

OLD MONSTERS

BY D.KRAUSS



Old Monsters
Stories Inspired by the Classics

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OLD MONSTERS

D. Krauss



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Preface

We are the first generation to sit up Saturday nights and get the bejeezus scared out of us by Frankenstein, the Wolfman, ghosts, and whatever other 1930s-through-1950s monsters, the hosts of those schlocky late-night horror shows—*Vampira*, *Doctor Shock*, *Svengooli* ... and the legend, Elvira—could dig up. Every Podunk television station serving a sparse and scattered populace had one of these shows. In Dothan, Alabama, WTVY, it was *X Minus 1*, with the appropriate reverb at the title announcement. There was no host for that show, but a decent intro of movie stills and a segment of *Swan Lake* which, taken out of context, is pretty eerie music.

I still remember, quite clearly, sitting on the couch, hiding under the afghan with my brother and sister, and watching *The Daughter of Dr. Jekyll*, all of us so frightened during the mirror transformation scene that we immediately shut off the TV and hid, trembling, until we fell asleep. And had nightmares.

By today's standards, it's a fairly tame scene, even hokey. Special effects were rubber bats and excessive makeup back then, and didn't fool anybody. But it was the idea that, outside the bedroom window and lurking in the woods, was a monster, something unnatural and murderous that wanted your soul and your life, and you were helpless before it. Whispering, "It's only a movie," over and over, and the ghosts were gone by sunrise, and your mother absolutely forbade you to watch those shows anymore but, yeah, right, Mom. In

the safe and normal world sixty years ago, it was thrilling to think that maybe, just maybe, things weren't that safe and normal.

As it turns out.

I am the first to admit that the more recent horror movies are vastly superior to the clunky and laughable ones of those middle decades. The *Nosferatu* remake beats the original into oblivion—which is heresy—but, there it is. The newer ones are more plausible; we have discovered that monsters are somewhat real and take every form you can imagine; some of them looking very much like your next-door neighbor, or a national politician. There is no garlic or silver or incantation that will save you from you. Those old rubber mask monsters have become quaint.

Like radio. Like Sputnik and nuclear attack drills. All nostalgia and amusement now but, in their day, the cutting edge, the frontier between a life of surety and the dark. Those old monsters from the Hammer and RKO films, *Creepy* and *Vampirella* magazines, birthed *The Walking Dead*, and Jason, and *Alien*. And still inspire.

Here, then, are ten tales inspired by the monsters I trembled at through afghan holes on a Saturday night decades ago, and who've chased me ever since.

**ASPECTS OF A
TRADITIONAL
VAMPIRE
AND THE NEED TO DISPATCH
SAME**



Aspects of a Traditional Vampire and the Need to Dispatch Same

(Nov 2013, InfectiveInk Magazine)

Randall lived on a small two-acre lot off the Enterprise Road, in a tiny house built in the 50s and never upgraded. No need; he was alone and spartan. He'd moved there some years ago for the isolation and quiet, which he did need.

Glen lived two miles up the New Brockton Road and down a gravel lane behind a cotton field and was, also, isolated and quiet, except he'd lived this rural Alabama life since birth and had the mournful displeasure of watching his widespread family precede him through various methods, such as the Vietnam War, both Iraq Wars, car accidents, and one to the overzealous ministrations of a particularly drunken Klan attack.

They knew each other by a chance remark Randall made when both happened to be in Wood's Store, the little one-room convenience shop, run by a couple even more ancient than they were; one of the few places an old Black man like Glen could get necessities without harassment. Randall was standing next to the ancient Nehi Grape Soda box located against the bare pine wall, under a faded Massey Ferguson pin-up calendar. "Knight to Queen's four, checkmate," he'd said when he located a YooHoo pop bottle, since those were rare now.

Glen, peering at some rather dated cans of tuna nearby, looked up in surprise. "You play chess?"

“Used to.”

And so Glen and Randall started playing once a week, quickly expanding to three to four times as their camaraderie grew. They played at each other's houses on a random schedule, splitting wins and losses just as randomly, which was the joy of being evenly matched. They spoke nothing of each other's past and tragedies, the books written clearly on their faces, and because that was then and this was now, the dwindling of their lives; and it was a pleasant way to pass what little time was left.

