

# *The Marsh Dispatches And Other Weirdness*

**Bob McGough**

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# Contents

Introduction	1
1. The Marsh Dispatches: Sharks and Armadillos	3
2. The Marsh Dispatches: Selling Bodies	6
3. The Marsh Dispatches: The King	8
4. The Marsh Dispatches: On The Creation of Jubal County	10
5. The Marsh Dispatches: Witches, Wizards, and Warlocks	12
6. The Marsh Dispatches: Jubal County Ain't The South	14
7. The Marsh Dispatches: Gateways	16
8. The Marsh Dispatches: I Like Critters	19
9. The Marsh Dispatches: The Richmond Family	21
10. The Marsh Dispatches: Devils and Demons	23
11. The Marsh Dispatches: Tricks	25

12. The Marsh Dispatches: Rutherford	28
13. Notes from the Secret Classes of Professor Abraham Keisler	30
14. Notes from the Secret Classes of Professor Abraham Keisler	33
15. Notes from the Secret Classes of Professor Abraham Keisler	35
16. Holidays in Jubal County	37
17. Holidays in Jubal County	39
18. Holidays in Jubal County	41
19. Wait Til Horace Comes	44
About the author	48

# *Introduction*

If you are getting this, it probably means I stumbled upon you recommending my books to someone. Or maybe you did me some other form of kindness. Whatever it was, you are someone I probably don't know, or you live too far away for me to give you something physical. And let's be real, it would be creepy for me to ask a whole bunch of random folks to send me their address so I can send them a postcard.

That said, I will totally send you a postcard if you want. Just shoot me a message.

Anyway, I wanted to do something to thank you. And since you are someone who enjoys Jubal County, I thought you might like some little flash fictions and the like that are set there. Most of this is content I host on my Patreon, and has only really seen the light of day there. So don't expect fancy editing, beyond what Word and Atticus have given me. And don't expect a lot of length and depth. These are mostly fun, sometimes weird, and hopefully cast a little more light on the life of Howard Marsh in Jubal County.

Section one contains the **Marsh Dispatches**. Each of these micro-essays come straight from the mind of Howard Marsh. Some of them are my attempts to filter my views on life through the mind of a meth wizard. Others are not. Some give hints at things yet to come in the series. Parse away.

After that I have a few notes from a Professor at the University of Alabama, who teaches in their secret school of magic. He will feature in a sister series to the Redemption of Howard Marsh, and his aren't meant to be funny. Instead they peel back the curtain on how the world works (**maybe**).

Following that I have three little holiday themed flash fictions, and a tiny little short based around one of my favorite childhood scary stories.

All in all, I hope you enjoy. And seriously, thank you. Word of mouth is the most important thing to an author like me. If I have had any success, it has been thanks to people like you.

Cheers,

Bob McGough

3/15/2024 – The Ides of Marsh!

# *The Marsh*

## *Dispatches: Sharks*

### *and Armadillos*

I hate a damn armadillo.

To be clear, not one in particular, I hate them all equally. Did you know they carry leprosy? Yep. I don't care who you are, ain't nobody want them a case of leprosy.

Did you know when they get scared they jump straight up? Try straddling one with your car, and the little bastards are liable to pop right up and crack your oil pan. Try explaining that to your insurance company. I mean I've never had insurance, so I wouldn't know exactly, but I bet it wouldn't be easy.

I once went to the Armadillo Round Up in Red Level. I reckon the powers that be in Red Level saw all the success Opp was having with their Rattlesnake Rodeo, and equally dumb idea to my mind, and wanted to be the next big thing in southeast Alabama.

They had three armadillos. And one of them was missing half its tail.

Two and 3/5ths armadillos do not a round up make, at least not to my mind. It was about the most pitiful sight you ever did see, the critters sitting there in the traps that had no doubt been used to catch them. They actually seemed pretty zen about the whole thing, all things considered.

I only went because as pitiful as it was, it was still more happening than anything going on in Jubal County. Even if I did absolutely hate the grubby lil shits, it was something to do. I got a funnel cake out of it thanks to Krista, so it wasn't a complete loss.

And so that brings me to my point, in the most roundabout way possible: I hate armadillos, but I cannot stop thinking about them sometimes. They are goddamn fascinating. I hate them, but I read about them a lot. One of my favorite things is a small porcelain armadillo statue that I scored from the Christian Mission drop box. I can't help it. As much as think they are about the worst critter ever, they are equally fascinating.

Same thing goes for sharks. You will never catch my ass in the ocean. I don't care that I am far more likely to die from the drugs I take on the daily. Or lightning strikes for that matter. Or basically anything else. Don't matter. I ain't getting in the water, because I hate a damn shark too.

But damned if I won't watch every shark movie I can get my hands on. And I will read pretty much anything with some scary shit from the ocean in it. Cause I hate it, but I love it too.

And you know, I think that says something important. Something about the nature of fear and love and hate. How they can all blend



together into a toxic soup that brings out the best and worst of each other. How at the core of each emotion, there are little seeds of all the others.

