, I think that the notes I made in the early days of *Body Rides* are a lot more revealing about my mental processes.

And, after all, delving into mental processes is what *Body Rides* is all about.
ideas for new novel Jan. 25, 1995 Just finished *Island* Next book.

1. Something that does not focus on a sex-maniac guy stalking, raping and murdering people.
Make the villain a woman? (Which is sort of what I've got in *The Glory Bus* partial.)
2. Come up with a big, catchy idea. For the background. Of course, the big, catchy ideas have all been used. So it would have to be a variation.

Maybe go with the *Hitcher* idea that I came up with back November, 1993.

*As it turned out, I'd only made some very sketchy notes on the Hitcher idea, back in 1993-
But the idea seemed to have potential. The next day, I sat down and explored the possibilities.*

Jan. 26, 1995
General plot.

A guy is in town. Happens to be in the right place at the right time, and saves a woman's life. She leads him to her place. Rewards him with the gift of "Drifting"? You can drift from person to person, going along for the ride inside their bodies.

You are there, but separate. You remain aware of yourself, but you know their thoughts, feel what they feel. However, you can't effect their thoughts or behavior in any way. You're just along for the ride.

The gal shows him how to do this. She gives him a ride to show him the ropes. Then explains the limitations.

Warns him that there are dangers—especially, you don't want to be a passenger at the time someone dies. Also, your actual body needs to be someplace safe.

The guy is excited, but nervous about his new powers.

He decides not to tell his girlfriend. She works nights. So shortly after he gets the power, he rides with her. She is great. Loyal, loves him, etc. But maybe when she gets back, he plays "games" with her. Makes a few remarks to let her know that he "knows" something. This annoys her. Does he admit his power? She wouldn't believe him, though. Would think he has been spying on her. This could be the beginning of the end.

Excellent way to start.

What are their jobs? In this book, it might be important. What if the gal is a cop? That might be pushing things, making it less "real." Not a hospital worker. Something to do

with a restaurant or bar? Better, something at the airport. What if she 'works for something like Hoffman? Greets celebrities, etc? Gives them the royal treatment? If I have questions, I can check with Murray.

What about the guy? He could lose his job. Maybe he already did lose his job. He is out on streets during the day because he is looking for employment. Which means he is already a victim, and ready for a little trouble.

Big question. Do they live together? No. Gal won't go for it. Wants to keep her own place unless they are married. She has a nicer place than him. He spends a lot of time over at her place.

What kind of guy is he? Timid. Dreams of wild adventures, but is too weak, nervous, etc. to do anything. Feels as if he is an "outsider." Or should I make him more normal?

He is good, decent. Has never done anything terribly adventurous, or terribly wrong. He would like to do things, but fears the consequences. Is not experiencing much of life. Stays pretty much in his own shell, etc.

This would be an ideal situation for a guy who wants to be a college professor. Maybe he is one of those guys who is a student for years. He is doing postgraduate studies at the local university.

Let's play it by ear.

Except. How does he save the woman's life? He is normally timid, not a risk-taker. She ends up basically uninjured, unless maybe minor injuries. Maybe should not involve cops. That way, they can leave immediately afterward—go to her place.

Maybe he is a grad student, walking home from the campus library at night. Or he is driving. Sees a -woman get dragged into the bushes. Drives off the road, goes for the guys. Honking. The assailants take off. No. Maybe he has to get into a fray. Fights him/them off. Maybe with a knife.

Okay.

At that point, I quit making notes and began to write the book itself. I wrote steadily for about two weeks before pausing to make any more notes. Here they are.

Feb. 9, 1995

I am now up to about p.60 of the new book. *Drifters*???

So far, Neal has rushed to the rescue of a woman in distress, Elise. He has shot and apparently killed her weird, bearded, sadistic assailant. After shooting the guy, he frees

Elise. They cover bad guy with bushes, etc., leave bad guy's van by road and return the videos.

Then Neal drives Elise to her home in Brentwood.

He is a screen-writer, substitute high school teacher.

Has a girlfriend, Marta. She works nights at LAX. Does not live with him.

Elise is a former diver. Divorced. Has nice house. She was diving in the dark when the guy supposedly grabbed her, applied choke hold. She came to in his van, in which she was taken to the place in W.L.A. where Neal rescued her.

There is possibility that her ex-husband may have sent the guy to nail her. But they both believe, pretty much, that she was actually just the random victim of a sociopath. When they return to Elise's house, she insists that Neal come in with her. She has spoken of giving him a reward. He has insisted that he doesn't want a reward.

Ideas for what goes on in the future.

The plan is for her to give Neal a present. A bracelet, maybe. It allows him to "drift" or "hitch" rides with people He tries it out at her place, just after she gives it to him. Afterward, he starts using it to "hitch" rides with people.

But I need to figure out general structure. Mainly, what about the bad guy from the opening???

To hitch, you have to find a person. Maybe it needs to be someone nearby, at least at the start. Within a couple of miles, or something? Because you have to float around, and can't go great distances. Maybe the distances can be increased with practice.

Is the guy dead? Yes. But maybe his body disappears. Neal, concerned, drives past the area to see if there are cops. Then he even goes in on foot to see if the body is still there.

It's not.

The deal is, I COULD go ahead with the story and leave out all the business about the Drifting or Hitching. Which might be a good thing, since its presence would make the book supernatural.

Try to figure out a plot that does without the hitching.

It would focus on Neal, Elise, Marta and the bad guy.

And maybe Elise's ex-husband.

On the other hand...the drifting bit is what makes it different, more than just a crime story.

Maybe she (Elise) had already quit hitching. Got tired of it, scared, etc. Was controlling her life. So she fought it—like an alcoholic. She only has the one bracelet. Gives it to Neal as the reward for saving her life. Warns him not to let it control him. It can be a curse, or a great thing, depending on its use.

The original idea was this. While Neal is hitching -with a gal, she meets a bad guy. He is there when she is beaten, raped, murdered, etc. Gets out just in time. And then he wants to find the killer.

Maybe Marta is the victim. (This would free him up for Elise, etc.)

But this can't be a coincidence. Has to tie in, somehow, with the guy he killed.

Someone else might've been there, watching it all, unseen by Neal and Elise. He or she sees the shooting.

After making those notes, I returned to writing the novel and wrote steadily for another two weeks before working on another set of notes.

And so it went.

It is my usual method of working.

In a sense, I am an explorer making my way through an uncharted jungle. I have a general goal in mind—getting through the jungle to its other side. But I know very little about what lies ahead. I trudge along, doing the best I can. Then, before getting helplessly lost, I climb a tree and scout the area ahead. I pick a distant landmark, climb down, and resume my trek until I reach the landmark. Or until I start to worry about being lost. Then I climb another tree—make a new set of notes.

If you look closely at the notes that I reprinted above, you'll get some very clear indications about how I go about developing my ideas.

As often happens, I had a concept that I liked a lot. But where to go with the concept wasn't easy to discover. I simply relaxed and played around with some of the possibilities—searching for what seemed right. (Searching for the inherent, natural structure?)

Plenty of the ideas mentioned in my notes did not end up in the story. Others arrived, but in strangely mutated forms.

Very few of the ideas appear in *Body Rides* intact. Why?

There are a lot of reasons. But a major, important reason is that I consider my notes to be a process of scouting the territory ahead. They give me general ideas about which way to go, but then the actual writing of the novel takes over.

As a story is being written, I find that one thing leads naturally, almost inevitably, to another. Almost in spite of my own intentions.

Sure, I could force the issues. After all, *I'm* the author.

I'm the Master of the Game.

As stated before, however, I've found that it's better to "give the story its head," not try to force it into directions that might be more convenient for me.

If the novel doesn't bear much resemblance to the preliminary notes, so much the better. It may be an indication that the story came to life and went racing off for adventures beyond anything I'd planned for it.

Body Rides, like *Savage*, presented such an enormous challenge that I had strong doubts about my ability to pull it off.

In *Savage*, the challenge was to breathe life into an "historical" story of such sweeping dimensions. In *Body Rides*, the challenge was to get inside people's heads—in a way that would make readers believe they are actually there.

As with *Savage*, I realized that the concept itself was so nifty that I *had* to give it a try. If I blew it, I blew it. Better to try and fail, than not to try...Here is a quote from a letter that I wrote to Bob Tanner:

Body Rides seemed like a very exciting concept for a novel, one full of possibilities for visiting unusual characters, getting involved in odd events, and exploring many dimensions of human experience.

Having a magic bracelet allowing such excursions would open up whole new realms of experiences for a person.

If you could "body ride," you could *be* anyone—at least for a while.

And safely, for the most part.

But when you *do* enter someone, what do you find?

One of my main challenges in writing *Body Rides* was dealing with the questions: What goes on in someone, *really*?

I wanted to reach behind the way that fiction usually treats the minds of characters. As we know—or suspect—people don't think simply by having verbal discussions with themselves. A lot of other stuff goes on.

Our heads, it seems to me, are packed with a jumble of conscious thoughts, monologues, vague notions, images that float through, mind-films of memories, worries and fantasies, projections of possible future events, and always an awareness of the body—its activities and physical sensations.

Though I'm fairly well read, I'd never encountered a book that described the minds of characters functioning in the way my own mind seems to function. That is, with such an array of stuff happening simultaneously on different levels. As far as I knew, I was breaking new ground. I had nowhere to look for guidance except into myself. I wondered if I would be good enough to recreate, in a believable way, what I found there.

And, actually, I wasn't totally sure that everyone experiences the same kind of stuff I do. I reckoned they likely did.

Hey, I was counting on it.

To do my research for *Body Rides*, I didn't read psychology books. I have no idea what they might've told me. I simply looked into myself and paid attention. And hoped for the best.

Apparently, I got it pretty near right.

Like *Quake*, *Body Rides* tells a lot of truth about life in Southern California.

