

DREW
STEPPEK



Knuckle
Supper

ULTIMATE GUTTER FIX EDITION





**Knuckle
Supper**

The ultimate Gutter Fix Edition

By Drew Stepek



Blood Bound Books

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Produced in the United States of America

Third Edition

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Children of the Night is a private, non-profit, tax-exempt organization founded in 1979. They are dedicated to assisting children between the ages of 11 and 17 who are forced to prostitute on the streets for food to eat and a place to sleep. They have rescued girls and boys from prostitution and the domination of vicious pimps, and they provide all programs with the support of private donations.

They are making a difference in the lives of hundreds of children each year. Their commitment to rescuing these children from the ravages of prostitution is shared with a small but committed group of detectives, FBI agents, and prosecutors in Los Angeles, Hollywood, Santa Ana, Anaheim, San Diego, other areas of California, Las Vegas, Portland, Billings, Montana; Seattle, Washington; Miami, New York, Minneapolis, Atlanta, Phoenix, Hawaii, and Washington D.C.—all stops on the child prostitution circuit. And their numbers keep growing as more and more dedicated individuals become concerned about the welfare of these desperate children.

Child prostitutes require specialized care for effective intervention. Most of the children victimized by prostitution were first victimized by a parent or early caregiver. Most have been tortured by treacherous pimps, and many testify in lengthy court proceedings against the pimps who have forced them to work as prostitutes.

In most cases these children do not have appropriate homes to return to, and the only relative who is a suitable guardian may live far away from the child's hometown. For many the only option is an out of home placement, college dorm, maternity home, or mental health program. For those who reach 18 and need additional time to prepare to enter the mainstream society, independent living programs are recommended; special education programs are advised for those who need extra help with school, and alcohol or drug recovery homes are suggested for those with substance abuse problems.

Children of the Night is in demand to assist other agencies across the country and around the world to develop similar programs.

www.childrenofthenight.org

**Up to 10% of the revenue from *Knuckle Supper* will be donated to
Children of the Night.**

FORWARD

Knuckle Supper is a dish that ain't for the squeamish, that's for sure. But if you've got an appetite for vampire business that goes steps beyond the pale, then Drew Stepek may have your bloody number. Forget the neutered, neurotic undead that pop-culture's been feeding you. The dirty, amoral gangs of bloodsuckers that roam the streets of Los Angeles in *Knuckle Supper* are unsentimental, unrepentant killers, preying on anybody who gets in their way (and a lot of other folks, too). It's a hell of a ride, but like I said before, it ain't for everyone. Part satire, part gore fest, part gut-punch, *Knuckle Supper* is a brutal book, complete with a horrific, streets-eye view of the grimy and gory lives of a new breed of Los Angeles gangster. The jaded, drug-addicted vampires whose unpleasant un-lives are so violent and mean, they barely live out a regular human lifespan, much less make it anywhere close to sainted immortality.

There's no philosophy and no lofty proclamations about what it MEANS to live so long and be so different from the herd. No, the vamps in *Knuckle Supper* are so animal-like in their behavior, their lives are brutish and short... their reality so grimy and dank, the book reads like a nature special about psychopaths. In some strange alternate reality, Iceberg Slim wrote a splatterpunk riff in *Less than Zero* and *Knuckle Supper* was the unholy spawn.

As you're about to find out, Drew Stepek is one sick fuck. I've known that since our days together roaming the halls of Larry Flynt Publications. If you ever have the chance to meet him, don't be fooled by his relaxed, easy-does-it California bonhomie. The Dude's got issues. Sure: you could fill a nice-sized suburban pool with the blood that's spilled during the course of this book, but despite all that (or maybe because of it all), he's doing something with *Knuckle Supper* that's been kinda lacking as of late in vampire lit...he's fusing good ol' blood and guts with a mighty conscience, exploring real issues and not coming up with any easy answers. Queasy answers, maybe, but no, nothing easy. Nothing pat. Nothing remotely safe for the mall vamps and their ilk. And bless his dark little heart for it.

So yeah, like I said before, *Knuckle Supper* is a dish that ain't for the squeamish. But if you're ready for a new kind of vampire and a new kind of vampire tale, you've found your sanguinary Shangri-La. But a word of warning: you might want to start flipping the pages on an empty stomach lest you find yourself getting a bit overwhelmed by what's about to follow.

Tighten your seatbelts, kids – it's gonna be a bloody read.

~ Gabe Soria / Author of *Life Sucks*

Man is the only creature that consumes without producing. He does not give milk, he does not lay eggs, he is too weak to pull the plough, he cannot run fast enough to catch rabbits.

Yet he is lord of all the animals.

~ George Orwell



1

MERCHANTS

Every once in a while, things went horribly wrong.

“Dez, get her in the fucking bathroom, you asshole!” I screamed, subduing the pimp by rapping him across the neck with a crowbar. He dropped, snot from his jughead splashed all over the hardwood floor.