In the way of small towns and passed-by regions, they were tolerated. Two silly old men playing chess, and driving around together in cars too old to bear much more use, seen at the Piggly-Wiggly in Enterprise gathering food and often on each other's porches late at night, a chess board and a bottle of Jack between them. Old White men and old Black men could mix because they were rather harmless together, but there were still peanut-farmer traditions to uphold. “Coupla old queers,” Davis, the red-neckiest of all the peanut farmers, spat one day when both of them happened to be at Spencer's, the three-room convenience store (with gas pumps, no less) in the middle of Goodlyn. Glen had given Davis the disgusted look allowed by old Black men at the end of their toleration of redneck culture, but Randall gave him something else. It was a look of disquietude, of promised violence with capability. Davis, made uncomfortable, muttered and walked off, uncertain, and the witnessing rednecks shied.

“You used to do something dangerous,” Glen summarized when they got into his duct-taped Buick Century and headed off for a two-man barbecue and all-night chess fest.

“Yes,” was all Randall said. It was the only time either of them alluded to the past.

But, apparently, it was known to those who made it

their business to know, and one morning the Sheriff pulled into Randall's drive, behind Glen's Century. Glen and Randall were off to the left, about two football fields away, examining the watermelon vines Randall was in the process of murdering. "What'd you do?" Glen asked Randall as they straightened, dusted off, and suspiciously eyed the approaching khaki-clad, straw-hatted, and stereotypically overweight sheriff.

"Nothing. Maybe he's here for you," Randall pointed out. Glen snorted. Not since the fifties, when he or one of his brothers was the sheriff's regular guest, accused of something heinous like self-regard.

"Mornin' gentlemen." The sheriff squinted in the sun, took off his hat, and wiped his brow, the comment including Glen because he was a new breed of lawman, or so he thought. "Hot 'un. Those going to live?" he pointed at the vines. Randall just shrugged. Glen just stood. "Well, sulfur might help. Anyways," he looked straight at Randall, "I'm wondering if I could call on your expertise."

Randall nodded, and Glen looked at him. The sheriff turned, and Randall followed, but he stopped and gestured at Glen, "Come on." The sheriff frowned, which was all the incentive Glen needed. He fell in step and got into the back of the patrol car, sweltering immediately because the windows didn't roll down and the air conditioning was broken.

They drove out of Damascus to where it joined the Elba Road and made a turn on a dusty farm trail, Glen watching the vortex behind them because it was like life disappearing. They pulled into Old Man Daniel's weedy barnyard and got out, walked past it and over a rise to see three or four men, one of them a deputy, standing over big dark lumps on the red peanut-stubbed ground. As they approached, the lumps became three dead boars.

The group around the dead boars looked up: Daniel, short, and Scot, mean and rednecky, glared at

Glen, but the upset in his eyes was already saturated. One of Daniel's sons, the one who was going to college, Joe, that's right, moved uneasily on his feet, glad for the distraction. Glen saw why. The three boars were arranged in a circle, heads toward each other, fangs bared to the sky. Not a mark on them. Unnatural.

Randall broke the silent circle and kneeled, carefully examining each boar, duck-walking around them to pull back skin, and push at fat and hide. Took about twenty minutes, then he stood and walked around the boars in an ever-increasing spiral, his eyes locked on the ground, until he had passed around the men who watched, but said nothing, because if the sheriff brought him, then the old codger must know what he's doing. Glen wondered a little more about Randall's past.

"What time you find 'em?" Randall asked Daniel.

"Sunrise," said in a surprised voice because, well, 'round here, work started at daybreak.

"See anything else odd?"

Daniels spat a stream of brown juice. "Ain't that odd enough?" he said, his dribbling chin taking in the boars.

Randall smiled. "Did you see anything moving? Moving away, I mean, very fast."

Daniels snorted, "They'se daid, they'se ain't moving nowhere." The set of his face conveyed how stupid he thought the question was. The set of Randall's conveyed the same sense about Daniels'. "Thanks," he said, turned, and headed back to the car.