It opens with the main character, Neal Darden, making a late-night run to the video store. (His last name was intended as a tribute to Christopher Darden, a prosecutor in the trial of O.J. Simpson.) In Neal's attempt to return the rented video to the store before midnight, he travels exactly the same route that I (and my family) have driven many times at the same hour.

And he thinks many of the same thoughts that have crossed my mind.

The tunnel is there. The strip of wilderness below the freeway is there. So is the video store (really a Blockbuster) and the fast-food joint (really an In and Out). The murders that Neal thinks about— well, they were real, too.

A lot is real in *Body Rides*.

The portrayals of Los Angeles, Brentwood, Santa Monica. The sounds of gunshots being ignored in the night. The bums and weirdos roaming the alleys. Nearly every detail about

life in Southern California, including most of the street names.

What isn't real?

Plenty.

I should mention that *The Fort* is entirely a figment of my imagination. Its location is based on an area I've visited, but there is no amusement park in the vicinity. *The Fort* seems like a pretty neat place, to me. If it existed, I would sure want to go there. But it doesn't. Only in *Body Rides*.

I finished writing *Body Rides* on September 27, 1995.

Mike Bailey, my editor at Headline, wrote, "Just finished *Body Rides*—wow! It's a trip and a half but we've doubtless already talked so you'll know I think it's great and your readers will just adore it."

Headline published *Body Rides* in February, 1996. It was the main selection of the World Book Club and the Mystery and Thriller Book Club. The book club editions numbered 42,000 copies—nearly doubling the amount they printed of *Quake* or *Island*.

BITE

On October 17, 1995, I sat down at my computer. Here are some of the notes I made: I'm now done with *Body Rides* and it has been accepted. Have also written my vampire story for Poppy Brite's anthology. Now is the time to come up with an idea for a new novel.

How about something truly noir-ish?

I toyed earlier with the idea of a guy being approached by a beautiful gal to help her with a dead vampire. In earlier version, she was an old girlfriend. This could be like a companion piece to *The Stake*.

She comes to him. Tells him that she needs his help. Then she leads him to the scene of the crime—a dead man with a stake through his chest. She confesses that she did it.

Says that he was a vampire. But the cops won't believe that. They'll try to nail her for murder. So she asks his help in getting rid of the body.

As in notes for other novels, such as *Body Rides*, I refer to an earlier version of the idea. Here is what happened.

In my previous attempt, I began the story "with the girl asking her former boyfriend for a favor, then taking him to her house and showing him the body of a man she has been killed. He is dead on the floor with a stake in his chest. She tells her old friend that the

guy is a vampire, that she needs help in disposing of the body, etc.

As I wrote the first chapter, however, I realized that the story seemed to lie there, dead as a carp.

It had no zip, no "forward narrative thrust."

I decided not to continue writing it, and went on to look for a better idea.

This sort of thing happens with some frequency.

Many times, I embark on a new novel, then quit. Why? Most often, it is because the story doesn't seem to be going anyplace. I have a certain standard inside my head. It isn't well defined, but I get a sense of when things are going well and when they aren't. If a story *does* have a problem, I'd rather quit sooner than later.

But I save everything.

Because, just as I've quit certain projects, I have eventually returned to many of them and brought them (in one form or another) to completion.

If you're a writer, be sure to keep track of your older stuff, the notes and chapters of unfinished novels, the manuscripts that you completed but which never sold—everything.

You may find uses for them.

More often than not, when I start considering ideas for my next novel, I think about some of my earlier attempts. "What about giving *that* one another try?"

Usually, when a story doesn't seem to be working, there is a very specific reason for it. The reason isn't always easy to recognize, especially during the first try. By the time you take another look at the idea, months or years later, the problem *and solution* may be obvious to you.

In the case of *Bite*, I decided to give it another whirl because I really liked the basic idea. I needed a way to give it some energy and forward movement, but I still wasn't sure how. That's why I made extensive notes about possible ways to go with the plot.

Eventually, as I made the notes, I discovered the *specific* problem with my earlier version: at the beginning, the "vampire" was already dead on the floor with a stake in its chest.

The easy fix?

This time, write it so the vampire hasn't already been dispatched. The girl won't ask her old boyfriend for help in disposing of the body—she'll ask him to *kill* the vampire for her.

And that made all the difference.

Suddenly, *Bite* was off and running.

In fact, it ran away with itself. By the time I'd finished making my notes on October 17, I'd written seven pages (single spaced) and developed a very involved plot. As I wrote the book—following my general ideas for the plot—one thing led to another. I followed where they led. Eventually, it became obvious that I couldn't do *Bite* the way I'd planned.

If I followed my notes *and* allowed the story to develop in the full way that seemed appropriate, it would be over a thousand pages long.

I wasn't ready for that, and neither was my publisher.

(For one thing, I had a deadline that wouldn't allow me to spend so much extra time on a novel.)

As a result, I had to choose between developing the story properly or following my intended plot to the end of the line. I couldn't do both.

I chose to dump the second half of the plot.

Under the circumstances, that involved little more than *not* continuing the story after my main characters disposed of the vampire's body.

I don't think I'll tell, here, what I had planned for the second half of the book. Because maybe someday I'll want to use that plot. Maybe I won't. But it's never a good idea to shut off options by giving away a story that might come in handy someday.

A few little asides about *Bite*.

Ann asked me to name the vampire Elliot. I don't know why.

I'd already given him another name, but she wanted Elliot. So I changed the vampire's name. It's easy to do with a computer.

Perhaps to reward me for letting her choose the vampire's name, she suggested a weekend trip in which we followed the exact route that my characters take in *Bite*. The trip allowed me to take extensive notes about details of the areas. The notes came in very handy. The book would've been quite different if we hadn't taken that trip.

My outlaw biker would've *looked* quite different if I hadn't known Del Howison. I needed to come up with something unusual about the character's physical appearance, and decided to give him long, flowing white hair like Del. I then named the character Snow White.

Del and his wife, Sue, are the owners of wonderful shop of horrors (including books) called Dark Delicacies. The resemblance between Snow White and Del stops with the hair. Del is a terrific, friendly guy. To the best of my knowledge, he's not a homosexual pederast or a murderer.

Two months into the writing of *Bite*, I took time off to prepare my first Headline short fiction collection, *Fiends*.

I spent about one month on *Fiends*, then returned to *Bite* and finished it on May 1, 1996.

It was published hardbound in September, 1996. The book club later combined it with *Fiends* and published a 14,000 edition of the double-book.

FIENDS

Though small presses are usually eager to publish collections of short fiction, most major publishing companies have a strong aversion to collections.

Apparently, the things don't sell as well as novels.

For years, Headline resisted the idea of publishing a collection by me. They even rejected my Stoker-nominated collection, *A Good, Secret Place*.

Eventually, however, Bob Tanner convinced them to do one—so long as it would be anchored by a novella.

I anchored it with a piece of fiction called "Fiends."

I'd started writing "Fiends" at my parents' house in Tiburon, California during Christmas vacation, 1971. I finished that version of the book in the summer of 1972, but it came in at a meager 50,000 words. Despite its brevity, I sent it out to a few agents under the title, *Dark Road*.

And had some interesting responses. In a letter dated November 10, 1972, agent Julian Bach wrote to me, "The story certainly moves, and there is a lot of tension in it. I suspect you will find an interested agent and that he or she will find a publisher. Our vote finally went not to take it on. We found it just too sadistic in subject matter but good luck with it elsewhere."

On March 12, 1973, agent Max Gartenberg wrote, "It's a gripping enough story. The problem for me was that the characters seem flat, without dimensions, and therefore hard to get caught up with. Good luck with it elsewhere."

Soon afterward, I wrote a couple of new versions of the book. One, called *He's Out There*

in the Night, -was written entirely in the first person, from the girl Marty's point of view. (A precursor of *After Midnight*) Another was in the third person, about 60,000 words, and called *Ravished*.

I believe that, in 1975, I did a major rewrite of *Ravished* and sent it to agent Dick Curtis. But nothing came of my efforts.

I finally put all the drafts into a box. It must've been quite a large box, because at present count I seem to have seven different versions of *Dark Road*, *He's Out There in the Night*, and *Ravished*. In all, I probably spent more than four years "writing and rewriting the thing—though it's difficult to know exactly when I did what, because in those days I didn't date my material very well.

Having put the book behind me, I went on to other things.

When moving all my stuff in preparation for the demolition of our old garage, I took another look at some of my old, nearly-forgotten material. And I reread a few of the unpublished novels.

I liked *Ravished*. Parts of it seemed clumsy and slow and silly. A few parts were outdated. Also, at 275 manuscript pages, it was too short to be a novel (by current standards) and too long to be a novella.

When I needed a good-sized piece of fiction to anchor my Headline story collection, I realized that *Ravished* might be perfect. If I could fix it.

I read the manuscript again, this time trimming it drastically— eliminating every "word, sentence, paragraph and page that didn't seem right.

Then I typed the revised version into my computer, fixing it more as I went along. I kept working on the story until it seemed as good as my current stuff.

During the revisions, I reduced the manuscript from 275 pages to 170 pages—which seemed like a good, solid length for the lead story of my collection.

I changed the title from *Ravished* to "Fiends," which would also become the title of the collection.

With 170 pages of original material, I felt fine about filling the rest of the collection with reprints. Besides, *Fiends* was to be published in the United Kingdom, where very few of my short stories had ever been published.

I began the selection process by printing up *all my* short stories. I found that I had enough of them to fill at least three volumes.

For *Fiends*, I eliminated the five stories that Headline had published along with *Out Are the Lights* in 1993. I chose to use only a few of the stories that had appeared in *A Good, Secret Place*.

I separated my stories into piles. One pile would be for material I would include in *Fiends*. Into the other pile would go all the tales I intended to save for future collections.

The decisions weren't easy. Stories made a lot of trips back and forth from pile to pile.

For *Fiends*, I tried to come up with a mixture of new stuff and old. A mixture of serious and rather humorous stories. Also, I was careful not to load it down with more than its share of my best (or best-known) stories. I didn't want it to be a "best of" volume, just a good sampling.