The dogs went into a frenzy in the backyard.

“And tell the dogs to shut up,” I added.

Dez ran his fingers through his hair, trying to get it out of his face. I always wished he’d cut that shit-hair of his. While licking gel off his index finger, he whispered, “What the hell, bro?”

The pimp squirmed around. He was still alive. Our little blood theater wasn’t a wrap... yet. He struggled to his feet and made a run for the door, but I tripped him by chucking the crowbar at his legs. It was enough to send him nosediving back to the floor. Unfortunately, I only managed to bone-out one of his legs.

I looked at Dez, who was restraining the little girl. She wasn’t shaking. I think she was just shocked. She probably figured we were going to rape her. “Just get her in the bathroom, dumbass. She’s fucking twelve.”

Dez shot me a salute, opened the bathroom door, and shoved the girl inside. He bolted it from the outside. “You can be a real pussy sometimes, RJ,” he said.

You’d think that more junkies would find it strange that our bathroom had not one, but three deadbolts that locked from the outside. Then again, I took some mean smashes. My diet didn’t exactly consist of low-fat chicken breasts stir-fried lightly with organic veggies. That being said, I wouldn’t envy anyone locked up with me in close quarters.

Without acknowledging that once I got high I was going to beat the shit out of

Dez for his stupidity, I proceeded to the pimp. While brushing the blood from his nose and out of his mouth, he crawled to our front door, trying to get at the locks that prevented him from establishing contact with the outside world. The bathroom wasn't the only door with deadbolts. His yellowed, chipped nails dug into the wood like he was holding onto the side of Mount Everest without a rope, a carabineer, or a spotter. Trembling, he got halfway up the door. His compounded left leg dangled sideways, more hindrance at this point than a method of propping him up. He felt around the first lock and dropped a little bit.

I ripped off a stainless-steel security chain from around my neck. "Looking for these?" I unhooked the clasp on the homemade necklace and let it unravel to my waist, revealing three keys on the end. The pimp looked at me, stunned. It was one of those moments when someone realizes that they're fucked. Dez ran from the bathroom door and snatched the key and chain out of my hand.

The pimp cried as his head rested on the door. "Please, bro, don't kill me. I'm nobody."

He slid down to where his ascension began, defeated. They were always defeated in the end.

Dez walked over to him. "You are nobody, bitch, and now you're gonna get me high for the rest of the night."

I grabbed Dez on the shoulder. "Don't kill him, idiot. You know that's not what we want."

He shrugged off my hand and proceeded toward the bitch-beater who was crying against his last hope to escape.

"Wait a minute," the pimp whimpered. "I know who you are." He braced himself up slightly by planting his palms onto the floor. "What are you? BBP? Sangre? Battlesnakes?" His words stumbled as he pleaded. "I... I... I can help you."

Dez continued his trek. "Wrong, motherfucker. Do I look like a Beverly Hills shithead to you? Do I look like a Mexican? Am I a fucking Rasta? We're Knucklers."

He stood over the trapped rat and kicked at his almost emancipated leg. The pimp slid backward on his mitts. Then, without even hesitating, my snaky friend began thumping the chain and keys down on his head, using them as a weapon.

"Stop, Dez." In all reality, I didn't care if this piece of shit was mortally injured, but he had to be alive. We both knew that even a douche like this guy wasn't any good to us "quiet."

I nabbed Dez's wrist before the chain collided with his skull for the fifth time. "Don't be a psycho. Do you want to get high or not?" I ripped the chain out of his hand, tossed it into the dining room and added, "I get first dibs."

He flicked a blood droplet off his girly eyelashes. "You always get first dibs."

The pimp grabbed his leg and ran his tongue across his toothless gums. I walked back toward the coffee table, grabbed two loaded syringes, and wiped off all the asshole goop that had landed on them, noticing for the first time that the viscous beating had pitched his gore over most of the room.

I put one syringe in my front pocket. "Hold him still."

I looked at the bathroom door. Not a sound. Either the pre-teen girl behind it was scared, assuming she was next, or she didn't care whether or not we killed the asshole that dropkicked her down Sunset Boulevard on a nightly basis.

Dez got behind the pimp, secured him in a headlock and extended his forearm toward me with the wrist held upright. "Why did we have to go through all that? We should have just killed both of them at the same time. She's a junkie, RJ."

"Just hold him still," I commanded. "You know there isn't another way to do this. You wanna end up back on Skid Row eating rats?" I bent down on one knee, inhaled the warmth of human and grabbed the pimp about halfway up his forearm.

Dez freed up his arms from the headlock and popped both of the pimp's ears, causing the scumbag's head to waver around like a cartoon cat who took a frying pan to the face. Without wasting a beat, Dez replaced his restraint with his legs by crossing them over the dude's torso and then looped his feet around back.