"Thass it?" Daniels called after, incredulous, bantam-sized, and just as belligerent, and Glen eyed him as he fell in behind. "They'se blood all drained, ya know!"

"BFO," Randall muttered as Glen took his shoulder, and the sheriff hastened up, falling into step. "Coyots?" the sheriff puffed, wiping at his forehead as they made the rise and descended to the car.

“No,” Randall said. “First time you’ve seen this, I’m betting.”

“That’s right.”

“Any reports of missing people? Children, especially?”

“No more than usual,” said as they resumed their places in the car.

“Um,” Randall nodded. “Let me know when this happens again.”

“It’s going to happen again?” The sheriff pulled out, and the dust swirled behind, but Glen was too interested and leaned forward to listen.

“Yes,” Randall said, “and, each time it does, use your GPS and start mapping the locations. And let me know, immediately, if people start disappearing. In more than the usual way,” he added.

The sheriff blinked in puzzlement but knew more than Glen did about Randall’s past, so said nothing. Glen didn’t either, until after the sheriff dropped them off and left, and they had made their way back to the interrupted vines. “What’s BFO?”

“Brilliant Flash of the Obvious,” said Randall, and they returned to saving plants.

The Inspiration

I. Vampires

A. Books

1. The classic is, of course, Bram Stoker's [*Dracula*](#), which is still the best novel for vampire lore. Practically every other vampire book borrows from it. Stoker accumulated numerous legends and myths from various traditions to create the vampire we have all come to love. So if there's one in your neighborhood and you need a quick brush-up on how to get rid of it ...
2. [*Salem's Lot*](#), Stephen King. Still the best 'modern' vampire tale because it updates Stoker to this century ... well, close enough. All those other 'modern' vampire novels that follow families and covens and angst-ridden shiny boys, meh.

B. Movies

1. Bela Lugosi's [*Dracula*](#) is considered the classic but, man, is it slow. The 1979 *Dracula*, starring Frank Langella, is a far more faithful adaptation of the Stoker novel, and quite decent.
2. Any [*Count Yorga*](#) movie.
3. More recently, [*Let the Right One In*](#) is faithful to the legend, and an overlooked gem is the Iranian movie, [*A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*](#).

II. Creatures from Lagoons, Black or Otherwise

A. Books

1. Anything by [*HP Lovecraft*](#).
2. [*Jaws*](#), although it's just nature, man. Not malicious. No, not at all.

B. Movies

1. [*Creature from the Black Lagoon*](#). The classic.
2. [*Gorgo*](#). The American Godzilla.

III. Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

A. Books

1. The [Robert Louis Stevenson](#) classic.
2. [The Picture of Dorian Gray](#), Oscar Wilde.

B. Movies

1. The [Frederick March](#) classic.
2. And just for fun: [The Daughter of Dr. Jekyll](#)

IV. Werewolves

A. Books:

1. Like vampires, there's a ton of werewolf books, the classic being [The Werewolf of Paris](#) by Guy Endore. Stephen King's [The Cycle of the Werewolf](#) is another good one.
2. Avoid the ones that try to make them all angsty. Werewolves are monsters, not misunderstood teenagers.

B. Movies

1. Tons of good werewolf movies, starting with Claude Rains' [The Wolf Man](#). His way is thorny.
2. Modern werewolf movies have been more true to the character than modern vampire movies, two standouts being [An American Werewolf in London](#) and [The Howling](#).

V. Frankenstein

A. Books

1. The original, Mary Shelly's [Frankenstein](#).
2. Brian Aldiss, [Frankenstein Unbound](#), a sci-fi novel about a sci-fi novel.

B. Movies

1. The original [Boris Karloff](#).
2. [The Curse of Frankenstein](#), which inspired Wilfred.

VI. Ghosts

A. Books

1. Lots of classic ghost stories out there, mostly as

parts of story collections. [Great American Ghost Stories](#) is one, and any [Alfred Hitchcock](#) anthology.