So I say all this, to make the case that Armadillos should be called possum-on-the-half-shellfish.

You're welcome.

# *The Marsh*

## *Dispatches: Selling Bodies*

I knew a woman once, name of Leana. She was a hooker what had a camper back in the woods off Highway 12. There's some debate over whether she had an accident or if she killed herself. Regardless, her old mustang wrapped itself into a fiery pretzel around a tree, and that was that.

I'd never hired her exactly, but we ran in the same circles. She was always good about sharing a smoke or two with me when I was out. And I always would let her have a toke if I ever had enough to share. There ain't any such thing as honor amongst thieves that I've ever seen,

but there is a bond between those of us on the outside looking in I reckon.

I don't know what the Baptists look down on more, thieving drug-gies like me or ladies of the night like her, but regardless we were both living on the edge of polite society. Outcasts doing our own thing, and slowly destroying ourselves in our own ways. Not bothering nobody really.

Well I mean I bother a lot of folks ac units for the copper. But Leana, she never hurt a soul near as I could tell. She probably took the virginity of more of Jubal County's men than you could imagine, but instead of that being a good thing, she was shunned.

I wonder if that's why she killed herself. Being good enough to fuck, but not to be said hi to at the grocery store has to be rough.

When she got sick, I came up off a bottle of pills for her, to help with the pain. She put it on me pretty good by way of thanks. Couple of times in fact. I don't know if that means I hired her, or what, but I don't really care. I don't see nothing wrong with paying for sex. If it had been more important to me than drugs, well I reckon no shortage of dollars would have flowed from me to her.

I know a lot of truckers, who've plumb ruint their bodies driving big rigs. I mean just destroyed their spines just so you could get a snack at the Family Dollar. And that's celebrated, and respected. But sell something that's fun, like sex? Well you must be filled with the devil.

It don't make no fucking sense.

# *The Marsh*

## *Dispatches: The King*

I don't know all that much about the King. I mean, outside of my few run ins with him over the years. But I have a faint memory of going out to meet him with my Granddaddy once.

It wasn't all that long before he died, and I had to be maybe six at most I think. We'd piled into his old truck and driven out...somewhere. I honestly couldn't tell you where, but it couldn't have been all that far. I remember that it was down a dirt road, but that doesn't really narrow things down in the County.

Granddaddy parked in a small clearing, and then we went walking back into the woods. And there he was, all big and bad: The King.

Only, the way I remember him, he wasn't the mess he is today. He didn't look sickly at all, in fact he looked clean and nice, and had this big laughing smile on his face. He wasn't crazy either, at least not that

I recall. And there were some pixies too, which played hide and seek with me, around this big table that was set up like a feast. So I don't remember what the King and Granddaddy talked about. Or, if that was even the same satyr that I know as the King.

On the one hand, I hope that he is. Because that's one of my few memories of my time with my Granddaddy, and it's one of my favorites. But on the other, I hate to think that even the mythic folk of the County have fallen so damn low.

These days no one goes and seeks an audience with the King.

I wonder sometimes if things might get back to being like that someday?

I doubt it.

# *The Marsh Dispatches: On The Creation of Jubal County*

**K**ee in mind I ain't no history buff. I didn't ever graduate high school, so what I learned on this I picked up from talking to old folks mostly. So take all that with a grain of salt.

Here's what I do know for fact: it gets called the Lost County a lot. Reason being it was the last county to be created in the state, and

because of that it didn't show on a lot of maps. That somehow got transferred over to the federal level, and folks making the maps there had a tendency to leave it off as well.

I can attest though: we do exist, unfortunately.

It was made up parts of Crenshaw and Pike counties mostly, which considering Crenshaw was already made up of a lot of parts other counties didn't really care to keep...well it didn't get the best start. There's a lot of farming, but that's less because there is good soil for it, and more to do with the fact that there ain't really much in the way of jobs here, and never has been.

I also don't know this for sure, but it's a safe bet that race came into play. You gotta figure that in a time in America where the Klan was having a big resurgence, that not a whole lot of political descisions got made in the state without fuckin' over some person of color. Like I said, I don't know this as a fact, but it's a safe bet.

There were a lot more Black folks in the County than in some others, which makes me think that the powers that be probably tried to shove as many poor sharecroppers into Jubal County as possible. It's not as pronounced a percentage these days though, as a good chunk of them moved north in the 60's, since they got sense.

And as for the name, it was named for Jubal Early, least that's what I was told. He was some confederate general, so of course they named it after him. He wasn't even from Alabama near as I know. But hey, racists gonna racist. I'm just surprised they didn't name it Forrest or some shit.

So yeah: a forgotten spot on the map, made up of the leftovers from other countries, probably for racist reasons, named for a confederate general. It ain't the most historical record you'll find, but I think it sums things up nicely.

# *The Marsh*

## *Dispatches: Witches, Wizards, and Warlocks*

**N**o one has ever been able to tell me what the difference between a witch, a wizard, and a warlock. I mean, tradition says witches are female, and wizards are male. But...why? We all use the same magic. And what the hell is a warlock? Most folks use it like to describe an evil wizard...I think? But again, we all use the same magic.