With his hands now free, Dez yelled, "Hand me the needle."

I did as he asked. His hand was jittery as he accepted it.

"Don't fuck this up for me, dude," I insisted. "Stay steady. Shit, you act like this is the first time something went wrong. Remember when that one homeless guy started squirting shit and piss all over the house? This is nothin'."

"Me?" he squealed and he flippantly tapped on the cylinder and pushed the air out of the syringe. He tightened his leg lock and the pimp's eyes rolled up, showing nothing but white. I was pretty sure the guy wasn't going anywhere. We have superhuman strength and all that. "I knew this was going to be more of a problem than it was worth. You and these fucking cattle. Like they give two jogs about you." He shuffled his hand with the syringe, emulating jerking off.

Brown blood bubbled out of the pimp's mouth. He tried to chew on his lip, but he came up with nothing but gums and crust. The chain sprayed his teeth all over the carpet like we were playing fifty-two pick up in a dentist's office.

My grip tightened on the forearm. I felt his heartbeat and an orgasmic flush swept through my body.

"Whatever." I grabbed onto the pimp's middle finger, pushing the other fingers down and out of the way. "You really need to get that hair out of your eyes, Dez." I laughed and made a weepy emo face. "What? Are you a fifteen-year-old kid, angry because his pussy hurts?"

Dez laughed a little and tapped at the needle again with the hand that was locked around the pimp's neck. "Someday, you're gonna thank me for always being here. You could never do this alone."

I held up the pimp's middle finger. "Fuck you. Get it done. One... two... Spike this asshole!"

Laughing, Dez sunk the needle into the pimp's wrist. As soon as all the heroin was in his blood, I cranked the elbow quickly to the left and then to the right. Knowing the arm was loose by feeling the already-brittle bone give, I commanded, "Pull the plug!"

Without hesitation Dez pulled the spike from the wrist and I tore the forearm from the pimp's body and held it vertically in the air. I quickly snapped off the "fuck you" finger directly at the knuckle. Then I sucked and allowed the blood to flow into my mouth like some deranged beer bong.

As I drank the nectar, I scuttled across the floor, back to the coffee table. I searched around with one eye and my hand and grabbed a powdery new latex glove. I stretched out the glove with my hand and capped the end of the severed arm.

"Hurry up, RJ, this grit is going into shock and losing a lot of blood. If his heart stops, it's your ass."

Both Dez's arms were now taming the squirming body of the pimp.

Knowing time was running out, I kicked over a glass bong and then inched the bong stand toward me with my right foot.

"Hurry!" Dez screamed.

Finally, I spit the knuckle out of my mouth, placed the arm in the bong holder and dragged my rapidly fading ass across the floor. Dez released his legs and reversed his position swiftly so he was facing his prey. He laid the body down on its back. I grabbed what remained of the already trashed arm, cranked it toward the sternum and rested it above his heart. Dez dropped his weight onto the pimp's chest.

Trying to prevent more blood from coming out of the torn appendage, I wrapped a towel around the break point, then massaged my leg against his chest, toward the still attached arm, hoping to redirect the blood flow. Dez hopped to the intact arm and more sloppily than I had, he severed it at the forearm.

I nabbed the needle from my front pocket, forced out the air and tapped at it as I tried to hold in blood from the other arm. Keeping the dying pimp still, I took the needle and plunged it into a vein on the wrist. When the syringe was empty, Dez cracked off the knuckle with his teeth.

As he started sucking away, I moved over to the top of the armless pimp, hugged his neck like a strangler without the element of surprise and with one turn

to the right and one turn to the left, I removed his head from what still remained of his torso. The chest plate sucked in one last time and gassed out from his five open holes. He pissed and shit himself. Dez managed to make it over to the coffee table to get his latex cap. I tossed the head aside and went back toward the bong display.

“That’s a mess,” Dez joked. His eyes rolled back and forth from the heroin.

I held up my arm-bong for cheers. He just fell backward on a beanbag chair.

“Fuck you then,” I said, turning the arm up to my mouth. “Call one of your little Deziens to come clean this up.” Deziens. That’s what I called his pussy-ass followers.

The dope began flowing with the blood of the pimp through the dust inside me. It felt nice, warm, comforting. My head nodded back and forth and bobbed side-to-side. The feeling was so comforting because it was the only thing I ever knew how to feel. Heroin meant more to me than my body, my face, my words, and my brain.

Dez and I are in a pack called the Knucklers. Yeah, I suppose we’re vampires but more importantly, we’re junkies and gangster motherfuckers.

“RJ?”

“Yeah?”

“What are we going to do about the girl in the bathroom?”

“Good question, Dez.”