After I'd finally decided which stories to use, I needed to figure out some sort of order to put them in. I certainly didn't want them arranged in chronological or alphabetical order. I decided to arrange them by content, so that there would be a lot of variety: a scary story here, a darkly humorous story there, a long one, a short one, a new one, an old one, and so on.

Though I made major revisions in *Ravished* to come up with "Fiends," I did not change the other stories to any significant extent. (If you start *really* revising, where do you stop?) I corrected a few spelling errors, changed a punctuation mark here or there, and made a few minor fixes (very few) to clear up the meaning of a confusing sentence.

It took me a few weeks, working part-time while I was writing *Bite*, to transform *Ravished* into "Fiends" and to prepare the accompanying short stories. I mailed the manuscript to Bob Tanner on January 5, 1996.

I decided not to tell anyone, including my agent and editor, that the anchoring novella was actually a revision of a novel that I'd written more than twenty years earlier.

For one thing, I figured that a previous knowledge of the situation might create a pre-conception about its merits. For another, I wanted to see whether anyone would notice a difference in quality.

Could "Fiends" stand on its own two feet?

It did.

For me, the publication of *Fiends* had special meaning. It wasn't just a collection of short fiction; it also marked the resurrection of *Dark Road*, *He's Out There in the Night*, and *Ravished*, a novel that I'd spent a long time writing and revising back in the days before the sale of my first novel...in the days when I was an aspiring writer, and pretty much of a failure.

To have the story published was like recovering several lost years of my life. Those years hadn't been a waste of time, after all. I hadn't thrown them away writing worthless crap; I'd spent them on a novel that would be published more than twenty years later.

At some point after the deal had been made for Headline to publish *Fiends*, I was talking to Dean Koontz on the phone. He mentioned that a small press publisher had asked him to write an introduction for a special limited edition of my novella, "Wilds" (which would eventually not be brought out by that publisher). I said to Dean, "Hey, if you feel like writing an introduction, how about doing it for *Fiends*, instead?"

He agreed to that, and wrote a splendid introduction for my story collection. While much of the introduction was tongue-in-cheek, he wrote a lovely little piece about my daughter, Kelly. For me, what Dean wrote about Kelly was the highlight of the introduction.

Headline published *Fiends* in 1997, and Book Club Associates printed 14,000 copies of it as a double-book with *Bite*.

AFTER MIDNIGHT

I finished writing *Bite* on May 1, 1996. On May 6, I once again embarked on the third book of the Beast House series.

Once again, I experienced a false start. On June 9, however, I came up with an entirely new concept for the *The Cellar III*. I called my new version, *The Midnight Tour*. I worked on it until September 4, then stopped again, this time 180 pages into the manuscript.

Why did I stop?

Because I was informed that, due to scheduling problems, the book club intended to postpone publication of *Bite* and print it as a double-book with my next novel.

My "next novel" would have been *The Midnight Tour*. And I didn't want the third book of the Beast House trilogy to be brought out by the book club as a double-book with *Bite*.

So I decided to stop working on *The Midnight Tour* and write a book specifically designed to accompany *Bite*.

The result was *After Midnight*.

When I made my first notes for *After Midnight*, the story was about a teenaged boy who sees a mysterious young woman in his back yard in the middle of the night.

I "wasn't completely happy with that.

I thought, "What if I turn it around?"

What if a young *woman*, late at night, looks outside and watches a mysterious young *man* come "wandering into the yard?"

This seemed like a much better idea.

But there was a hitch.

The nature of the story required for it to be told in the first person viewpoint. If I made the main character a female, I would need to write the novel as if it had been written by *her*. A woman.

I'd already written a couple of novels, *Savage* and *Island*, entirely in the first person viewpoints.

But the viewpoint characters had been *guys*.

This would have to be gal.

Could I do it in a convincing way?

After giving the situation a little thought, I realized that I'd been writing large portions of many novels, over the years, in which I depicted female characters: how they acted, how they talked, how they thought and felt about what was going on. Those books had worked out just fine.

So why should I let a little word like "I" get in the way?

(In fact, it's my policy to let almost nothing "get in my way" if I think there's a good story to tell.)

If I went ahead and wrote the book from a "woman's viewpoint, however, I figured that I would be opening myself up for criticism along the lines of, "How dare you, a male, presume to have the slightest clue about what goes on inside the mind and body and heart of a female?"

Again, I'd been making such presumptions for years—though never in such a straightforward way. Every time I write about *any* character, male or female, I'm using my imagination. I'm no more a mad scientist or serial killer than I am a woman.

Besides, I could point to the examples of Stephen King (*Dolores Claiborne*) and Charles Portis (*True Grit*) Both authors were males who wrote novels in the first person from a female's viewpoint.

If they can do it, why can't I?

No good reason.

As with *Savage*, I began by experimenting with the character's voice. I came up with this: Hello.

I'm Alice.

I've never written a book before, but figured I might as well start by saying who I am. Alice.

That's not my real name. I'd have to be an idiot to tell you my real name, wouldn't I? Identify myself, then go on to write a book that tells more than anyone should ever know about my private life and adventures and passions and crimes.

Just call me Alice.

Sounds like 'alias,' doesn't it?

I'm somebody, alias Alice.

Though *Dolores Claiborne* helped me justify writing a book in the words of its female protagonist, Holden Caulfield was a more important inspiration for Alice. Holden and Huck, my own Trevor Bentley, and Mattie Ross from *True Grit*. Alice is sort of a descendant of them all.

But they are all "good" people.

I have my doubts about Alice.

With *After Midnight*, I went out on a limb by writing the book from Alice's viewpoint, then went out even farther by allowing her to do *bad* things.

Several times during the course of the book, she behaves in ways that are more suitable for a villain than for a protagonist.

I did go a bit too far. To make the novel more suitable (and apparently to prevent a rejection by the book club), I "was asked to tone down certain scenes in which Alice strayed too far beyond the realms of decency. I was happy to cut back. I knew that I'd pushed it, and the minor cuts didn't damage my portrait of Alice.

The book club, possibly worried about Alice's unsavory nature, accepted *After Midnight* but limited their initial order to 9,000 copies. As of this writing, it's too early to know whether they'll require additional copies.

Before I'd quite finished writing *After Midnight*, I learned that the book club no longer planned to do a double-book of *Bite* and my next novel. Instead, they would combine *Bite* with my short fiction collection, *Fiends*.

If I'd known that would happen, I wouldn't have abandoned *The Midnight Tour* to write *After Midnight*. And quite possibly, *After Midnight* would have never been written at all. Funny how things "work out."

I finished *After Midnight* on January 2, 1997. With a little extra time on my hands, I spent almost three weeks writing a screenplay based on the novel.

And then it was time to try, once more, for a return trip to Mal-casa Point.

THE MIDNIGHT TOUR
&
A WRITER'S TALE

As mentioned earlier, I wrote the first 180 pages of *The Midnight Tour* between June 9 and September 4, 1996, immediately after *Bite* and before *After Midnight*. Done with *After Midnight* on January 2, 1997, I returned to my third Beast House book on February 18, 1997.

After working on it for a couple of weeks, I left it *again*, this time to write a short story, "The Job," for a Peter Raining anthology. Simultaneously, I spent time trying to develop another new novel, *Madland*.

I returned to *The Midnight Tour* on March 15. A week later, however, I -was approached by Peter Infantino and John Scoleri about helping them prepare a book about *me*. I continued writing *The Midnight Tour* but also spent time, starting on April 25, preparing material for the book that would become *A Writer's Tale*.

From that time onward, I've been working regularly on both books. Today is December 12, and they are almost finished. I need to complete *A Writer's Tale* within the next three days, and I plan to send off *The Midnight Tour* next week.

Both books took on lives of their own and nearly grew out of control.

Initially, I was to contribute *some* material to the book for John and Peter (and Bob Morrish, who came aboard the project somewhat later). As I worked on it, however, one thing led to another. I soon got in touch with John and Peter and said, "I've got this idea. What if I write the *whole thing*? It won't just be a 'Laymon companion' for my fans, it'll *also* be a book full of advice and information for aspiring writers. I'll tell them things they'll never hear in creative writing classes...or anywhere else. The nitty-gritty stuff most writers only find out the hard "way."

Peter and John were enthusiastic about the idea.

And one thing has *continued* leading to another—to the point where I am now writing *this* piece three days before my deadline.

If not for the deadline, I could *keep* on writing *A Writer's Tale*. Like the novel ideas I'm always seeking, it has an "infinitely expandable" plot.

But this piece will be it. For now. We want to have the book ready by late October, in time for the World Fantasy Convention.

Time to stop writing it, and put the final touches on *The Midnight Tour*.

Like *A Writer's Tale*, *The Midnight Tour* grew well beyond my original intentions.

From the start, I wanted it to be a *big* book with lots of *scope*. After developing the plot, I knew there was enough material to take me well beyond my usual 600 pages of manuscript.

I expected it to run no longer than 700-750 pages.

But one thing led to another...

As I've stressed in the course of *A Writer's Tale*, every story seems to have its own internal, hidden structure. The writer's job is to discover it, reveal it and follow it.

Once I'd made my early decisions about the basic plotlines for *The Midnight Tour*, I had little choice but to let the stories develop along their natural paths.

I found myself surprised, however, by the *length* of the paths.

I kept following them, having plenty of adventures along the way, moving ever closer to my destination—the midnight tour itself. But the tour, like a mountain seen in the distance, was farther away than I ever expected.

And I had a deadline to meet.

The contractual deadline is December 31, 1997. But it isn't exactly the *real* deadline. Because of the approaching holidays and family commitments, I need to finish *The Midnight Tour* and send it to England no later than December 23.

As early as October, I knew that I had a long distance to travel in a fairly short amount of time.

Sure, there were short-cuts I could've taken to get there quicker.

But I *wanted* this to be my biggest book yet. It was to be the ultimate Beast House story. I wanted to pull out all the stops, "ring all the bells," take it all to the limits.