I ain't evil, but I summon up a devil on occasion. Granted the Hog of the Road isn't like...Satan level evil, but he is some sort of demon pig. He will fuck you up is what I'm saying. But yeah, I summon him up on occasion, but no one calls me a warlock. Least not to my face I reckon.

Then you have the issue of briar witches. Guy or gal gets called that, gender don't matter. Which probably says nothing good, 'cause of course if something is wrong it gets labeled witch instead of wizard. So anyone using magic without generations of magic use in their blood, they are all doomed to be crazy ass briar witches, not briar wizards, not briar warlocks.

What I'm trying to say is is goddamn 2022, the fuck are we ascribing gender to magic for?

I'm a goddamn Swamp Witch, Swamp Wizard, Swamp Warlock, Swamp Ass. It don't matter to me what I label myself as, and it damn sure shouldn't matter to anyone else.

*The Marsh  
Dispatches: Jubal  
County Ain't The  
South*

**L**ook, that title is misleading, and I'd be sorry for that but woke up this morning hungover, and I just don't care.

Of course Jubal County is super fucking southern. It's in central Alabama, and you don't really get more southern than that. But there

is something I want to make really, really clear: Jubal County is the South, but it ain't representative of the South as a whole.

Don't read these stories I'm telling and think 'damn, I'm glad I don't live in Alabama.' Because things have gone wrong in the County, a lot more so than most places. Are there racists in the South? Of course. More than other places? Probably not. Are there dumb people in the South? 100%. More than other places? Probably not.

Now Jubal County certainly has more than its fair share of fuckups, and I don't blame anyone for thinking 'god, what a shithole.' Because it is, no getting around that. But it just happens to be the bottom of the barrel. There are lots of places near the top of the barrel.

I just don't live there.

Because I'm dumb I guess.

What I'm trying to say, in way too many words at this point, is don't judge the South by Jubal County. Most folks are good people, just trying to live their lives, and not fuck with nobody. So if you are reading these tales, and using them to justify shitting on the South, well, fuck you.

# *The Marsh Dispatches: Gateways*

Growing up we had the D.A.R.E. folks show up to school each year to preach to use the evils of drugs. I don't recall much of the messaging, but I do remember the guy in the Crime Dog suit. Gruff? Fuck if I can remember exactly.

I do recall the whole idea that weed was a gateway drug. If you'd listen to those folks you'd be convinced that just one toké and you'll be shooting heroin straight into your eyeball within a week. And that's just dumb.

Weed isn't a gateway drug, least not the way they think it is. Least not in my experience. Pretty much everyone I know has smoked weed at one point or another. And the vast majority of them stop there. Do some come join me in the gutter? Sure, of course. But it wasn't that weed wasn't doing it for them anymore, so they chased some deeper high.

No, society is the gateway. I mean that two ways. The first way, is that its illegal. And folks who want to do it, have to be a little shady, contact some folks who are a little shady, and then go off and partake in their illegal activity that they have to keep at least somewhat secret or else deal with a world of legal bullshit.

It drives folks into a world that they probably never would have run into otherwise. It gets folks trained on breaking the law, and how to do so without, hopefully, getting caught at it. You know why cigarettes aren't a gateway drug? Cause you can buy them at a gas station. You don't have to text someone in weird slang, then show up at somebody's house all sneaky like and score, then hide it while you drive yourself home and hope you don't get pulled over.

It makes folks just a little more comfortable with the whole process, which is a lot more of a gateway than the actual drug is. At least to my mind.

The other way, is just the way society treats drugs here. I read somewhere, and this was years ago so don't hold me to it, that heroin users back in the day before it was illegal usually tended to all get clean within like five years of starting. Or maybe it was by their thirties? Hell don't trust anything I say at face value. Anyway, once they made it illegal folks started staying on it a lot longer.

Cause you know what? Folks turn to drugs to escape pressure, stress, all the bullshit in their lives. You know what arresting them, putting them through the legal process does? It adds a shit ton more stress. And then you expect them to just ignore all that and get better.

Get fucked.

Legalize everything. Everything. Stop making it a damn crime, and instead sink this war on drugs money into rehab and shit.

You want to stop drugs? That thing humanity have done since the first caveman ate a funky mushroom? Good fucking luck.

You want to save some lives, the actual important part of all this?

Legalize. Everything.

# *The Marsh*

## *Dispatches: I Like*

### *Critters*

I will be the first to tell you that I ain't exactly the second coming of magic. I am in fact probably about the person lowest on the totem pole in the whole damn County, least when it comes to knowhow. I can juice myself up, sure, but most folks actually learned how to grow their power naturally, which gives them an edge.

And there's two reasons for that, that hold about equally. First and foremost, ain't no one ever really taught me right. There is a whole host of reasons at play there, and this ain't the space to dive into that little chestnut. Least not right now. But suffice it to say, that while

most folks was learning their ones and ones make twos, I wasn't. So I ain't got a foundation really.