Usually after Dez went to go fade for a few hours, I listened to music in my own daze. I was a collector of old school British and American vinyl seven-inch punk rock records. Something about the sound was so raw and so shittily recorded that it always put me in a really good vaporous state. It was kind of like being in a slow-motion scene in a movie where you faintly hear music, but it sounds like a single speaker boom box being broadcast through a tin can. Adding to the majesty of my circulatory antifreeze, my dogs howled at the Los Angeles wind chimes outside—police sirens.

I worshipped the smell and taste of the heroin that summer night. The drug was always quite a bit more pleasant than the blood that I had to use to bulldoze it into my system. I always have some blood in my body, but it’s more like a small reserve of canteen water being carefully monitored by someone lost in the desert. It depletes and doesn’t come back.

I spent hours (probably more like minutes) sifting through my stacks-upon-stacks of records, spreading them out all over the floor and looking at the artwork

on the front that was more often than not a Xeroxed paper. The biggest pain in the ass when I was in a state of fucked-upness was switching out the little yellow spindle adapters that go in the middle. I thought for a long time that I'd just buy a thousand of those things and just put them inside all my records to make things a lot easier. For me though, that took time away from killing people and doing drugs and shit. After all, I led the Knucklers.

I tried to be careful not to bust any of my 45s because they were collector's items. Sad thing is that I often flopped around the floor like a fish that just landed on the deck of a fisherman's boat. As I sipped away on the pimp's arm filled with the garbage nectar, I dropped my knee onto a record and cracked it. It sounded like a bone breaking. Pissed off, I flung it across the living room into the kitchen. I didn't look at what it was. I hoped when I woke from my glaze that it wasn't one of the expensive ones. They were hard to replace because when they originally came out, the bands only printed about a hundred of them.

It was always a great thing to be wasted... at least while it was going on. I sat on a cloud and convinced myself for the longest time that I'd remember everything in the morning. I rarely did, though. I looked in the direction of the record I shot like skeet. I went to see what it said on the label and whether or not the wax was fixable. Then, I tripped on my own feet, knocking my arm bong onto the records.

"Goddammit!" I yelled at myself.

I picked up the bong and grabbed a Herrington jacket off the couch to dab away the mess. Thankfully, most of the records were in plastic sleeves, but the dust that collected on them was mixed with blood, urine, phlegm, and whatever else was in the pimp's dislodged arms and head that turned into this atrocious, gelatinous concoction that made me vomit.

Barfing made things much worse. I tried to suck it back down my esophagus but as soon as the barf retreated back toward my stomach, it snowballed and came back up bigger, stronger, and smellier.

Stymied, I slumped my back against the entertainment center behind me and crossed my arms like a frustrated little baby, bumping the needle on the player across the entire record. Then, I scratched my forehead. I immediately realized that I was rubbing retch, combined with the pimp's special sauce, all over my head and hair. I tilted my head sideways, let out a big "Hmfff," and asked myself rather impolitely: "What the fuck is wrong with you?"

Looking around the room filled with heroin needles, body parts, shit, piss, vomit, records, blood, and a stiff pimp, I answered my own question. "Oh yeah."

Old RJ was never defeated, though. Like I told Dez earlier, one of his little Deziens should come over and clean the mess. So, I picked myself up, cautiously, and made my way past my bedroom and knocked on his door.

“Dez?” I asked.

No response.

“Dez? Can you call one of your little pussy shits to come over here and clean up my mess?” I opened the door a crack. Dez was sprawled out on my guest bed, covered in blood and narcotics, hugging his chunk of the pimp like a wooby.

“Hey, Dez?”

He rolled away from facing the door and let out a high-pitched wheeze. “What the fuck do you want, RJ?”

My face cringed a little. His winey voice stabbed my ears. I stayed out of the light in the hallway. I didn’t want him to see what a mess I had made of myself. Pig Pen from the Peanuts Gang would have been ashamed to hang out with me.

I brought my negativity down a notch. “I was wondering,” I began as I picked a chunk of puke off the side of my nose. “If you can call your friends to come clean up. The house is a disaster.”

Dez shot up in bed. “Close the fucking door, you junkie. We’ll have them clean it tomorrow. Fuck, dude, the heroin wasn’t that good!” He threw his portion of the pimp at the door. The severed arm slammed across my face, creating a wind pocket that blew my own stench directly up my nose. I put my hands up to my mouth but it was too late. Spunk bombed through the alleys between my fingers and drooled down my arms to my elbows.

Seemingly forgetting everything that had happened in the past hour, I quickly unbolted the bathroom door and took off my shirt. After throwing it in the shower, I headed toward the sink, cranked on the faucets, and began cupping water all over the upper half of my body. I swear that I saw stink lines and squiggles emanating from my head. It was pretty rare that I gave myself a full sink bath, but turning on the shower at that point seemed like more of a chore. If the sink is good enough for the French, then it was good enough for me.

After I was somewhat satisfied, I turned off the water flow and dragged my feet back to the living room. I figured I’d start cleaning. I blacked out instead.