If you've learned anything from reading *A Writer's Tale*, you've learned that the *larger* the novel (within limits), the more seriously it will likely be taken by agents, publishers, book club buyers and readers.

The Cellar had been a quickie little genre piece. *The Beast House* had been more fully developed, more mainstream. With *The Midnight Tour*, I wanted *epic* proportions. I didn't want people to read it and think, "Not bad for a sequel." I wanted them to think, "*Holy shit!*"

But I never expected to go 900 pages with it!

As I kept writing—the deadline drawing closer and the midnight tour still looming in the distance—I knew I was cutting things close. If I didn't watch out, I'd run out of time before reaching the end of the book.

Starting in October, I knuckled down. Instead of my usual 30 pages per week, I averaged about 40. Finally, the first week in December, I wrote a total of 56. That brought me to December 6, the day on which I finished the climax of *The Midnight Tour*.

As of today, I am attempting to finish *A Writer's Tale*. I am also proof-reading my manuscript of *The Midnight Tour*, making a ton of corrections. And I have not yet finished writing the "wind-up"—what we used to call "the denouement"—of *The Midnight Tour*.

Even though I'm anxious (more anxious than eager) to get done with this and move on—I have a very busy week ahead—I feel compelled to follow my own advice.

Advice I am about to impart to you.

Never rush the ending.

John Kinney, my editor long ago at Warner Books, once told me that writers are like baseball pitchers—a lot of them seem to "lose it" in the final innings. He thought it would be a neat idea to have "relief writers" who could come in and save the endings.

Though I don't like his idea about relief writers, I do think that John made a very good point about book endings.

During the final chapters, writers often mess up.

This may happen for several reasons.

1. The writer may simply have grown tired of his story. He's been dealing too long with the same old characters, the same old plot, and he wants to *get it over with* so he can move on to fresh material.
2. The *opposite*. He is so caught up in his material, so excited, that he's racing through it. He's plunging forward as fast as he can, skimping on details, writing the first thing that pops into his mind because he *just can't wait* to find out what'll happen next. (I plead guilty.)
3. A deadline is approaching, so he cuts corners in order to reach the finish as fast as possible.
4. He doesn't know *how* it should end.
5. A combination of the above.

Rather than dealing with these problems individually, I'll cut corners and discuss endings in general.

As I've mentioned earlier—and you've certainly noticed by now—I'm a master of stating the obvious.

In this case, the obvious is: *You don't want to blow your ending.*

And there is a real danger of doing so.

You've been -working on a novel for many months—maybe over a year. At last, the end is in sight. Like a long-distance runner (no longer a baseball pitcher), you're worn out but you want to put on the *big push* for the finish line. You want to *churn up the ground* in a final, gut-busting sprint.

My advice is this: *Don't.*

You're not a long-distance runner. You're not a baseball pitcher. You're a writer.

Resist the temptation to make a mad dash for the end of your book.

Slow down!

You've spent a long, long time developing your characters and plot. What for? For *this!*

Every word, from the first, has been a footstep on the path toward the climax of your story.

You haven't been writing to get the story over with—you've been writing to reach the big *climax* in which all the ingredients come together and *explode*.

The climax, not "THE END," is your real destination.

You do not want to "short-change" it in a rush to finish the job.

You want it to be great and memorable.

So take your time with it. Relax.

Play with it.

To a large extent, a reader's most lasting impression of a book will be based on his reaction to its climax.

So give it your best shot.

As a final word about endings, I have always been dubious about "explanations." Explaining everything is fine and dandy—and perhaps necessary—if you're writing a mystery. After all, a mystery story is supposed to involve the solving of a puzzle.

But I don't believe that writers of mainstream fiction or horror novels are required to give reasonable explanations for everything that happened.

Certainly, we do not want to leave our readers befuddled and confused. We don't want them to think we've created such a wild muddle that it defies explanation. We want to clear things up.

To some extent.

But we are under no obligation to explain everything.

And *shouldn't*, in my opinion.

On television, in films and often in fiction, audiences are bombarded by stories that end only after every issue has been neatly tied up and explained. No loose ends are allowed.

Which seems amazingly artificial.

For one thing, the "explanations" (particularly in horror stories) are often incredibly trite or stupid or unbelievable or otherwise lame.

For another, there are mysteries at the heart of every real event. Beneath the surface, there are strange and murky currents.

We may *think*, for instance, that we know why someone 'was murdered or why a car crashed or why we exist.

In the final analysis, however, what do we really know?

Not much.

If we think we know all the answers, we're fooling ourselves.

If a writer wants to *avoid* fooling his reader with superficial and possibly false explanations of the events in his story, he could do worse than to leave them...

.. .if not in the dark, at least in shadows.

It's not only more realistic that way, but possibly more fun for everyone.

Foes and Fans

AS A MASTER OF STATING THE OBVIOUS, I WILL START THIS PIECE BY saying that every reader isn't a fan.

In my own case, some readers *hate* my books. They see my material as puerile, voyeuristic, distasteful, and dumb. "Blood and guts churned out for numbskulls," as one critic put it. They seem to find my material not only simple-minded but deeply offensive.

If everybody felt that way, I'd be in deep trouble.

As things stand, however, I can afford to laugh about it.

Laugh as I wonder how in heck such people came to *read* a book by Richard Laymon in the first place. Did they "wander into it by mistake? What were they expecting, Winnie the Pooh? The covers of my novels are not misleading. The artwork and the written material should make it fairly obvious to anyone with half a brain that naughty things happen in my stories. So "why do these people read them, anyway?

Don't they *believe* the covers?

They must not.

Often, book covers do tend to exaggerate. Though a cover might lead us to believe that a book will be thrilling, lurid, shocking, bloody, erotic, violent, etc., the story inside often turns out to be tame, predictable, trite and boring.

Apparently, some people not only *expect* the cover to exaggerate (lie) about the book, but they prefer it that way. When these people get what they're told they'll get, they whine and scream, sometimes write nasty letters to me or my publisher, sometimes write vicious reviews.

I *still* don't get it.

Say these people stumble into a book of mine because they don't believe the cover or they're simply curious or whatever... and suddenly they encounter a situation that deeply shocks and offends them.

Perhaps, at that point, they should stop reading the book.

Put it away and take out a Tom Clancy, for instance.

Or a Maiy Higgins Clark.

Or a Franklin W. Dixon.

If they *don't* stop reading my book, then they deserve whatever they get.

What sort of stupes are they?

You don't like spinach, don't eat spinach. Most especially, however, don't go ahead and eat it, then whine about it afterwards. "Man, I hated that spinach! God, it sucked! It's GREEN!"

So eat corn, moron.

And leave me alone.

As you might detect, I don't find such people *entirely* amusing. I also find them stupid and annoying.

And, oddly enough, flattering.

Though they don't realize it (I doubt that they realize very much of anything), their condemnation of me and my fiction is a high compliment. For one thing, I obviously didn't bore them. More significantly, however, I managed to shock them.

What could they possibly find so shocking in my books?

I'm not sure.

I write about nothing that is, in itself, any more horrible than what is found in the fiction of many other authors. Incident by incident, my stories are *less* violent and explicit and gory than much of what is being published. Even the sex is less graphic and extreme than you'll find in other people's stories. My use of "foul" language is minimal.

This being true—and it is—why are some people so shocked by what I write?

Apparently, it has to do with *the way* I handle the material.

It gets under their skin.

Which is why I am flattered by the vehemence of those who hate me and my work.

Still, I would find my detractors extremely distressing except for a simple truth: what they

despise, my fans apparently love.

My fans are every bit as vehement as my detractors. And there are more of them.

How do people become Laymon fans?

Some stumble onto one of my stories in an anthology. Others may hear about me from a friend. Or I'm recommended by a book dealer when a "horror reader" asks for advice. (One Canadian book dealer recommends *The Woods Are Dark* and offers a money-back guarantee for any reader who is disappointed in it. So far, nobody has returned a copy.) I have fans who buy extra copies of my books and *give* them to friends who haven't read me yet.

If the new reader's first encounter with my fiction creates a sudden urge to read everything I've ever written, then that person has become a fan.

It happens a lot.

I am *not* a well known writer, especially here in the United States. Quite a few people in the publishing industry are aware of me. (They *all* seem to know that I'm big in the U.K. but that my books "just don't sell" in the U.S.) Most "horror" readers are also aware that I exist—the few, at any rate, who've gone past the stage of reading only bestsellers. For the most part, however, I'm unknown in America.

In 1994, when I phoned Forbidden Planet bookstore in Manhattan about possibly having a signing, the person in charge of author appearances had never heard of me.

Even a New York company that had just published four of my books told an inquiring publisher that they'd never heard of me.

However...

When Don Cannon arranged my first book signing back in 1989, I suddenly discovered that I had ardent fans. Sure, I'd received fan mail now and then over the years. But the letters had not prepared me for *this*.

Customers were lined up to the back of the store. Many of them showed up with boxes or paper bags full of my books. They brought copies of old *Ellery Queen* and *Alfred Hitchcock* magazines containing my early stories. They brought anthologies. They brought books that had been published in England. A few of these fans even showed up with bound galleys that *I'd* never seen before. Many had ten to twenty items for me to sign.

It was an overwhelming experience.

And only a few of them appeared to be drooling maniacs.

True, there was a guy who bore a startling resemblance to Charles Manson. He seemed perfectly nice, however. Mostly, my fans appeared to be very clean-cut, normal people. There were men, women, teenagers, and even a few senior citizens ("which *really* surprised me).

Over the years, I've often asked my fans what they do for a living. Some are teachers and students, some are in the construction business. Others are in computer and aerospace industries. There are accountants, postal workers, newspaper reporters, film makers, special effects artists, animal trainers, musicians, and authors. One fan, Daniel, works in a morgue. Another, Roy Robbins, became a book dealer. Others, Del and Sue, opened Dark Delicacies bookstore in Burbank.

Not exactly a bunch of retards and perverts, as my detractors might expect.

