

Hub

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Grinning in the Dark

Lee Harris

It seems ridiculous to me, now. Until last week I'd never read a book by Ramsey Campbell. I'm a lifelong horror fan, and vaguely remember picking up one of Ramsey's earlier novels some twenty-plus years ago, and never finishing it. I don't remember what the book was – I just remember not enjoying it. I now believe my reading habits just weren't mature enough to appreciate Ramsey's work.

Last week I took his latest novel (*The Grin of the Dark* – reviewed in this issue) on holiday with me. Funny, disturbing, and beautifully written, the novel reaffirmed my love of the genre. It made me nervous of the shadows again.

I've missed out on twenty years of reading Ramsey's work, but on the plus side, I now have an entire back catalogue to work my way through. I just may have a new favourite horror writer...

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About *Hub*

Every week we publish a piece of short fiction, along with at least one review and sometimes a feature or interview. If you like what you read here, please consider making a donation over at www.hub-mag.co.uk. We pay our writers, and anything you donate helps us to continue to attract high quality fiction and non-fiction.

Chapiesky

by A J Brown

"I worry about him, sometimes," Chasity said as she looked out the kitchen window and into the front yard. "Sometimes he just zones out and it's as if he is in another world."

"Chas, he is autistic," Melanie said as she peered from the window at Joshua. "Sometimes they do that—zone out and go to another place . . . a place where you and I can't go."

"I know, but I still worry about him."

Joshua sat on the grass, one broken crayon in his hand. He stared across the street to the four little girls sitting in a circle, clapping their hands together and singing a song.

*Miss Suzy had a baby,
She named him Tiny Tim.
She put him in the bathtub
To see if he could swim.*

Their voices echoed in the air as if they were in a large room with block walls and no furniture. To Joshua the song seemed to call to him, to beckon him to join the girls.

*He drank up all the water,
And ate up all the soap...
He tried to eat the bathtub
But it wouldn't fit down his throat.*

One of the girls, a dark haired one with barrettes on either side of her head holding her hair in place, turned to him. Her eyes were black pools and gray rings sat beneath them. She smiled, showing her cracked and broken teeth. She raised one battered hand and waved to Joshua.

Joshua lifted his hand, the crayon gripped tightly in it, and waved back.

Chasity frowned as she watched Joshua wave toward the house across the street. She looked to see if there was anyone there, but saw no one.

"What's he doing?" she asked aloud.

"I think he's . . . waving." Mel's face changed from smiling to concerned, her eyes suddenly holding concern in them.

"Yeah, I got that. But, what is he waving at."

Mel stepped away from the window and sat down. Chasity looked back at her and saw Mel's face grow pale.

"What's wrong, Mel?"

"No one lives there."

"I know."

"Not since the Chapiesky twins were killed along with their two best friends."

Joshua stood when the dark haired girl motioned for him. The other three girls, two blondes and the other one dark haired that looked almost exactly like the girl waving, turned their eyes toward him. They all motioned for him to join them. Joshua took a few awkward steps and started for the road.

"The Chapiesky twins lived there. They were good girls. As were Mary Ellen and Beth, their two friends. They had a sleep over that night and things went terribly wrong. Someone broke in . . ." Melanie's voice cracked as a tear streaked down her face.



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"What happened?"

"Someone broke in and killed the Chapieskys—all of them except the mother, who spent months in the hospital. It's been said that the murderer had been stalking Mrs. Chapiesky and went berserk that night and tried to kill her. Her husband tried to fight the man off but died from his injuries. She had managed to call 9-1-1 and the cops got there before he could kill her. By then, the girls were all dead and so was her husband . . ."

"Did you know them?" Chasity asked.

Melanie stood up, nodded and walked toward the window. "It's been said just before someone dies the girls appear to them and call that person to them." Melanie looked out and saw Joshua approaching the sidewalk. Just beyond him, she saw the four girls, their hands motioning for him. "Joshua! No!"

Melanie bolted from the kitchen and to the front door. Down the steps she ran with Chasity following close behind.

"Joshua, stop," Chasity screamed as he reached the street.

The girls turned their eyes to the two women running across the yard. One of the dark haired girls' smiled and blood slid from a crack in her lip. Her dress, which had changed into a nightgown, began to tear and blood poured from her chest. The other three girls began to bleed, their throats opening up and pouring their lives from them. They all crumpled to the ground, their mouths opened as if they were gasping for air.

Joshua stopped in the street, not knowing what to do. The sight before him was hard to comprehend and he thought the girls were playing like they were asleep. The squeal of tires didn't draw his attention from the bleeding girls.

Melanie reached the street as the car slammed on the brakes. She thought she was too late but ran into the road as the car reached Joshua. In her ears she could vaguely hear screeching tires and Chasity screaming.

Pain tore through her body as the car hit her, lifting her off the ground and into the air. She landed a few feet away, near the other side of the street. Blood seeped from her nose and mouth and her body lay in a crumpled heap.

Through her pain she heard a man crying and babbling about not seeing them in the road. Even with blurred vision she could see Chasity hugging Joshua, who still stood in the street unharmed and looking at the girls.