About an hour later, I woke up. I looked over to my right. All my records were stacked nicely. I take that back, they were stacked, sure... but, in between each one, sludge dripped over the sides, making the mound look like a shit sandwich with all the fixings.

“That’s funny,” I said to myself. “I don’t remember doing that.” I had never, in fact, ever stacked my records until the morning because I always wound up in a

situation like the bodily chaos I created earlier that night.

I eyeballed the room to see if Dez had called one of his Deziens to come over and clean while I was passed out. No one was there. Hmmm. I knew Dez didn't clean it up.

Like a kid on a pogo stick, I suddenly bounced to my feet and ran down the hallway toward the bathroom. I tried to reassure myself that I had stacked the records, but it was pointless. Even that fucked up I wouldn't have left the puke and sludge all over them.

Sure enough, when I reached the shitter, all the bolts were unlocked. Still too wasted to use my brain enough to decide what I was going to do about the little whore in there, I swiftly and discreetly locked all the deadbolts. The last thing I wanted to do was explain to Dez how she got out of the bathroom. On top of that, she had been in our living room... stacking my records for some reason.



DELINQUENTS

While the rancid stench from our dance with the devil still encased the living room, *I* on the other hand smelled like Irish Spring. After shaking off my buzz and having taken a proper shower in the master bathroom, I decided it was time to figure out what to do about the twelve-year-old whore in the community bathroom. Thankfully, Dez was still in bed. Typical of him. In his defense, it was my fault the girl wasn't dead yet.

I knocked on the shitter door. "Are you okay in there?" No response.

I unlocked the first bolt. "I'm coming in. If you are thinking about ambushing me when I open the door, I wouldn't recommend it."

Clink. I heard what I imagined was the towel bar dropping to the tile.

I unlocked the second deadbolt and spoke calmly as I peered into the bathroom. "Smart move."

The brittle girl was standing on the edge of the tub with her toes curled over the porcelain edge like a gargoyle. Her body looked shaken, but her eyes told another story. The little human seemed indebted that we had offed the pimp and spared her life.

"I'm coming in, and I don't *think* I'm going to hurt you." I opened the door to its full extent and propped both my arms up against either side of the door frame, blocking any escape. "I know you're probably a little freaked out here. It's kind of difficult to explain."

She locked onto my eyes and boldly said, "Not really. Pimps owe people money."

She smirked as she brushed her greasy skunk-streaked hair out of her young face. Her blistered bottom lip quivered slightly and her piggy nostrils flared: open-

closed-open-open-closed. Her squinty, blood-cracked eyes rolled around slowly, trying to hatch her escape route.

“So, are you gonna fuck me or kill me, or fuck me then kill me, or kill me then fuck me? You sure didn’t seem interested when you came in here earlier to wash all that shit off in the sink.” She started to pull down her ripped jeans shorts.

“Jesus, keep your pants on,” I said, dropping my guard to cover my eyes. As quickly as I covered my face, I was belted in the nuts with my stainless-steel shower radio. “Owwww!” I yelled, doubling over in pain.

She booked past me and headed toward the front room. In an aggravated state, I attempted to appeal to any sense that this little whore might have. “You can’t get out, stupid.” Reflecting, that probably wasn’t the smartest thing to say.

She ran back over to me and unleashed a barrage of blows to my neck and back with the radio as it dialed through three or four Latino stations. “No shit, asshole.”

After about ten blows, I caught the radio with my right hand and nabbed her wrist with my left. I could’ve snapped that thing off so easily. For some dumb reason, I didn’t.

“Relax. I slid the radio across the room on the hardwood floor and grabbed her other wrist. Oh man, did I want to break both her arms backwards, crack them off and just beat the shit out of her.

She felt my power. She tried to get me to release. “Don’t you fucking touch me, creep,” she yelled.

I nudged her with my eyes. “There’s your pimp.” And then threw her down next to him.

“I know, fucktard,” she roared. “I saw him earlier when I came out here to try to steal some of your heroin and see if I could sneak out. You were passed out with your hand in your pants, queer.”

“Do you really want to end up like that? You aren’t going anywhere until we figure this all out.”

She shoved herself away from the corpse. “What do we need to figure out? Are you going to kill me or what?” She backed herself into the corner. Her head twitched and she covered her face with her hair as she tried to avoid looking at the pimp. “Who are you psychos?”

I cracked my neck and fully stood up. Walking cautiously like a child trying to feed a deer, I moved in a little closer. “I come in peace.” I put up my arms to show her that I wasn’t planning any shenanigans. “Kinda.”

She shoved herself farther into the corner and her hardened eyes started to swell. “What the fuck are you?”

I hesitated, unsure how to answer the question. Then, I blurted out, “I’m a gangster.”