Over the years, several of them have become good friends.

In addition to the fans I actually get to meet at book signings, there are those I know only from letters.

I receive a moderate amount of fan mail.

A word about fan mail...

Headline sends it to me very promptly. Most other publishers, however, take their time. Fans need to be aware of this. If they mail a letter to an author in care of his publisher, it probably "won't reach him for at least two or three months. God only knows what takes the publishers so long. (I guess they're busy screwing up the lives of mid-list authors.)

I enjoy getting fan mail. Most of it, anyway. It's exciting to find out that there are so many strangers all over the -world who can't wait for my next book to come out.

Of those who send letters, most became fans according to the pattern I described above; they read one of my short stories or books, then went out and grabbed every Laymon book they could lay their hands on. Most of them have read all my novels. Those who've only read fifteen or twenty complain because there are certain titles they haven't been able to find.

After telling me how they became my fans, some tell me a little about themselves and ask me a few questions.

Some ask me *a lot* of questions. These are usually aspiring writers, and I often take the time to respond in some detail.

Most other letters, I answer with a few sentences on a picture post card. (On my travels, I spend lots of time in search of nifty cards for that purpose.) I almost always, eventually, send responses to my fans. Eventually.

Back to the letters *they* send.

A couple of questions pop up in nearly every one of them.

1. What am I working on now, and when will it be coming out?
2. Why haven't there been any movies based on my books or stories? They would *love* to see a movie of... then they name a couple of their favorite novels.

Fairly often, the author of the letter claims to be my "Number One Fan," then tries to reassure me by denying any resemblance to Annie Wilkes or Kathy Bates.

And, oh yes. While we're on the subject...

Hardly a letter arrives in which the fan doesn't claim to prefer me over Stephen King.

Some fans even maintain that I'm better than anyone.

What can I say? They're *my* fans.

Bless 'em.

It doesn't take a genius to figure out that they're the minority opinion.

It does a lot for my ego, anyway.

Especially considering the position of my career in this country— not a few rungs down from King, but off the ladder completely.

Every now and then, fans tell me wonderful things about my effect on their lives. They're personal stories, and I don't feel like telling about them.

Nor do I feel like complaining about my fans. If you want to read about fans who are nuisances, try reading Harlan Ellison or Stephen King.

I find it amazing, wonderful and delightful that, for whatever reasons, there are so many people in this world who value my fiction.

Who can't get enough of it.

Who crave it.

Before leaving the subject of fans, I must mention three of them: Martin White in Scotland, founder of the "Richard Laymon Fan Club"; Steve Gerlach in Australia, creator of the "Richard Laymon Kills" website on the Internet; and Vince Fahey of Arizona, creator of "The Official U.S. Richard Laymon Page" on the Internet.

Terrific chaps.

I thank them.

The Summing Up

BY PURE COINCIDENCE—IF ANY COINCIDENCE *IS* PURE----I FOUND myself writing this book about myself during the fiftieth year of my life.

Fifty is, in itself, something of a milestone.

For me, another milestone is the creation of *The Midnight Tour*. *A Writer's Tale* delayed the completion of *Tour*, which is the third book of the "Beast House" series.

The Cellar started my career. *Beast House* came several years later. Finally, here comes *The Midnight Tour*.

So now, fifty years old, I've "written what amounts to an autobiography and I'm "winding up the "Beast House" trilogy.

Time to call it quits.

Nah.

The only way I call it quits is when they pry my cold, dead fingers off the keyboard.

With any luck, that won't be for a while.

The confluence of these several events has conspired, however, to make me think a lot about my life and career.

Assess things.

And boy, did I blow it!

Kidding. Whatever might've gotten blown was mostly out of my control.

If a thing or two had happened differently, its not unlikely that my books would've been residing on bestseller lists in the U.S. for the past seventeen years. I would have made millions of dollars.

But who would want something like that?

(Me.)

The deal is, it didn't happen that way.

Maybe it's for the best.

(Sure.)

As things stand, it's easy to remain somewhat humble.

And happy.

Real happy.

If someone had come up to me when I was a fifteen year old kid and explained what would happen by the time I hit fifty, I would've been incredulous...and overwhelmed with delight.

Then I would've wanted to kick his butt for telling me ahead of time and ruining all the fun surprises.

At fifteen, I daydreamed of being an author.

I didn't exactly expect it to happen.

And never in my *wildest* fantasies did I imagine being read all over the world (in English and approximately fifteen foreign languages), making bestseller lists, writing novels that would be main selections of book clubs, becoming friends with some of my favorite authors, being nominated for awards alongside several of the major writers of our time, or having so many deeply devoted fans.

I never even dared to hope for such things.

But they've happened.

It boggles my mind.

So where do I go from here?

My intention is to keep on going.

Write one novel after the next.

Write each one as well as I can.

Play around with them. Experiment. Search for new angles on traditional ideas.

Try to discover deeper secrets and truths.

Take chances.

As you should know if you've read this book, taking big chances led to some of my most

significant books (*The Cellar*, *The Stake*, *Savage*, *Body Rides*, *Island* and *After Midnight*, for instance). Sometimes, I thought I couldn't write them. Sometimes, I thought I *shouldn't*. But I wrote them, regardless. Each time, the risk paid off.

Because of that, because the number of my fans continues to increase and because Headline has stood by me, my confidence has grown over the years. I find myself more and more willing to follow my inclinations about what and how to write.

So far, I haven't written a book that has been widely proclaimed by my fans to be a disappointment.

I would like to keep the streak going for as long as possible. In my opinion, the best way to keep it going is to write stuff that pleases me.

My fans obviously like what I like.

So as long as I remain true to myself, I'm fairly sure that my fans 'will stay true to me.

While my intention is to keep on doing what I have been doing, I am obviously not pleased by the course of my career in the United States.

I would like to be as popular here as I am in the rest of the English-speaking world.

How might that happen?

1. A film based on something I wrote becomes a hit, or;
2. a fan of mine takes control of a major U.S. publishing firm, or;
3. for some other reason, a major U.S. publisher decides to get behind me the way Headline is behind me in the U.K.

One or more of the above is almost certain to happen eventually.

I am held back, now, only by the *perceptions* of people in the major U.S. publishing firms. Many have publicly acknowledged that I am a "star" in Great Britain. They assume, however, that I can't be a star in America.

Why?

They seem to think (I've heard it with my own ears) that I'm successful "over there" because humans who reside in such areas as England, Ireland, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, etc. are *different*.

Actually, the difference is not in the tastes of the readers, it's in the attitudes of the publishers.

Over there, they stuck with me.

Here, time and time again, they've dropped me like a Wallenda.

I expect the situation to change, someday. When it does change, when a publisher gives me publicity and some loyalty, my books will sell very well indeed. Not just my new novels, but my backlist. At this point, I own the U.S. rights to all my adult novels. That's more than twenty-five, so far. If handled properly, the backlist will be a gold mine for whatever publisher manages to get it.

In the meantime, I'm fine and dandy with the way things are.

Even without sales in the U.S., I'm well off.

I have no problem with waiting. My books "won't go away.

They're like parcels of real estate. I'm holding them for the right buyer.

I do, however, feel bad for my American fans. In order to obtain my books, they have to hunt out a British contact, then pay through the nose. Most of the current Headline paperbacks go for \$15 to \$20 in this country. The hardbounds are usually about \$40. That's a lot more money than my fans "would need to pay if my books were published in the U.S. And the British hardbounds skyrocket in price as soon as they go out of print.

Many of my fans can't find all of my books.

If they can find them, they can't always afford them.

I don't like that.

But I salute them for their devotion and persistence.

Someday, all my books will be in print in this country.

In the immortal words of William Goldman, "Until that time, Eustis..."

Books

THE CELLAR (Warner Books, 1980) Sold at least 250,000 copies in the U.S. at that time, four weeks on B. Dalton bestseller list. Published by NEL in England, reprinted by Paperjacks in 1987 and published in Italy, France and Spain, Germany, Bulgaria, and Lithuania (in Russian). Reprinted in June, 1989 in England by Star. Reprinted in March, 1990 by Headline. Bought by Turkey and Japan 1995. Limited edition hardbound published in December, 1997 by C.D. Publications.

THE WOODS ARE DARK (Warner Books, 1981) Also published in England (NEL) and France. A new, fully revised edition was printed by Headline, March, 1991. Purchased for publication in Italy, 1991; Hungary, 1993; Spain, 1994; Russia, 1994; Bulgaria, 1995.

OUT ARE THE LIGHTS (Warner Books, 1982) Also published in England (NEL) and France. Reprinted by Headline with short stories added, hardbound, June, 1993. Approx. 9,000 hardbound copies to Book Club Associates. Purchased for publication in Spain, 1994; Russia in 1994; Hungary in 1995.

NIGHT SHOW (New English Library, 1984) U.S. publication by Tor, 1986. Also published in France. Reissued by NEL in 1992. Bought by Headline, 1993. Also purchased for publication in Lithuania (in Russian), 1994; Bulgaria, 1995.

BEWARE! (New English Library, 1985) Reprinted by Paperjacks in 1987. Also published in France. Reprinted in 1991 by NEL. Hardbound limited edition published by Kinnel, 1992. Reissued in 1992 by NEL. Bought by Headline, 1993. Bought for publication in Russia, 1994; Taiwan for Chinese (Mandarin Traditional script) language, 1995; Bulgaria, 1995.

ALLHALLOW'S EVE (New English Library, 1985) Reprinted by NEL in 1991. Hardbound limited edition published by Kinnel, 1992. Reissued in 1992 by NEL. Bought by Headline, 1993.

THE BEAST HOUSE (New English Library, 1986) (Sequel to *THE CELLAR*) Reprinted by Paperjacks in 1987. Also published in France and Bulgaria. Reissued in 1992 by NEL. Sold to Headline, 1993. Bought by Japan, 1995.