The other reason is cause I'm real lazy. I have had chances to learn, rare, but often enough that I could be in a better spot than I am. But fuck me, learning magic ain't easy, and sitting in my busted recliner high as a kite is. So you can guess what traditionally has won out.

I'll tell you though, there is one aspect of the magical world that does interest me, and I've actually been motivated to learn about. And that's critters. Any time I've had a chance to read up on the sort of shit that roams the hidden spaces of the world, from pixies to pooka, grim to goblins, I'm all over that shit. Lucky for me H.D. had a few books in his collection that he let me borrow a time or two. And I've been able to fill in a good bit of the gaps those books have from practical knowledge. Some of which I can't even begin to remember where I learned it.

I think I got real high one time and had a long talk with some sort of fey critter, only I've forgotten the actual conversation, but retained the facts. Which could be because of the drugs, or some sort of fey magic.

Really, are they that different?

Anyway, I say all this to make a point: I am real deficient in basically every type of magical knowledge. Save one: I'm a goddamn walking talking bestiary when I wanna be.



# *The Marsh Dispatches: The Richmond Family*

I reckon if you've heard of any of the Richmonds, it'd be Thomas. He's the one they said burned down that church with all the people in it. Which I don't believe for a minute mind you. I mean, yeah he probably burned that church up, but I can guarantee you there's more to that story than anyone's telling. I say that, cause for one I know for a fact Rutherford had an interest in that case, which...well I don't have to tell you what that means.

But more importantly, the Richmond family is an old one in the County. Old, and strange. Think the Marsh Clan, but with less power.

We got Granny, Krista, and I guess me that all have real Power, as well as a few folks with smaller snippets of ability like Uncle Hubert Dale you see. But they just have folks that take more after H.D. than Granny. Maybe if they'd had someone like Granny or Krista, they would be considered one of the actual magical families of the County, like the McGregors. But they ain't, so they don't.

Those who know though...they know that strange stories are tied to that family. And I can speak to that personally, seeing as I know Jeff Earl Richmond.

You see, I'm white trash, mixed with wizard.

Jeff Earl? He's full blown redneck, mixed with...medium? Necromancer? Hell I don't know exactly. He's a ghost whisperer, and a shade tree mechanic of the highest order. If I had a car, and no money, he'd who I'd take it to. And if my shed was haunted, well, he's who I'd call. I ain't never seen him cast a spell, but he just has this way of showing up where the ghosts are, and they just...behave.

It's the damnedest thing you ever saw.

He ain't the only one in the family with a snippet of power either, but he's the one I deal with the most I reckon.

So yeah. The Richmonds are worth taking note of, iff'n you want to understand the weirder side of Jubal County.

# *The Marsh*

## *Dispatches: Devils*

### *and Demons*

What exactly is the difference between a Devil and a Demon?

No really, I'm asking. Cause near as I can tell their ain't none. I've had dealings with the Hog of the Road a time or two, and some folks call him a devil, others a demon. I know there are things like crossroad devils, at least so I've heard. And what about something like Father Flathead? What the fuck is he? I mean I know he's something big bad and nasty, but he ain't connected to Hell so far as I know.

Like...where does all the fairy stuff separate from the eldritch stuff which separates from the Christian stuff? I tried talking to H.D. about

it one time, but he just launched into a lecture about how I needed to be doing a better job of reading the books he keeps recommending I read. But fuck, those things are dry as a dusty fart in a desert, and I gave up trying. So I ended up just changing the subject.

So yeah, I guess what I'm trying to say is, the more I think about it all, the more I realize I don't know. I used to be blissful in my ignorance, but now that I am learning a little bit more, it's cluing me in on just how little I actually know. I'm winding up with a dozen questions for every answer I do manage to find.

It's kinda bullshit.

# *The Marsh*

## *Dispatches: Tricks*

I remember one time when I was still in school, they had this sort of comedy troupe come and perform for us. Looking back, they was all real young, most of them hardly older than twenty I reckon. At the time though they seemed worlds older, but most importantly they was funny as all hell.

Now, keep in mind it was really safe humor. This was a school after all, and most of the jokes came with a lesson. Which even back then I would have normally bristled at. I wasn't the contrary shit that I am today, but you could say the seeds were certainly there. But even though it was a bunch of 'don't fuck around with strangers' kinda of crap, it was actually hilarious. And for a backwoods boy from Jubal County who'd never even heard of a comedy club, or ever even thought of going to a comedy show, it was a pretty cool experience.

When the show was wrapping up, they made sure to tell us that they were doing another show that night at the Ag Center in Sumpville. And I knew I was gonna be there. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity I figured, and I needed to spread the word, if for no other reason then so I could find a ride.

The show was at six that night, and by five I had managed to get one of the older brothers of a guy in my class named Daryl to agree to take us. I sold it hard, telling them just how funny it was. I even did my best job replaying this scene where one guy ran over another guy who was playing a monkey, and even my dumb attempts managed to get a laugh. Daryl backed me up on it, attesting that it was fucking hilarious.

