

**MIDNIGHT
PREMIERE**

MIDNIGHT PREMIERE

EDITED BY
TOM PICCIRILLI



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First Edition

*For my father,
Edward William Piccirilli
who started me down the dark road
and led me safely home*

I'm indebted to all the contributors, but special thanks go to: Del Howison, for mentioning the project to so many fine authors in its early stages; Patrick Lussier, for his enthusiasm and friendship; Mick Garris, for taking time out of an extraordinarily busy schedule to lend his hand to the book; and Gerard Houarner, my French goombah.

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INTRODUCTION

*When You Crawl Under the Covers to Get Away from the Monsters
Only to Find Yourself Among Them*

Unlike many fans of horror film who can't quite pinpoint when their love of these movies began, I can do so easily: 1971, the year before my Dad died.

I know, it's a downer of an opening to an introduction for what has turned out to be a very fun book, but bear the burden with me for a couple of pages here.

The man had been growing sicker for a while, and I suppose he wanted to impart to me something that he enjoyed, something that we could share, and that I would take with me throughout the rest of my life even after he was gone. So in one 12-month period—what might be well-defined as a hell of a *frantic* year—he took me out to the theaters as often as his ill health allowed, and while we were inside we spent plenty of time watching the old *Creature Features* and *Chiller Theater* shows. The Saturday afternoon matinees which were almost always horror flicks.

I vividly recall watching with him *Tales from the Crypt* (Joan Collins battling Santa, as if I wasn't confused enough about what was real, mythic, and cultural white lies), *War of the Gargantuas* (what the hell is Riff from *West Side Story* doing with black hair in Japan?), *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*, *The Andromeda Strain*, *House of Wax*, *Black Sunday*, *Mr. Sardonicus*, and the one that may have really sent my wheels spinning out of control more than the rest—Roger Corman's *The Undead* (time travel, witches, hypnosis, the devil, and Billy Barty...? Sweet Mother Mary on a pogo stick!)

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You have to understand the whole scene of our home life to really get the wide-screen effect.

You've got little 6-year-old Tommy, who, by the way, doesn't even know his daddy's sick, you've got his Mom who works nights, you've got his older brother who's 18 and always out of the house catching the tale end of the hippie movement before it turns into the disco decade, and you've got his older sister who is, back then, known as retarded, and is now in our PC age called mentally disabled.

The point being, it's a house full of stories and whispers and shadows already.

And the boogeyman hangs around this house a lot, though Tommy hasn't really noticed him much. But everybody else has, as Dad becomes more ill and the biopsy scars lengthen and broaden across his throat. The family has decided that Tommy is too young to handle this ordeal, so it's best that they keep his febrile mind occupied, and that nobody tells him shit.

Now, not everybody has such a dramatic over-the-top *sturm und drang* tale to tell about how they were led into the world of horror flicks, but there's mine.

As much as I loved what was going on up there on the screen, I learned an even greater respect for it when I realized that all those giant Japanese monsters and people with their faces getting eaten by insects and the lady looking into the binoculars and having her eyes poked out were actually—"Ob Jesus Christ, get Dr. Freud on Line 1 now! Now!"—a gift of love from my departed Dad.

So, with that auspicious beginning, I didn't even need the fact that horror films can be, by turns, bizarre, intriguing, evocative, thoughtful, primal, taboo, gut-wrenching, and downright fun.

Think about it. A kid with his mentally disabled sister on the couch to one side, his dying father on the other, the cops occasionally calling to discuss how the brother is in the can for some anti-social activity or another, and the television showing *Attack of the Killer Crabs* and *The Amazing Colossal Man*.

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Listen up, kiddies, there's no way you're getting out of that house being an accountant or a dentist, you dig? You're either going to be dispatched to the rubber room, go save the manatees, or become a horror writer.

Now, none of that was meant to say that you had to either have childhood trauma or a deep need to become a writer in order to enjoy horror movies. But I think a key word for many of us is probably *escape*.

Not the kind of escapist feel-good you get from a romantic comedy or a feel-good mook-triumphs-over-overwhelming-odds film, but the escape that puts us in the hot seat for a couple of hours, chills our blood, ups our heart-rates, and then drops us back safely in our seats at the end—except for the goblins of our imagination repeating into our nightmares, “What if something like that really DID happen to you one day? What if the movie somehow became real?”

What you'll find here in *Midnight Premiere* is the work of twenty-one other authors who've taken up that question and put themselves to work on it. These are the folks who've turned their passion for horror film and literature into life choices or professions. You'll see here how some of them have worked in film—as screenwriters, actors, and directors—and put their particular experiences to good use in showing you the dark underside of the Hollywood dream and the LaLa Land facade.

The opening credits are about to roll.

Prepare yourself for the shocking and the illuminating, the strange and the fanciful...the real and the lies of celluloid that might mean more to you than the truth.

And remember—

All the many screaming folks they torment up on the big screen and across these pages...?

The leering mad smiles, yowling creatures, and the brandishing of sharp weapons...?

All the havoc and mayhem and anguish and horrors...?

They do it because they *love you*.

GARY A. BRAUNBECK has probably watched (and re-watched) more movies in his efforts to avoid an active social life than is arguably healthy. Author of nearly 200 published stories, as well as 6 novels and 8 collections, he was the recipient of the 2003 Bram Stoker Award for his short story "Duty." He currently lives in Columbus, Ohio, where no one has heard of him. You can visit him on the Web at: www.garybraunbeck.com.

ONLOOKERS

Gary A. Braunbeck

“...all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world have not any subsistence without a mind—that their being is to be perceived or known.”

—George Berkeley (1685 – 1753)

“It is a simple equation: take me, subtract film, and the solution is zero.”

—Akira Kurosawa

They are filming something on the street, in front of our house, very close to the front door.

Even though he can't see them when he pulls up his blinds or pushes aside one of the curtains, my six-year-old son Brian senses that someone is watching. After dismissing his claims as “...an overactive imagination,” Dianne, my wife, finally admitted to feeling the same way, though with the nervous, slightly embarrassed, “Maybe-I'm-Just-Full-Of-Shit-Today” laugh she always uses whenever she can't put her finger on what's bothering her. So far neither of them have directly asked me what I think, how I feel, do I believe them or not.