TREAD SOFTLY (W.H. Allen hardcover, 1987) under Richard Kelly pseudonym. U.S. publication by Tor, 1987, as Richard Laymon book. Star paperback in England, 1988. Published as Richard Laymon book, *DARK MOUNTAIN*, by Headline in 1992. *DARK MOUNTAIN* sold to Spain, 1992; Lithuania, 1994.

FLESH (W.H. Allen hardcover, 1987) U.S. publication by Tor, 1988. Paperback published in England by Star. This book was named Best Horror Novel of 1988 by *Science Fiction Chronicle* and was nominated by the Horror Writers of America for a Bram Stoker Award. Reprinted March, 1990 by Headline. Sold to Turkey, 1991; Poland, 1992; Lithuania (Russian), 1994; Japan, 1995; Bulgaria, 1995.

MIDNIGHT'S LAIR (W.H. Allen hardcover, 1988) under Richard Kelly pseudonym. Picked up by Smiths/Doubleday Book Club in England. Published by Headline 1992 as Richard Laymon book. Picked up by Book Club Associates. Large print edition by Magna Large Print Books (England). Purchased in US by Tom Dunne for St. Martin's and published in February, 1993. Doubleday Book Club selection in U.S., 1993. Paperback rights to Zebra, 1993. Sold to Russia, 1994.

RESURRECTION DREAMS (W.H. Allen hardcover, 1988) Star paperback in England published in 1989. U.S. publication by New American Library (Onyx) in 1989. Reprinted by Headline, 1990. Sold to Turkey, 1991; Denmark, 1992; Spain, 1994; Russia, 1997.

FUNLAND (W.H. Allen hardcover, 1989) Published in paperback in U.S. by New American Library (Onyx), 1990. Sold to Germany, 1990; Italy, 1990. English paperback published in 1990 by Headline. Nominated by Horror Writers of America for the Bram Stoker Award, 1990. Purchased for publication in Russia, 1994; Hungary, 1995; Turkey, 1995.

THE STAKE (Headline, 1990) Headline published simultaneous hardcover and trade (C-format) paperback editions, followed by mass market paperback edition in 1991. U.S. hardbound edition published by Thomas Dunne, St. Martin's Press in June, 1991. Optioned by Tri-Star (New World) TV and okayed for development in January, 1992. Sold to Italy, 1992; Spain, 1992. Paperback rights to Zebra, 1993. Sold to Russia, 1994. Published by Zebra in May, 1995.

ALARMS (Mark Ziesing, 1992) Mark Ziesing published a signed, slip-cased edition limited to 400 numbered copies, and a larger trade edition. *ALARUMS* (using my original title) was published by Headline in June, 1993 in simultaneous hardcover and trade paperback editions. Book Club Associates, 10,000 copies, 1993. Sold to Italy, 1993. Headline mass market paperback, 1994.

ONE RAINY NIGHT (Headline, 1990) Headline did simultaneous hardback and trade paperback editions in March, 1991. Selection of Book Club Associates, with subsequent hardbound book club printings. Sold to Italy, 1991; Spain, 1992; Lithuania (in Russian), 1994; Belgium; 1997.

DARKNESS, TELL US (Headline, 1991) Headline published simultaneous hardcover and trade paperback editions in 1991 and the mass market paperback edition later in 1991. Purchased for publication in Russia, 1997.

BLOOD GAMES (Headline, 1992) Headline published hardbound edition in March, 1992. Selected as February, 1992 main selection of the Book Club Associates with initial hardbound printing of 18,000 for book club. Headline full-page ad was on cover of December 6, 1991 issue of *The Bookseller*. Headline mass market paperback edition, 1992.

A GOOD, SECRET PLACE (Deadline Press, 1993) Limited edition hardbound, illustrated by Larry Mori, introduction by Ed Gorman, collection of short stories published in February, 1993. Deluxe first edition limited to 574 individually signed and numbered copies and 26 individually signed and lettered copies. Nominated for Brain Stoker award, 1994.

SAVAGE (Headline, 1993) Headline published simultaneous hardcover and trade paperback edition, 1993- Book Club Associates made initial order for 8,000 copies. Purchased by Tom Dunne for St. Martin's Press, 1993. Headline mass market paperback, 1993. Sold to Germany, 1994; Hungary, 1997.

ENDLESS NIGHT (Headline, 1993) Headline published the hardbound in September, 1993. Book Club Associates, 12,000 copies. Headline paperback in June, 1994. Sold to Italy, 1994; Russia, 1997; Spain, 1997.

IN THE DARK (Headline, 1994) Headline published the hardbound in June, 1994, the mass market paperback later in 1994. Sold to Taiwan, 1995; Russia, 1997.

QUAKE (Headline, 1995) Headline published the hardbound in January, 1995, the mass market paperback later in 1995. Main selection, Book Club Associates, World Book Club and two others, 24,000 copy book club order. Published hardbound in U.S. Thomas Dunne, St. Martin's Press, June, 1995. Published in France, 1995.

ISLAND (Headline, 1995) Headline published the hardbound in July, 1995, the mass market paperback in 1996. Book Club Associates, 23,000 copy initial book club order. Sold to Russia, 1997.

BODY RIDES (Headline, 1996) Headline published the hardbound in February, 1996, the mass market paperback later in 1996. Main selection, World Book Club and Mystery and Thriller Book Club, 42,000 copies.

BITE (Headline, 1996) Headline published the hardbound in September, 1996. It was a book club selection as half of a double-book with my short fiction collection, *FIENDS*. The Headline mass market paperback edition of *BITE* was published in 1997.

FIENDS (Headline, 1997) Headline published the hardbound edition of *FIENDS* (a collection of short fiction anchored by the title novelette) in January, 1997. Book club selection, double-book with my novel, *BITE*.

AFTER MIDNIGHT (Headline, 1997) Book club selection, 9,000 copy first printing. Headline mass market paperback edition to be published in 1998.

A WRITER'S TALE (Deadline Press, 1998) Limited edition hardbound, non-fiction collection published in October, 1998. Deluxe first edition limited to 500 individually

signed and numbered copies and 26 individually signed and lettered copies.

Miscellaneous Other Book Publications

YOUR SECRET ADMIRER as Carl Laymon (Scholastic, 1980) Young adult romantic suspense novel. Also published in Germany.

NIGHTMARE LAKE as Carl Laymon (Dell, 1983) Young adult horror novel published as part of the "Twilight" series.

THE LAWMEN as Lee Davis Willoughby (Dell, 1983) Adult western historical novel as part of "The Making of America" series.

A STRANGER'S ARMS as Carla Laymon (Capital/Oehler Books, Blue Heron Press, 1984) Also published in Germany.

Screenplays

"The Hunted," in *SCREAMPLAYS* (Del Rey, 1997) Edited by Richard Chizmar. Contains screenplay based on my short story, "The Hunted." Portion published on-line on barnesandnoble.com.

Short Stories

(Includes only short fiction published in a professional, paying markets. All Pitman publications were written specifically for young adults with reading difficulties, but include some of my better horror and mystery stories.)

1. "Desert Pickup" a "Department of First Stories" piece published in *ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE*, November, 1970. Translated into Swedish and published in Stockholm periodical, 1970. Broadcast by radio in Berlin, Germany, 1981. Reprinted in my collection by Deadline Press, *A GOOD, SECRET PLACE*, 1993. Reprinted, *CEMETERY DANCE*, Spring, 1994. Reprinted in my collection by Headline, *FIENDS*, January, 1997. To be published in *THE BEST OF CEMETERY DANCE*, 1998. To be reprinted in *100 MENACING LITTLE MURDER STORIES*, ed. by Stefan Dziemianowicz, Robert Weinberg, and Martin H. Greenberg, published by Barnes & Noble, 1998.

2. "Roadside Pickup" *EQMM*, December, 1974. Translated into Dutch (Belgium?) for periodical, 1976. Reprinted in *GSP(A GOOD, SECRET PLACE*, 1993). Bought for reprint in *100 TINY LITTLE TERROR TALES*, Ed. Robert Weinberg, Stefan Dziemianowicz, and Martin Greenberg, 1996.

3. "Oscar's Audition" pseudonym Dick Kelly. Published in *THE EXECUTIONER MYSTERY MAGAZINE*, June, 1975. Reprinted in *GSP*, 1993.

4. "Paying Joe Back" *EQMM*, September, 1975. Reprinted in *MASTERS OF SUSPENSE*, ed. by Ellery Queen and Eleanor Sullivan, 1992. Reprinted in *GSP*, 1993.

5. "Out of the Woods" *EQMM*, December, 1975. Reprinted in *GSP*, 1993. Reprinted in *FIENDS*, 1997. Bought for reprint in *100 TWISTED TALES OF TORMENT*, ed. Weinberg, Dziemianowicz & Greenberg, 1997.
6. "A Good Cigar is a Smoke" *EQMM*, February, 1976. Reprinted in *GSP*, 1993.
7. "The Direct Approach" *ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE*, January, 1977. Reprinted in *GSP*, 1993.
8. "The Champion" *CAVALIER*, October, 1978. Reprinted in anthology, *MODERN MASTERS OF HORROR*, ed. by Frank Coffey, published by Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1981. Paperback reprints by Ace, 1982 and Berkeley, 1988. Reprinted in *GSP*, 1993. To be reprinted in *100 FIENDISH LITTLE FRIGHTMARES*, ed. by Dziemianowicz, Weinberg and Greenberg, published by Barnes & Noble.
9. "Stiff Intruders" *MIKE SHAYNE'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE*, March, 1980. Reprinted in *GSP*, 1993. Reprinted in *FIENDS*, 1997.
10. "Barney's Bigfoot Museum" *CREATURE*, ed. by Bill Pronzini, Arbor House, 1981. Reprinted in *GSP*, 1993.
11. "Blarney" *MSMM*, September, 1981. Reprinted in *GSP*, 1993.
12. "Spooked" *MSMM*, October, 1981, Reprinted in *GSP*, 1993.
13. "The Grab" *GALLERY*, January, 1982. Reprinted in the anthology, *THE YEAR'S BEST HORROR STORIES: SERIES XI*, ed. by Karl Edward Wagner, published by DAW, 1983. Reprinted in *100 HAIR-RAISING LITTLE HORROR STORIES*, ed. by Al Sarrantonio and Martin H. Greenberg, Marboro Books, 1993. Reprinted in *GSP*, 1993. Performed by the New Hampshire Radio Theater group on Halloween, 1997. To be reprinted in 8th grade Australian textbook, *ENGLISH MAGIC 2*, published by Addison Wesley Longman. *FASTBACK MYSTERIES* — Pitman Learning, 1984.
14. "Shootout at Joe's" Reprinted in anthology, *DESCENDANTS OF EVE*, Lake Books, 1989.
15. "The Intruder" Reprinted in anthology, *AFTER MIDNIGHT*, Lake Books, 1989.
16. "Cardiac Arrest"
17. "Dawson's City" *FASTBACK SPORTS* — Pitman Learning, 1985.
18. "Marathon" *FASTBACK SPY* — Pitman Learning, 1985.