“You don’t look like a gangster.” Her eyes focused on my chest. My eyes inched down to see what she was looking at. I already knew. On my chest was my ink: A Batman symbol. In my defense, it was actually the symbol for skater Steve Caballero’s band, The Faction. The thing was that I had the band’s name written on top of the black bat in dark blue ink. In other words, you couldn’t really see it.

I grabbed for a shirt thrown on the back of a chair and casually buttoned it up. “What do you know about the gangs in Hollywood, anyway? You’re like twelve.”

She smirked; obviously she knew I was embarrassed by the dumb tattoo. “Gee, I don’t know. I’ve been on the streets, turned out, for over a year now.”

I didn’t understand how she was staying so relatively calm with the shredded corpse on the floor about six feet away from her or why she didn’t try to kill me when she stacked the crud records.

“Your name’s RJ, right? I heard your lovers’ quarrel with your friend earlier.”

“Lovers’ quarrel?” What does that mean?” Stunned by her ease in my slaughterhouse, I finally asked. “Why aren’t you freaking out at all?”

“You just killed my pimp. Now answer the question, Batman: What are you?”

I scratched at the tattoo through my shirt. “I guess you could call me a vampire.”

“You’re kinda out of shape for a vampire,” she chortled.

She was right. I stood just under six feet and had fried hair that I’d call a rat’s nest if it wasn’t an insult to vermin everywhere. I didn’t have a lot of body tone because most of my flesh seemed bloated from narcotics and alcohol. I had a big lower lip and an even bigger nose. I tried to brush the tobacco off my teeth as much as possible but since they were contained inside a walking carcass, they never really shined like chompers on a toothpaste commercial.

I had nice eyes though, so that could be considered a double helping of cherries on top of a turd. At least that’s what I looked like the last time I stood face-to-face with my own reflection. Contrary to popular belief, we have always been able to see our reflections. No matter. I didn’t like looking at myself. The only thing I ever saw was a serial killer looking back at me and laughing at me for somehow being able to live.

Finally, I said, “Thanks, I know I’m out of shape.”

Thud! Thud! Thud!

I looked at the front door and then at the little skunk girl.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

“Shit.”

I grabbed her by the back of her striped halter top and rushed her back to the bathroom and threw her in. I put my index finger to my mouth. “Shhhhh,” I whispered. Down the hall, I heard Dez fumbling his way out of bed. I snapped the

outer bathroom locks in place and ran to his door to greet him just as he opened it. “Heeeeeeeey!” I said with a smile.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Dez looked up at me and squinted. “What the fuck is wrong with you? Answer the damn door, RJ.”

I improvised. “I came by to get you first. Is someone supposed to come by here?”

He squinted at me a second time. “No.” He shoved me aside and headed toward the front door as I kept my eye on the bathroom. Aloof, I followed him down the hall. He put his face against the door; I got into a grappling position, as if I was about to enter a wrestling ring. Dez looked over at me again. “Hey, retard. What in the hell is wrong with you?”

I looked at myself in the mirror next to the door. I did look like an idiot. “Ummmm, I did some blow.”

“How?”

I kicked what was left of the pimp on the floor in the ribs. “I just mixed it in with the blood from this asshole.”

“That was a waste.” He re-pressed his head against the door. “Who is it?” he asked.

“It’s Linnwood Perry,” the voice on the other side returned.

“What do you want?”

“Copper told me to come over here. I need something taken care of.”

Dez looked at me as if I had an answer for the intentions of our visitor. I simply shrugged my shoulders.



The illustrious Linnwood Perry was the leader of a vampire gang who ran the Beverly Hills and Bel Air area: The BBPs, or the Blue Blooded Perrys. They were a bunch of wannabe rich kids who loved coke and all dressed similarly in Fred Perry tennis sweaters, stack haircuts, and white leather tennis shoes. All of them had the last name Perry: Linnwood Perry, Greg Perry, Lance Perry, et cetera. We thought it was pretty lame, but truth be told, they were a ruthless bunch. The name and look came from a gang of soccer hooligans in England called the Perry Boys. The originators were these poor kids from the streets that stole clothing and put out this vibe that they were these normal preppy kids and then they’d just kick the shit out of people.

Linnwood surveyed the room. “Looks like some partying went on here tonight.

Wow, look at this loser.”

He wandered over to the pimp.

“Damn, you Knucklers sure are dirtbags.”

“So, what’s the deal, Linn?” I asked as I yawned, dipped a cigarette in the pimp’s eye socket and lit it. For some reason the blood from the eye, mixed with a cigarette and fire was tastier than just dipping it in blood. If Perry wasn’t a vampire like Dez and me, I guess he might have found it intimidating.

“We have a snitch.” Perry produced a pack of Dunhills from the pocket of his button down that was nicely pressed under his V-neck sweater. Covering his nose with a monogrammed hanky, he bent down to the pimp, pressed the filter end of the cigarette into one of the missing tooth craters in the mouth and then lit it with a Zippo by torching the roof of the pimp’s mouth. I’m not going to lie, it was pretty cool.