Melanie turned her head toward the yard. The four girls were no longer on the ground, but standing near her, looking at her. There was no blood and their gowns were all intact as if nothing had ever happened to them. Their pale faces still held dark, sunken eyes but there were no bruises or cuts in them.

One of the dark haired girls knelt down and placed a hand on Melanie's face. A tear trickled from her eyes and she whispered . . .

"Mommy."

As Melanie closed her eyes, the sounds of her daughters' and their best friend's singing filled her ears.

*Miss Suzy had a baby,
She named him Tiny Tim.
She put him in the bathtub
To see if he could swim . . .*

About the Author

A southern boy with a penchant for the darker side of writing, AJ Brown churns out stories hoping to one day find a diamond in his slush pile. Occasionally a gem surfaces, and he polishes it off and sends it out to the wolves. He's still searching for that diamond.

He is a member of Cavender's Terrible Twelve with +The Horror Library+ and has been published in Our Shadows Speak and Dark Distortions, among others. He is married with 2 children. Life enjoys him as much as he enjoys it.

True horror to a writer is to have no audience to write for.

If you enjoyed this week's tale, and the non-fiction that follows, please make a donation at www.hub-mag.co.uk.

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REVIEWS

Rise: The Blood Hunter reviewed by Alasdair Stuart

The Grin of the Dark reviewed by Marie O'Regan

Rise:Blood Hunter

Directed by Sebastian Gutierrez

Starring Lucy Liu, Michael Chiklis,, Margo Harshman, Janes D'Arcy, Carla Gugino, Robert Forster, Samaire Armstrong and Mako

Sadie Blake is a reporter who specialises in cult, unusual stories. Sadie Blake is a gifted, brave woman who has no trouble suppressing her own identity for the story. Sadie Blake is dead. And Sadie Blake is not happy about that.

A relentlessly odd little movie, this is peppered with cast members you'd never expect to see in something which seems, judging by the way it's presented, distinctly low budget. That's not to say it looks bad because it doesn't, just that this is a street level film which has, fairly clearly, been filmed on the street.

Liu does well as Sadie, and the film's unusual first half hour does a nice job of contrasting her life with her un life, flashing between the two and changing lighting and camera style as it does so. There's a



real sense of both classic horror movie inevitability ('Oh Sadie, you're so good at these terrifying Satanic cult cases!') and some real surprises, the moment where she finally dies in particular proving both visceral and distinctly effective. All involved should be applauded as well for deciding to eschew the 'PVC avenger' route and instead have Sadie as a woman who is resolutely normal and trapped in an abnormal situation.

Of the other cast members, Gugino scores as a surprisingly pragmatic vampire and Chiklis, whilst excellent, looks faintly confused at what he's doing here. Everyone else turns in work which is never less than competent but this is Liu's show and even Chiklis comes in a distant second.

If there's a problem here, it's that the script doesn't seem to quite know what it is. The street level vampire story is derailed by frequent, faintly cursory 'erotic' interludes and there are at least comic relief characters that serve absolutely no purpose. It's a script which could have done with an extra one, even two polishes before being put in front of a camera and for all the hard work of those involved, there are several moments where it just doesn't cluck, at all.

That being said, vampire fans will find a lot to enjoy here and anyone playing White Wolf roleplaying games will feel right at home. All in all, Rise is fun but with a little effort, it could have been much, much more.

The Grin of the Dark
by Ramsey Campbell.
Virgin Books, Paperback £7.99

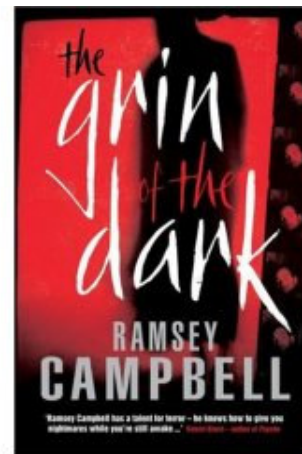
The Grin of the Dark tells the story of failed journalist Simon Lester as he attempts to get his life back on track. With his career in downhill spiral that started with the demise of a controversial magazine he wrote for, Lester is desperate for a new start. When he runs into his old film tutor, now an editor for a university press, opportunity appears to be knocking.

Lester is commissioned to write a book on the career of an obscure comedian from the early part of the twentieth century, Tubby Thackeray. Thackeray seems to have faded into obscurity under something of a cloud, and from the strange things that start happening when Lester begins his research, someone wants to make sure he stays forgotten. The banter between Lester and a cyberstalker, Smilemime, is blackly amusing and worryingly familiar to anyone that spends much time online.

The story becomes a tale of Simon's search for the truth even as reality starts to fray at the edges, and Simon himself becomes ever more unstable.

As usual, Campbell manages to convey an escalating mood of unease with his description of things almost seen, but never revealed. Lester's slow disintegration even as things start to look up in his personal life is well handled, and the reader is never quite sure of what is or isn't real.

Treading similar territory to novels such as *Secret Stories*, *The Grin of the Dark* is an extremely enjoyable, whilst deeply unsettling, read. Campbell remains a must-read.



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