

# Bedbugs



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Rick Hautala

Illustrated by  
Glenn Chadbourne

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*To every editor who ever bought a story or novel of mine.  
You are the vineyard owners...  
I am the vineyard worker...  
and it is now late in the day....*



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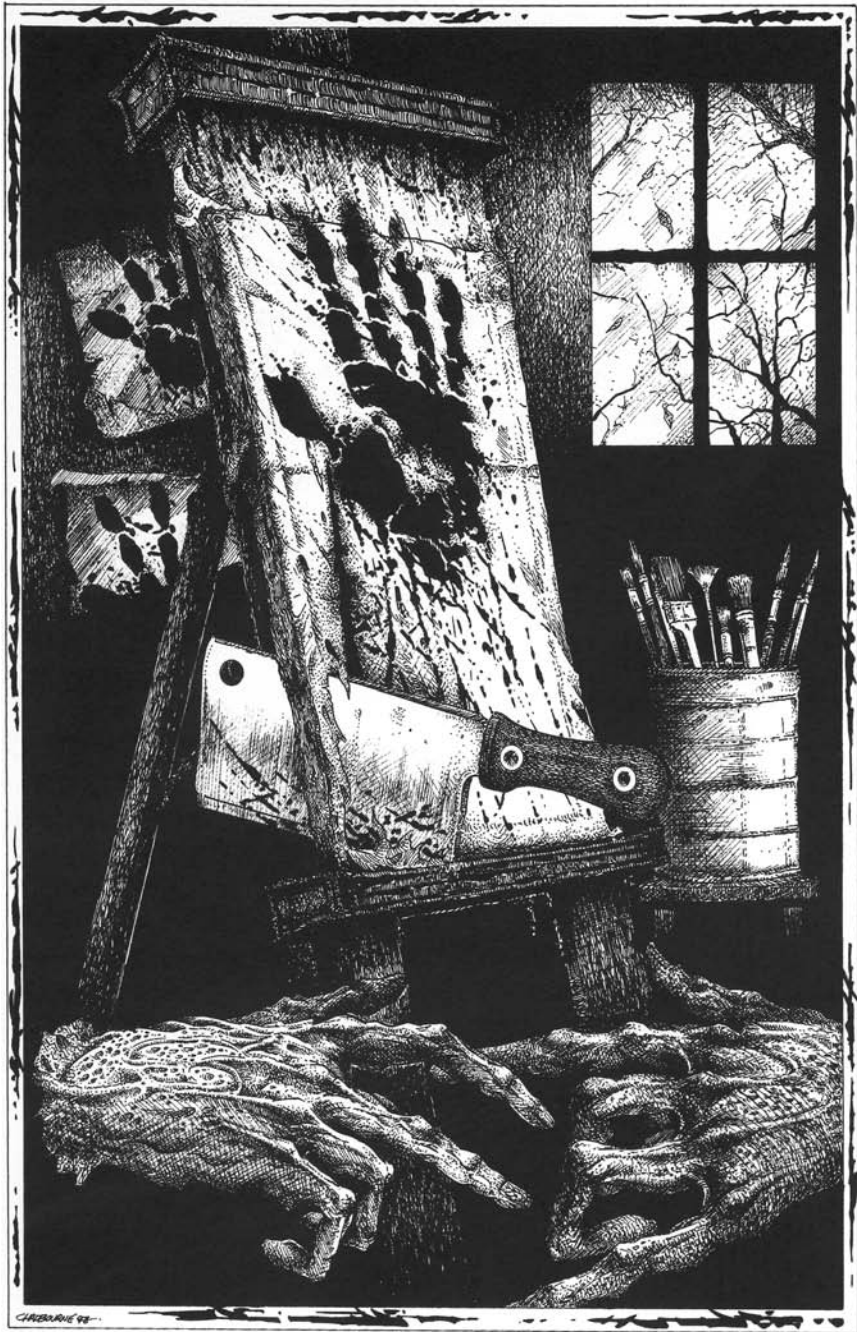
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## THE BACK OF MY HANDS

The back of my hands started looking like a man's back when I was—oh, maybe ten or eleven years old.

I remember how fascinated I was by the curling, black hairs I saw sprouting there; how amazed I was when I flexed and unflexed my hands, and watched the twitching blue lines of veins, the knitting needle-thin tendons, and the bony knobs of cartilage and knuckle. Sometimes, I used to constrict the flow of blood to my arms—you know, like a junkie—to make the veins inflate until they fairly bulged through the skin. The bigger they got, the more “manly” I thought my arms and hands looked.

It might seem laughable now, but I still believe hands are a God-given miracle. They let us touch and manipulate the world outside of ourselves. Sure, scientists say that vision is the only sense where the nerve connects directly to the brain, but hands are the only things that let us reach out, to touch and explore the world. They allow us to *feel* love and to create what we know and feel, both internally and externally.

They're our only *real* solid connection to what's “out there.”

Our other senses—sight, sound, taste, and smell—can all deceive us. They trick us into thinking we're experiencing something that might not really be there.