Dez wasn’t so impressed. “Yeah, and?”

“Well, since the Knucklers have become the Battlesnakes’s whipping bitches since the—hmmm—how do I say this...incident—” he looked at Dez and then back at me, “—we all feel it would be better if you took care of the problem.”

I arched my back to tower over Linnwood. “Who is we?”

With his cigarette dripping between his index finger and his middle finger like a pretentious asshole, he took a drag. “Me. Copperhead. That’s who *we* is.”

I popped my thumb in and out of my mouth. “Copperhead? He has no say over what we do in our area.”

Dez moved a little closer to me. “RJ. He kind of does now. King Cobra doesn’t bother with this low-level shit anymore.”

I flashed Dez a shit look. He was friends with Copperhead and I didn’t trust any of those Rasta fucks. I looked back toward Perry. “So, if that’s the case, what’s the story? Is this guy a Perry?”

“Yes. Apparently, Gavin—”

I looked back at Dez and giggled a little, made a limp wristed gesture and mouthed the name Gavin. Dez turned away from me to hide his face. He was laughing.

“Real funny, RJ,” Linnwood said, shoving me. “How about I just leave now and let you deal with the Snakes?”

I wiped my smirk clean. “Okay, dude. Relax.”

“Anyway, this asshole has been blabbing to these two slices of bacons for a boatload of coke. It’s all confiscated from high-level busts. He’s giving the pigs maps of the city and where all of us run things, and also giving them locations of exact compounds. The guy is a pussy and he would rather have the coke and the cadavers handed to him by the cops than deal with our way of doing things.”

I smacked myself on the side of the head. “Are you fucking kidding me? Linn, you gotta control your boys. What’s in it for the cops? Did your rat tell them that they could be turned?”

Perry nodded his head. “I guess. That is unless the LAPD is planning some kind of bust. I sincerely doubt that, though.”

My mouth dropped. When were people going to realize that isn’t the way all this vampire shit worked? “What I don’t get is why we have to take care of this problem.”

“Simple, the Snakes don’t want to get everyone all freaked out over the cops knowing everything about the territories and the gangs. That being said, Gavin meets with these cops in your area so they don’t get busted by us. In all honesty, your territory, your problem.”

I looked at Dez again and shrugged my shoulders. “I suppose that makes sense. Killing another idiot is killing another idiot. Where and when? Is there anything we should know about this Gavin?”

Dez giggled.

“I mean is there anything special about him?”

“Not very big. Typical BBP. He’s meeting these guys in an hour over behind the Samsung building on Wilshire. Do you know where that is?”

“It’s only the biggest fucking building in the area with a huge, neon-blue sign on top. Consider it done,” I assured Linnwood. “But let’s make things clear; you go tell Copperhead that this isn’t going to be a regular thing. This is your mess, Linn.” I swept my hand down the shoulder of his white, cable-knit sweater. “I’ve always been curious, where do you guys buy all these expensive threads anyway?”

Linnwood plucked my hand off his arm and dropped it back to my side as if he was discarding a plastic bag full of dog crap. “Posers on Melrose, idiot.” He shoved me on the chest. “You should shop there. ‘Who Farted?’” he said, reading my bleached T-Shirt out loud. “Classy. You should really learn how to do your laundry.”

Rather than furthering our runway model fashion fight, I tapped Dez on the back. “Dez, see him out of here and around the block.” And then, I flicked Linnwood on the chin. “You’re lucky that a random Knuckler didn’t pop you for being over here.”

As soon as I shuffled them out, I headed back to the bathroom, unlocked all the deadbolts, and grabbed the whore from her new stoop atop of the toilet. “Shhhh,” I reminded her.

Throwing her over my shoulder, I rushed her down the hall and into my bedroom. I quickly opened my closet and threw her in there. I nabbed a pair of handcuffs that were for some reason hanging from a belt loop on a pair of old jeans,

cuffed her hands and then locked her around a hanger bar. Frumpily, she dropped flat-footed and broke the hanger bar in the center. My clothes dumped off the bar and all over her.

“Stay quiet or you’re dead.”

“I got nowhere to go,” she said falling into the mound of shit she dumped everywhere.

I can’t tell you to this day why I didn’t throw her out the window to deal with my dogs in the backyard. Regretfully, I just didn’t.



“This is lame. Why didn’t you tell me that the Battlesnakes were going to start using us for this vice principal bullshit, Dez?”

“Let’s not get into this, RJ. You know why.”

I left it at that. I did know why we owed them. I just liked to try and forget the fact that I indebted myself to the most dangerous thugs in Los Angeles. They were the faux-Rasta, drug-running leaders of the vampy underworld. Regrettably, I had to bow down to a bunch of dingbats who couldn’t have come up with a better name than the Battlesnakes.