So three deep we pulled up to the Ag Center just like two minutes late. I honestly don't remember if there was a charge, but if there had been I'm certain I didn't pay. Those days there was no such thing as a spare dollar, that's how poor we was. But we slipped in and took a seat near the back, since the place was pretty full up.

The show had just started, and it looked like we hadn't missed anything. I'm not lying when I say I was on the edge of my fucking seat, waiting for the laughs to start. I'd really sold this, and I was counting on them to come through. Not just for me, but for the older brother we convinced to waste his evening on our behalf.

The show was garbage. Turns out they used the whole comedy troupe thing to get into schools, get kids hooked like I was, then lured us onto not school grounds so they could preach to us. As if Jubal County wasn't slap fucking full of churches.

There were almost no laughs, as getting right with Jesus was the focus, and that shit is never funny. Not one fake monkey got run over, and what my mind had built up as a once in a lifetime comedy experience in the County, turned out to be just another of a million fucking revival, evangelizing shitshows.

I wasn't even mad. I was just really, really let down and sad. They'd taken something I had loved, and turned it sour, all so they could preach to a bunch of easy to manipulate kids. Kids who other than me pretty much were all already going to fucking church anyway.

We don't need more religion in the County. We're full up.

We need laughter and a reason to smile.

So fuck them for taking that from me.

# *The Marsh Dispatches: Rutherford*

I don't know how Rutherford found me. I really don't.

I think maybe I did something while I was out of sorts, real fucked up like, and it was big enough to get on his radar. I mean whoever it is he works for, they keep an eye out for people like me, that's clear. So I guess they were just keeping an eye out, and I had the bad luck to step into their line of sight.

The whole organization is a mystery to me really. I think they're government, they got that smell about 'em. That sordid mix of money to burn mixed with underfunding. Like how they clearly got a budget



for ominous black suv's, but any time I get roped into visiting an office of theirs, which are always sorta disguised mind you, they give off a cheap feel. Like puttin' nice rims on a beater. The desks are always a little old, a little worn. The computers are just as likely to be old as hell, but then they will have like, an eye scanner thingy to get in a door.

It's weird. Like they get grant money for some things and not others.

The other thing I can tell you is that they don't have a single magic user on staff. Like not really. Rutherford, he told me one time that anyone I meet that is working with them who's got power, they are either a contractor, or they're working pro bono like. Some help out because, I don't know, they want to save the world or some shit. But Rutherford, he don't like to work with folks he don't have some sort of leverage over. Folks he can control.

Folks like me. Best counter for magic? Keep a body locked up in a cell a long way away from you. That, or a bullet in the skull. Both of which he's made real clear he's got ready and waiting on me should I buck too hard.

I put up as good a fight as I can. But at the end of the day, he's holdin' all the cards.

And I swear to you, one day? I'm gonna even things out. And then he's gonna regret ever fuckin' with me.

I wonder sometimes, this agency, is the whole thing run the way Rutherford runs things in our neck of the woods? Or is he just the shitty reflection of the shitty life we got here in much of the South? I wonder, does the boss hog out west, or north, do they keep things running on a system of blackmail and bad intentions?

Something tells me no.

And maybe, just maybe, that's my in.

# *Notes from the Secret Classes of Professor Abraham Keisler*

*From Western Magical History 102*

“Another family with an outsized effect on the secret workings of the world would be the Marsh’s. You are no doubt thinking that the name comes from a family tied in some way to a swamp, in the same way the the origin of names like Smith and Cooper came

from familial professions. You would be incorrect in that however. While no doubt there are some families for which that might be the origin of their last name, the Marsh's we will talk about over the course of this class draw on a different source.

The family we're discussing is an anglicized version of the Norman French word *Marche*, which means 'boundary,' which itself is a corruption of the Middle Latin word for frontier, '*marca*.' You've now doubt heard the title *Marquess*, it shares a similar origin. Traditionally what separated a *Marquess* from a *Count* was that the lands ruled by a *Marquess*, a *March*, would be on a border while a *County*, or lands ruled by a *Count*, would be internal holdings.

So the *Marche*'s did what Normans of the period did, and helped conquer a large portion of the world, specifically they rode alongside William in 1066, finding their way to the British Isles. John Dee, in his '*Notes Concerning the Origin of the Soyga*' references that the *Marche*'s were known to be men of dark renown, and in no small part responsible for the Norman success. He posits in that work that their name, *Marche*, has far less to do with the location of their holdings near a borderland, but is in fact related to the fact that the family were known to be sorcerers who held court with beings from beyond the borders of our reality.

While there of course is no way to confirm such a claim, there is little doubt that certain branches of the family have expanded upon that supposed legacy. Of course minds will no doubt wander to Obed Marsh, and his dark legacy in the ruins of Innsmouth. But family practitioners were well known to be active during events as disparate as the Coal Wars of West Virginia around the turn of the last century, to the Scourge of 1883 in British ruled Hong Kong.

The tendrils of this family have come to fill many a hidden nook and cranny of the world, shaping events far beyond their humble trappings.