2. Everyone says [The Haunting of Hill House](#) by Shirley Jackson, but it never moved me. Better ones are [The Shining](#), Stephen King, and [Ammie, Come Home](#) by Barbara Michaels.

B. Movies

1. Lots of classic ghost movies, too, but one of the earliest and still one of the best is [The Uninvited](#), [The Terror](#) and [Cry of the Banshee](#) are some good 'uns.

2. [The Changeling](#) is, IMHO, the best modern ghost movie made.

VII. The Mummy

A. Books

1. I have not read that many books with mummies as the center, but Bram Stoker's [The Jewel of the Seven Stars](#) is probably the prototype, and probably inspired Boris Karloff's The Mummy. Probably.

2. The [Goosebumps series](#) has a few dedicated to mummies. Goosebumps is always a fun read.

B. Movies

1. Boris Karloff's [The Mummy](#), as previously mentioned.

2. The [update](#) with Brendan Fraser is a fairly decent, if a little silly, movie in its own right.

3. As for King Arthur, hands down best movie ever made on the subject: [Excalibur](#).

VIII. The Invisible Man

A. Books

1. The original classic, H. G. Wells' [The Invisible Man](#). Another classic is Ambrose Bierce's short story [The Damned Thing](#), which is an invisible monster.

2. I have not read any modern novels dedicated exclusively to physical invisibility, so I can't

recommend any. Lots of invisibility as plot devices (Cloaks of Invisibility, etc.) but not the subject.

B. Movies

1. Claude Rains again, [*The Invisible Man*](#).
2. Just about every modern treatment of this has been terrible. I can't recommend any of them. Elizabeth Moss's movie, [*The Invisible Man*](#), might be decent, but I haven't seen it.

IX. Zombies

A. Books

1. The classic definition of zombies are the dead brought back to life by a voodoo priest to do their bidding. Probably the best book with this definition is [*The Serpent and the Rainbow*](#), which is also a decent movie.
2. For the George Romero zombie, my goodness, so much to choose from, but Max Brooks. [*World War Z*](#) is a good place to start.

B. Movies

1. For the classic voodoo, [*White Zombie*](#). Bela Lugosi.
2. For the modern re-interpretation, [*Night of the Living Dead*](#). Romero, once more.

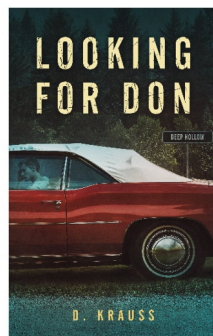
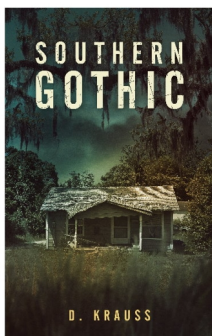
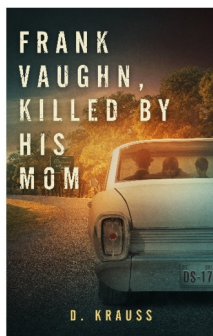
These should get you started.

About the Author

D. Krauss was born in Germany, adopted by a military family, and so became a US citizen in a roundabout way. He lived in Oklahoma and Alabama, somehow ending up in New Jersey where he lived every single Bruce Springsteen song. He joined the USAF, staying twenty years longer than intended. He has been a cotton picker, sod buster, painter of roads, surgical orderly, weatherman, librarian, special agent, analyst, and a bus driver. D's been married over 50 years (yep, same woman) and has a wildman bass guitarist for a son. You can reach him at <http://www.dustyskull.com>.

OTHER BOOKS BY D. KRAUSS

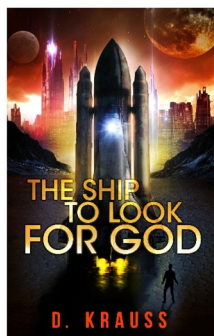
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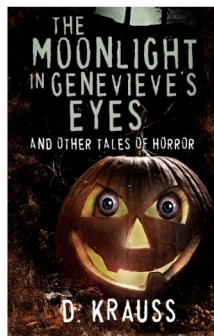
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