19. "The Last Hand"
20. "The Trap" Reprinted in anthology, *DESCENDANTS OF EVE*, Lake Books, 1989.
21. "The Cobra" Reprinted in anthology, *CLAWS AND FEATHERS*, Lake Books, 1989. FASTBACK HORROR — Pitman Learning, 1985.
22. "Live Bait"
23. "The Lonely One" Reprinted in anthology, *DESCENDANTS OF EVE*, Lake Books, 1989.
24. "The Caller"
25. "Guts"
26. "Night Games" Reprinted in anthology, *AFTER MIDNIGHT*, Lake Books, 1989.
27. "Night Ride" *BESTSELLERMAGAZINE* — Pitman Learning, 1985.
28. "Cut" Issue #23
29. "Finders Keepers" Issue #26
30. "Eats" *MSMM*, July, 1985. Reprinted in anthology, *THE SECOND BLACK LIZARD ANTHOLOGY OF CRIME*, ed. by Ed Gorman and Martin Greenberg, 1988. Reprinted as cartoon in *THE BANK STREET BOOK OF MYSTERY*, a Byron Preiss Book published by Pocket Books in 1989. Reprinted in *GSP*, 1993. Reprinted in *FIENDS*, 1997. FASTBACK CRIME AND DETECTION — David S. Lake, 1986.
31. "Beginner's Luck" DOUBLE FASTBACK — David S. Lake, 1986. *SOS SERIES (STRANGE OCCURRENCE SQUAD)*
32. "The Night Creature"
33. "The Beast"
34. "The Return"
35. "Thin Air" DOUBLE FASTBACK HORROR — David S. Lake, 1987.
36. "Halloween Hunt" Reprinted in *CHAMBER OF HORRORS*, Fearon Education, 1991.

37. "The Bleeder" *NEW BLOOD*, Winter, 1989. Reprinted in *GSP*, 1993. Reprinted in *FIENDS*, 1997.
38. "Mess Hall" *BOOK OF THE DEAD*, ed. by John Skipp & Craig Spector, Ziesing and Bantam editions 1989. Reprinted in *OUT ARE THE LIGHTS*, Headline, 1993.
39. "The Hunt" *STALKERS*, ed. by Ed Gorman & Martin Greenberg, Dark Harvest edition, 1989, New American Library trade paperback edition, 1990, mass market by Roc, 1992. Audio tape by Dove Audio, read by Arte Johnson. Reprinted in *FIENDS*, 1997.
40. "Dinker's Pond" *RAZORED SADDLES*, ed. by Joe Lansdale, Dark Harvest edition, 1989, Avon edition, 1990. Reprinted in *OUT ARE THE LIGHTS*, Headline, 1993. *NIGHT VISIONS* 7, ed. by Stanley Wiater, Dark Harvest edition, 1989.
41. "Mop Up" (novella).
42. "Wishbone"
43. "Bad News" Reprinted in anthology, *BEST NEW HORROR*, ed. by Stephen Jones and Ramsey Campbell, published in England by Robinson Publishing, in U.S. by Carroll & Graff, 1991. Reprinted in *OUT ARE THE LIGHTS*, Headline, 1993.
44. "Madman Stan" Reprinted in *OUT ARE THE LIGHTS*, Headline, 1993.
45. "The Tub" *HOTTER BLOOD*, ed. by Jeff Gelb and Michael Garrett, published by Pocket Books, 1991. Numerous foreign reprints. Reprinted in *OUT ARE THE LIGHTS*, Headline, 1993. Also reprinted in *TEN TALES*, a signed and limited edition by James Cahill Publishing, 1994.
46. "Special" *UNDER THE FANG*, ed. by Robert R. McCammon, Pocket Books edition and Borderlands special hardbound edition, 1991. Graphic tale, *SYSTEM SHOCK*, Tuscany Press, 1993. Reprinted in *FIENDS*, 1997.
47. "Saving Grace" *COLD BLOOD*, ed. by Richard Chizmar, Ziesing edition, 1991.
48. "Slit" published in the anthology, *PREDATORS*, ed. by Ed Gorman and Martin Greenberg, Roc, 1993. Reprinted in *FIENDS*, 1997.
49. "Invitation to Murder" published in the anthology, *INVITATION TO MURDER* ed. by Ed Gorman and Martin Greenberg, Dark Harvest, 1991. Diamond, 1993.

50. "I'm Not a Criminal" published in the anthology, *AFTER THE DARKNESS*, ed. by Stanley Wiater, Maclay, 1993. Belgium (French language) translation published in *PHENIX*, 1997.
51. "Good Vibrations" to be published in the anthology, *STALKERS #3*, ed. by Ed Gorman and Martin Greenberg. (Written in 199D Published in *NIGHT SCREAMS*, New American Library, Roc, 1996
A GOOD, SECRET PLACE, a collection of my stories published in 1992 by Deadline Press. Introduction by Ed Gorman, artwork by Larry Mori. Contained fifteen old stories plus original stories. Shortlisted (finalist) for Bram Stoker Award of HWA for best collection.
52. "The Good Deed" (novella).
53. "Joyce" Reprinted in *FIENDS*, 1997.
54. "Stickman"
55. "The Mask" Reprinted in *FIENDS*, 1997.
56. "A Good, Secret Place" Novella. Reprinted in *FIENDS*, 1997.
57. "Phil the Vampire," in the anthology, *VAMPIRE DETECTIVES*, ed. by Ed Gorman and Martin Greenberg, published by DAW Books, 1995.
58. "The Fur Coat," in the anthology, *THE EARTH STRIKES BACK*, ed. by Richard Chizmar, published by Ziesing, 1994.
59. "Dracuson's Driver," in the anthology, *DRACULA, PRINCE OF DARKNESS*, ed. by Ed Gorman and Martin Greenberg, published by DAW in 1992.
60. "Kitty Litter," in the anthology, *CAT CRIMES II*, ed. by Ed Gorman and Martin Greenberg, published by Donald I. Fine in 1992. Reprinted in *FIENDS*, 1997.
61. "The Maiden," in the anthology, *DARK LOVE*, ed. by Nancy Collins & Edward Kramer, published by New American Library, Roc, 1995.
62. "First Date," in the anthology, *RAZOR KISS*, ed. by Poppy Z. Brite, to be published by Harper Collins.
63. "Fiends," novelette, original publication in *FIENDS* collection, published by Headline, January, 1997.
64. "Herman," in *CEMETERY DANCE*, Fall, 1996.

65. "The Job," in *THE UNEXPLAINED*, ed. by Peter Haining, to be published by Orion in U.K., 1998.

Interviews

MYSTERY SCENE, November, 1986 pp. 29-31 "20 Questions With Richard Laymon"
Written interview conducted by Ed Gorman.

FEAR, Number 14, February, 1990 pp. 28-29
Profile in this British magazine is based on extensive written interview by David Whitehead.

AFRAID, Vol. 1, No. 5, March, 1990 pp. 2-4
Interview done verbally, face to face (and taped) by Mike Baker.

FANGORIA, #92, May, 1990 pp. 14-17 "Horror in Print: Richard Laymon"
Major Article/Interview by Stanley Wiater, based on telephone conversation.

MYSTERY SCENE, Number 48, July/August, 1995 p. 22
"The *MYSTERY SCENE* Interview with Author Richard Laymon"
By Ed Gorman.

CEMETERY DANCE, Fall, 1996, Volume Seven, Issue Three p. 44.
"A Conversation with Richard Laymon."
Interview conducted via telephone by Stanley Wiater.

EPITAPH, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1997 pp. 22-26.
"Out of The Cellar: An Interview with Richard Laymon"
By Vince Fahey.

Articles

MYSTERY SCENE, Number 11, 1987 pp. 36-38 "Down 'n' Dirty" By Richard Laymon

Wherein I define horror, defend myself against Charles Grant, and define his kind of dark fantasy as "exercises in scenery."

Written partly in response to Grant's "It Wasn't a Half-Bad Year" in *Amazing Stories*, volume 62, number 3, September, 1987 p. 61. In 'which he "wrote, "It's intimately associated, incorrectly, with horror, and it seems that Richard Laymon is one of those leading the pack. *Night Show*, for instance, isn't anything else but a slasher film in print, but if you like that sort of thing, it's better than his earlier books. Which is rather like saying a shattered leg is somewhat more tolerable than a sharp stick in the eye."

MYSTERY SCENE, Number 13, 1987—pp. 42-42 "Down 'n' Dirty—Part II" By Richard

Laymon. Wherein I trash writers who trash writers.

MYSTERY SCENE, Number 16, 1987—pp. 45-46

"Down 'n' Dirty—Part III—The Good, The Bad & the Ugly"

By Richard Laymon

Wherein I explore the horrifying world of copy editors—and give details of the slaughter of *The Woods Are Dark*.

Brian Garfield wrote of this article in *Mystery Scene*, Sept.-Oct. 1988, p. 5—refers to "Dick Laymen's painfully amusing piece on the horrors of copy editors...in a properly outraged column."