# *Notes from the Secret Classes of Professor Abraham Keisler*

*From Cosmology 101*

**W**elcome to a class with far more questions than answers. Over the course of this semester we will discuss the very nature of reality, or should I say, realities. We will talk about the origin of demons, devils, and djinn. We will discuss how creatures of wide rang-

ing mythological traditions can exist alongside creatures of eldritch horror that defy description. And you will be horrified to learn just how little we actually know about the realms that, we think, run in parallel to our own.

By the end of this class you will be able to discuss the major theories that dominate magical theoretical discourse on our cosmology. We will read essays by thinkers like Dee, McMillan, Crowley, and Radiant Brown. You will have to read a very dry book written by yours truly. But when you can sit there and debate Halstead's Gnostic Prison Theory against Zhao's Tulpa Discourses at the end of this class, it will have been all worthwhile.

If I have done my job right, you will have no clue what it is I actually believe, and you will have formed your own opinion. Which, spoiler, we will have no idea if it's more correct than any other, because that's the fundamental nature of magic: that shit is weird, and by its very nature defies all attempts to classify it.

But for those of you on any sort of demonology or summoning type paths, this class is required, so pay attention. It's going to form the foundation for much of your coursework moving forward. So now let's dive into the syllabus...

# *Notes from the Secret Classes of Professor Abraham Keisler*

## *Cryptozoology*

**L**et's talk about the etymology of the word for a moment.

When Sanderson, who you will recall from last week's lecture, came up with the term cryptozoology, he essentially mashed together the ancient greek words for secret, animal, and knowledge. Which

makes sense, it being the study of animals of disputed existence. He was out there trying to find animals whose very existence was a secret he was trying to uncover.

But you have to understand, Sanderson wasn't, as far as anyone knows, a practitioner of the magical arts. Had he been, I think things would have played out very differently. Because here is what we now know, that Sanderson and Huevlamans didn't.

Most true cryptids are not animals. They are secret, yes. Thankfully so in most cases. But virtually all cryptids as they are commonly understood to be are in fact eldritch creatures. Variations of a type, they all seem to stem from the same root area of existence. Some call it the Far Beyond. Those who subscribe to Gnostic Prison Theory would say they are reflections or minions of the Demiurge, perhaps Archons, and exist in the cosmos that entraps us.

They share a number of traits. They are extremely elusive, except when they don't want to be. Incredibly resilient and often immune to many conventional forms of magic, they are tough as hell to kill. Most often, they do resemble some sort of corruption of a normal animal form. Such as the way a not-deer resembles a deer, or a yeti can resemble a large ape. They are clearly creatures designed by some malignant force to blend into the natural world.

Until they don't.

That's when the bodies start to drop.



# *Holidays in Jubal County*

## *Thanksgiving*

“So if you and Anna want to come over a little early and help set up, I’d appreciate it. I’ll be handling most of the food, but if yall could bring some drinks and cups, that would be helpful.”

“You mean like...”

“NO BEER!” Krista said, cutting me off before I could helpfully suggest that I bring a suitcase of High Life.

I held my hands up defensively. I was already regretting agreeing to do this Friendsgiving bullshit. But Krista had managed to get the idea into Anna’s head, who just my luck had been all about it. “Jesus, I was just gonna say sweat tea,” I lied. “Ain’t nobody tryna get drunk at Thanksgiving, chill.”

That part was true at least. I just forgot to leave off the ‘yet.’

She cut me a look, as if she didn't quite believe me. I let it slide though, as she carried on. "Three gallons then, ok? Or maybe two gallons and a two liter of coke?"

I rolled my eyes. "As if I have Coke money. It'll be Faygo at best. Now what sort of grub are you plannin' to dish out?"

"The usual," Krista said, holding up a hand and lifting her fingers one at a time as she listed off the items. "Rolls, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, sweet potato casserole, green bean casserole, and a turkey."

I flinched, as a memory of the poo-turkey monster filled my mind. "What about a nice ham instead?"

# Holidays in Jubal County

## *Christmas (Probably Not Canonical)*

Anna shivered as she got out of her car. It was one of the colder Decembers she could remember, and she hated the cold. She had almost stayed home, but it had been a long week and she really wanted to see her boyfriend. He hadn't answered his phone when she called, but that wasn't all that unusual on a Friday, as he usually tried to get in a little pre-gaming before she came over.

She could see light oozing out from the cracks around the shed roll-up door, which other than the glow of the Dairy Queen sign was the only light. Pulling her coat closer around her, she stepped towards the door. She paused as she heard laughter coming from inside, a sort of deep guffaw that sounded nothing like her Howard's laugh. She'd had no idea there would be company.

With a shrug she rolled up the door just enough that she could duck her tall frame under it, keeping as much of the warm air inside as possible. The door rolled shut behind her as she straightened, the door hitting the ground at almost the exact same moment that she screamed.

Sitting there on the couch was...a goat man? A satyr? Whatever it was, it triggered in her the memory of that massive satyr that had attacked her car that time, and she felt the urge to flee. The only thing that stopped her, was the fact that it was hitting a bong. It was a sight so incongruous, that it basically caused her flight or fight response to give up.

“Hey, don’t worry, the Krampus is cool!” Howard said from his recliner. In his hand he was holding a mostly drunk bottle of Wild Irish Rose, which he used to gesture towards the hairy creature.

The Krampus nodded as it sputtered out a series of rough, weed smoke filled coughs.

“Hey, did you happen to bring any schnapps? I know we was talking about making eggnog. He loves the shit, but I all I had was this and some Thunderbird,” her boyfriend asked.

Anna looked down at the bag in her left hand. It did indeed have some Goldschlager and some eggnog. She looked back up at the goat-like creature, then back to Howard, who was smiling gamely. Back to the Krampus, who gave a small wave as he held out the bong in her direction.

She almost just said fuck it and went home.

But...it was pretty toasty in the shed.

# Holidays in Jubal County

## *Easter*

“Ok, so what’s the surprise?” Anna asked as we stepped out onto the back porch.

In our wake came all my favorite people, and a few folks I tolerated because my favorite people liked them. There was Krista of course, with her dad, my uncle Hubert Dale. Behind them were my multi-time ex Lidda, who for the first time since I could remember didn’t have a kid in tow, and beside her was my Mississippi cousin Jacki-O. Jeff Earl Richmond and his girlfriend, who’s name I couldn’t remember for the life of me were bringing up the rear. I’d invited a couple others, but Easter wasn’t the easiest time to get folks together.

I looked out over the back yard. The grass was in need of a cut, but that was working in my favor. I could see a few glints of pastel colors,

but for the most part it was just a sea of tall grass and bushes until you got to the tree line. "I got up last night 'round midnight, and hid a shit ton of eggs. So we could have an egg hunt."

I expected a couple of 'hell yeahs' and maybe a few 'dope!'s' as befit my brilliance. What I got was crickets. Until Lidda ran her trap at least.

"We aren't kids Marsh."

I glanced around at the faces, and no one seemed excited. Even Anna looked more confused than anything. Which stung a little, ain't gonna lie. But I hadn't played my hand yet, not really.

"No shit. That's why these ain't normal eggs. They ain't got candy in them. They got adult stuff!"

"What do you mean adult stuff. Like booze adult stuff, or adult stuff adult stuff," Anna asked.

I gave her the pistol fingers. "Yes."

"You mean there's eggs out there with dildos in them?" Jeff Earl asked?

"Fuck off! Do I look like I got dildo money?" I'd been real surprised at how much dildos cost when I went to the little sex shop in Troy, or there would have sure enough been a prize egg with one inside.

"No, there's like, little flavored lubes and condoms and shit. Plus little bottles of booze in some. And they all got little strips of paper inside each egg, that has how many shots you have to take or get to give. Like a drinking game."

"Wait, and you did all this?" Lidda asked. "That sounds way more productive than I would have thought you'd be."

Anna was laughing though. "You did it, you actually did it." She stepped over and threw her arms around my neck and gave me a kiss. "He's been getting high as fuck and talking about doing this for over a year now. And he's actually done it."

I didn't really remember ever talking about it to be fair. I'd kinda thought this was gonna be a total surprise. But I could see I had scored

some sort of points, so I was just gonna run with it. "I told you I would," I said with a smile.

"How many eggs did you hide?"

I shrugged. "Shit, like a hundred? I lost count. A couple broke, and a couple..." I decided not to finish that sentence. I'd drank several of the minis right out of the eggs as I'd been trying to hide them. I'd earned them I reckoned. "So yeah, grab a sack and get to hunting! The prize egg has a pack of smokes, so get after it!"

I started handing everyone a plastic bag from the Piggly Wiggly. After a moment's pause, and a little more yelling from me, they got moving. Before I knew it, they were all running like kids, racing around the yard grabbing up eggs. Even H.D. who had at least 25 years on everyone there. Hell he was finding more than anyone else from the looks of things. Which, I guess that figures.

Anna had a half dozen in her bag when she looked back up at the porch and realized I wasn't hunting. "Come on babe!" she shouted.

"I did the hiding, wouldn't be fair," I said, and I meant it.

Just cause we were adults didn't mean we had to always act like it I'd figured out long ago. And I figured that was maybe the thing I could best offer to my loved ones. A chance to let their hair down and have some fun at my expense.

Hell, I reckon I owed them a little.

# *Wait Til Horace Comes*

I woke up to something rustling around in my shed.

I was still pretty fucked up. Drunk? Lord I was drunk. I didn't have a clue how long I'd been out, but it hadn't been long enough, cause I could feel the earth spinning, even if it was too dark for me to see it. It's a testament to just how loud the rustling was that it drug me out of my stupor.

My shed door was down, and there were no hints of light coming in from around the edges, so it was still night. Though to be honest, I got a little hazy on just when I had passed out. Had it been night? Day? Fucked if I could remember. It had been day when I started drinking, I was pretty sure. Not that it mattered. What mattered was the rustling.