SUDDEN FEAR: THE HORROR AND DARK SUSPENSE FICTION OF DEAN R. KOONTZ, ed. by Bill Munster, Starmont House, 1988 pp. 66-71

"In the Midst of Life"

By Richard Laymon

An essay in which I delve into the "make the best of life while you've got it" themes in several of Dean's novels.

FRIENDS OF CANFIELD/CRESCENT HEIGHTS, volume 1, number 2, June, 1989 p.5

"Bill Steel: The Book Man of Crescent Heights" By Richard Laymon and Ann Laymon

Wherein my wife and I profile and praise a fine English teacher at my child's elementary school.

MYSTERY SCENE, Number 21, May/June, 1989 pp. 83 "Why I Wrote This Book:

RESSURECTIONDREAMS' By Richard Laymon

I tell some behind-the-scenes stuff about *Resurrection Dreams* in particular and necrophilia in general.

MYSTERY SCENE, Number 24, January, 1990 pp. 97 "Funland: Where Truth Meets

Fiction and the Fan Gets Hit." By Richard Laymon

I tell the story of the true origins of *Funland*, and how I found out about trolls.

Reprinted in this book.

MYSTERY SCENE, Number 26, June, 1990 pp. 27-30 "Not Necessarily The Gospel" By Richard Laymon

In which I assail various "gospel" statements by editors and agents, and rail against the dangers of writing proposals instead of books.

MYSTERY SCENE, Issue 30, July/August, 1991 p. 95-96

"The Stake"

By Richard Laymon

In the Horror New Books section, I recount my adventures in ghost towns and tell all

about *The Stake*.

Reprinted in this book.

AFRAID, Number 11, April, 1993 p.11-12

"The Lizzie Borden Syndrome—or, Vicious Hacks With a Lust For Chopping Other People's Wood, Fiction, and Necks"

By Richard Laymon.

Wherein I attack critics in general, and a few in particular.

Reprinted in this book.

THE WORK OF GARY BRANDNER:

an Annotated Bibliography & Guide

by Martine Wood, Borgo Press, 1995 pp. 11-12

I wrote the forward, a two-page piece called, "Gary Brander: 'Oh, Yeah?'"

MURMUROUS HAUNTS: THE SELECTED WORKS OF BENTLEYLITTLE Dark Regions Press, 1997 pp. 7-8.

I wrote an introduction for this small press collection of Bentley's short fiction. It is called, "Bentley Little: A Modest Introduction."

Miscellaneous

FANGORIA, #15, October, 1981, p. 17. This issue contains a full-page ad for *The Woods Are Dark* that I created with the help of my friend, Carol Law. I personally paid all expenses for the creation and publication of the ad.

DARK THOUGHTS ON WRITING: ADVICE AND COMMENTARY FROM FIFTY MASTERS OF FEAR AND SUSPENSE, Underwood Books, 1997. This book by Stanley Wiater is a compilation of quotes he has gathered during numerous interviews, including several with me. My "words of wisdom" appear fairly regularly throughout the volume.

Mom, Dad, Bob and
me in the '50s



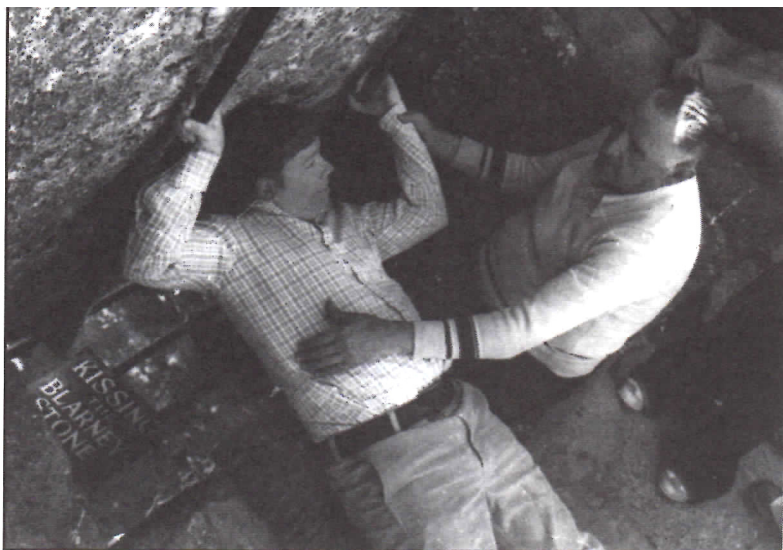
Me at Tiburon house circa 1964



Pike and I in the
mountains circa 1964



Easter 1976—me,
Mom, Bob, and Dad at
the Burlingame house



About to kiss the
Blarney Stone,
Ireland 1978

Ann and I at the
Edgar awards in
New York City, 1980

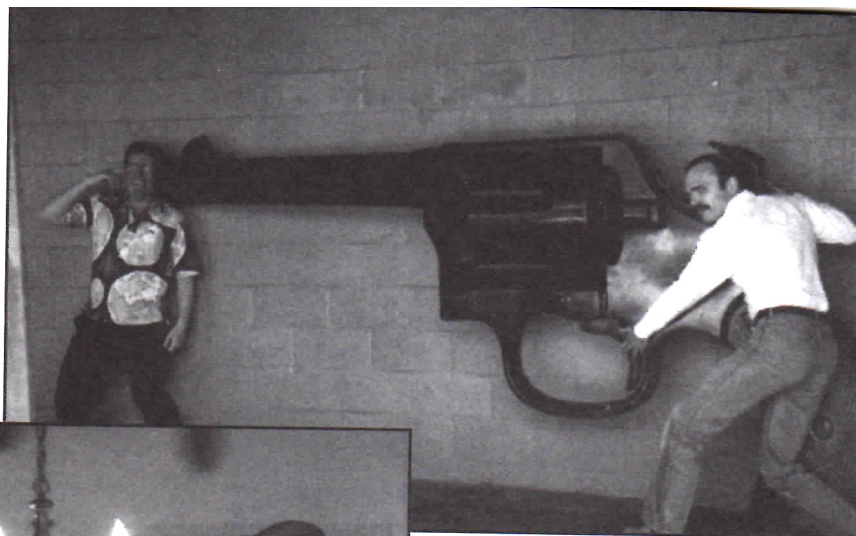
New Year's Eve 1979
Kelly promoting my first book



Gary Brandner and I
boozing it up at the
old swimming hole,
1981



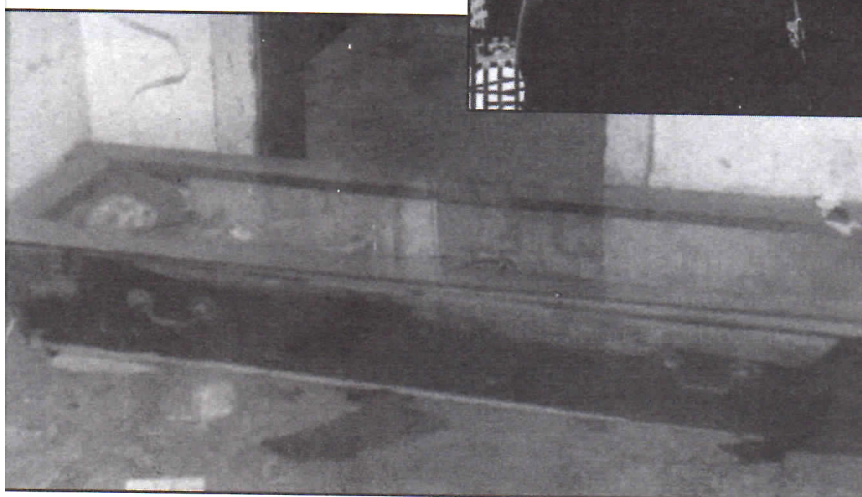
Dean Koonitz trying
to wipe out the
competition,
Universal Studios
1987



I take Ann out the hard way,
Halloween 1987



Dean Gerda, me and Ann at Gary
Brandner's wedding, 1988

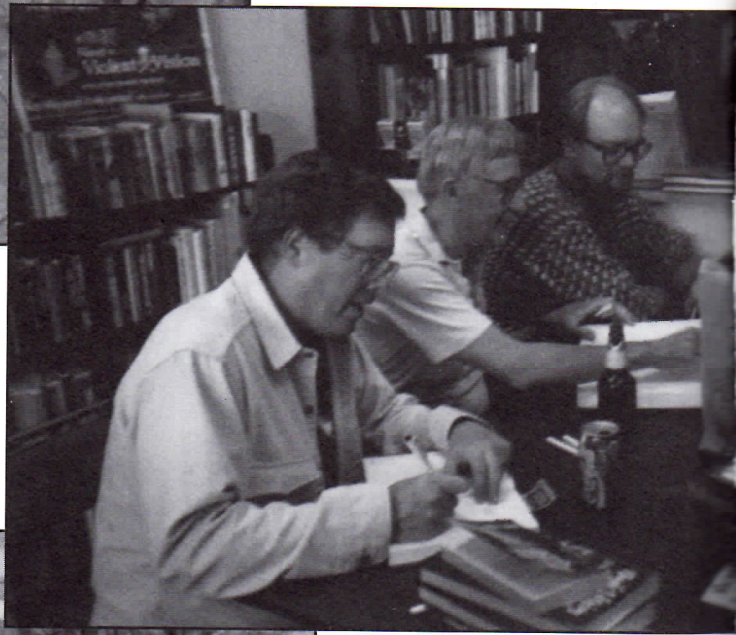


The coffin inside
the bottle house,
Rhyolite 1988



Raulo De Laraua, tearing
vampires, desecrates the
corpse with a stake, 1988

My first book signing
at Don Cannon's store
with Gary Brandner and Tom Elliot, 198



Me, Peter Infantino,
Larry Mori, and John
Scoleri hang out in
front of Cobblestone
Books looking for
trouble, 1993