I could have stood and fished around for the pull chain on the overhead light. But I wasn't real sure I could stand. So instead I fought



down the urge to be sick, and called up just enough power to produce a little light.

There was a possum staring at me. Which, considering I had a possum for a familiar could have been expected. But you see, in my experience there are two sorts of possums. Type A, of which Horace my familiar is, has this morose, hangdog look about them that's equal parts pitiful and adorable. Type B looks kinda evil and ratlike. Sharp eyes. Screamy mouth. Still oddly cute looking, but more of that 'so ugly it's gone full circle right back around to cute.'

This possum was a Type B. It didn't look like it was about one Swiss Roll away from a diabetic coma, so it was not Horace. I had caught it climbing up onto a stack of my books, and it was perched there now like some sort of furry gargoyle.

We locked eyes, and the little shit hissed at me.

I was simultaneously too drunk, and not drunk enough for this shit. I had no idea how the possum got inside my shed. But I knew possums are harmless, and I needed to either pass back out or throw up. And I didn't want to try and find a bucket in my current state. So I killed the light, and catching my first real break, passed right the fuck out.

When I woke up the second time, I could tell that some time had passed. It was still dark as all hell, but I could tell I was a little less drunk. The world wasn't spinning...I just felt like ass. I lay there a moment wishing for the sweet release of death, and trying to figure out what had woke me out of my stupor.

Then I heard the rustling. It was similar to what had woke me before, that sort of 'critter getting into shit it shouldn't be in' sound. I swore. Possums were harmless to me, but Horace was a portly living testament about how lethal they could be to human snack foods. And if that fucker had got into the cat food...

Angry, I summoned up another bit of light, preparing to actually maybe consider chasing this little shit out of the shed.

There were two of them now.

The first possum was still perched atop the books looking at me with a mouth full of hisses. But making itself at home in my recliner as a second possum. Only this was easily the biggest possum the world had ever seen. We're talking easily Labrador sized. It too was looking at me.

"Now?" the little possum asked, glancing towards its larger companion.

The big boy just kept settling in. "No. Wait til Horace comes."

I cut the light. That was met with a hiss.

I was clearly a lot higher than I had thought, and was having some fucked up hallucinations. And frankly, I was in no mood for that. I wanted to be asleep, and when I woke up next I wanted to have slept through my hangover. Or at least have slept of the worst of it, enough that a little hair of the dog would straighten me out.

And, with blessed quickness I fell asleep again.

When the third time rolled around I was actively pissed. Like real pissed. I was sober enough that I was really feeling the effect of the hangover now. I needed to be sleeping through it, and I knew me well enough to know that I was getting to the point where the amount of booze in my system was dissipating to the point where it wouldn't just automatically drag me back into sleep.

I called up my power and lit the room.

There were now three possums. And none of them were Horace. And the new one was the size of a Shetland pony.

You ever see a possum the size of a Shetland pony? No you haven't, because fucking no one has.

The damn thing was taking up pretty much most of the available space in my shed, right on to the back. Its face, far more of the hissy/screamy complexion than the hangdog of Horace, was damn near hanging over my couch bed. If I had unfolded the sleeper part

of it, it would have been in bed with me. As it was, it may as well have been.

The shed door was still down, so how the fuck these possums were getting in was beyond me. And now that I was more sober, I was certain that this wasn't a hallucination. There were three mean faced creatures all sitting there staring at me, ranging in size from house cat to fuck off.

"Now?" asked the littlest one.

The dog sized possum looked over to the newcomer. "Now?"

"Wait til Horace comes," said the biggest, with a hiss.

I was done. I got up from the couch, taking care to not bump into the big boy and stomped over to the shed door. "How about you guys tell Horace I couldn't wait, and then fuck right off?"

I rolled the door up as behind me a volley of hisses went back and forth. I didn't give them a second glance, I was too pissed. Instead I stepped out into the night air, which was way too cold for me to not have a shirt on. Horace was nowhere in sight, that much I could see at least.

My stomach gurgled ominously. I felt clammy all of a sudden, and sweat broke out across my brow. This wasn't my first rodeo, I knew what was about to happen.

Is it weird I didn't want the possums to see me throw up?

So I left them to their party, and went to find some place to die in peace.

## *About the author*

Bob McGough is an author, podcaster, and indie tabletop game designer from south Alabama. As an author he has been published by a number of small presses in a range of genres, from steampunk to horror. He is best known as the author of his 'Rural' Urban Fantasy series, the Jubal County Saga. He also teaches a number of classes and workshops on various aspects of the business of writing.

As a podcaster Bob is the man behind the Tales by Bob Podcast Network. His first show, Books, Beards, Booze, is a conversational style podcast that has run for years now. Southern Fried Fantasy, is a completed interview style podcast where he interviews Southern Authors who write genre fiction set in the South. He is a frequent guest on a wide range of other podcasts

A long-time freelance writer, he has worked on a number of tabletop and video games. As a huge fan of one sheet and simple rpgs, he has released over 30 games in that space across a number of platforms.

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