We both sat on a fire escape on the side of the building, overlooking the alley where Linnwood told us the snitch was gonna be waiting for his pig buddies.

Dez and I dangled our legs over the railing, trying to be quiet. Along with the super strength, vampires have an acute sense of hearing, so we didn’t want to set off any alarms for this Gavin Perry to know that his jig was up.

I pointed to a billboard across the street for a vampire film called *The Chronicles of Nightshayde: Our Darkness*. “Your boy,” I said to Dez. On the advertisement was Hollywood’s latest vampire pin-up tool, holding hands with a teenage girl. A red moon separated them. He was flexing his muscles toward the shadow of a werewolf that appeared to supernaturally cradle the girl.

“I prefer the books,” he admitted.

I cocked my head toward him. “Really? You prefer the books? So, you’re admitting you’ve read them?”

He lashed back, becoming uppity. “Hasn’t everyone?”

“Ummm. No.”

“God, RJ. Leave me alone. So, I read some vampire books.”

I put my arm around Dez. It was better to leave him alone sometimes than to constantly bag on him for his idiotic pastimes and behavior. This wasn’t one of those times.

“Ello, Gavin. Would you like to take down your knickers and let me give your cock a good flogging?”

He shoved me away, laughing. “Get off!”

In all honesty, I always gave Dez a lot of shit. He tried to put out this aura that he was this chosen God among living-dead people, but he was just another street shmuck trying to swindle the next sucker waiting in line to be killed.

I guess if I were to call someone my little brother, it would be him. Hard to say who was older though, I suppose. None of us really knew our ages. I did guess that I was about thirty-something and that he was about twenty-something, but there was never any real way to tell. We simply couldn’t remember where we came from or who we were. I know that I was found on the street, eating rats by an older member of the current Knucklers named Pico. I didn’t know much beyond that. That’s where I found Dez, too: vermin feasting on the urine-flooded streets of a dead city.

“Dude, quiet,” Dez whispered as he pointed below.

Two cops pulled up about a block away and walked down the alley. One of them was carrying a duffle bag. It wasn’t like a gym bag. It was one of those bags you see the SWAT team unloading after a huge bust.

“Bingo,” I said. Using the front bar of the rusted fire escape, Dez and I slowly pulled ourselves up. When he was halfway, I kicked out his left foot. In a wimpy voice, I mocked him. “I prefer the books.”

“Let it go, RJ,” he said, as he grabbed onto the rail of the jiggling fire escape.

As predicted, a tennis sweater-wearing BBP sashayed from the other end of the alley toward the cops. Dez and I crept down a flight of stairs in an attempt to get our super ears within reach of the conversation.

Gavin went over and fist bumped the cops. “Zup, Rogers? Zup, Picky?”

“Not much, Gavin. Whatchu got for us?”

I nudged Dez and went limp wristed like I had before, mouthing the name Gavin in a negative fruity way.

“Something big is about to go down,” Gavin returned. He was being honest. My ears smelled sincerity. Even a rat tells the truth sometimes.

One of the cops rolled back his sleeve and cut through a vein on his wrist almost up to his elbow.

“Wanna taste?” He took out a little baggy from his pocket and handed it to Gavin.

“Where did this shit come from anyway?” Gavin asked as he lifted the arm up, smeared the blood around a little and then shook some powder into the open wound. The numbing cut to the wrist, combined with the pain, made the cop shiver and shake like a wet hound. I figured the whole production was Gavin’s way of

convincing the nitwit detectives that they could be “turned”.

Gavin ran his nose directly up the arm and swiftly brushed his head up at the end of the line. He stood upright for a second, the arm remained steady like a table. He closed his eyes, put his fingers up to both sides of his nose and snorted all the blood and drugs in like a vacuum. Gavin’s etiquette was sloppy at best. Then again, I never got into snorting. I preferred the instantaneous rush of mainlining.

He shook off the split-second satisfaction and his eye bulged out.

“Goddamn, boys! That isn’t coke.”

“Nope, it isn’t,” one of the officers returned.

“Me likey, boys.” Perry continued as he pushed the mystery powder into his brain with his index and middle fingers. “Like I was saying, some big shit is gonna happen.”

“Like what?” one of the cops asked, holding back the duffle bag. I rolled my eyes. Even a shit like Gavin could have just swiped the thing from them and torn them to pieces.

Dez whispered in my ear. “Let’s go now, get this over with.”

“Shut the fuck up, Dez. I wanna hear this.”

“Come on, dude!”

I held Dez back by grabbing his devil lock, and then cracked my fist with the back of his head in tow against the wall behind us. Stupid move. Gavin’s ears picked up the sound. “Shit, Dez. He heard. Move!”

We both leapt down five flights from our perch. On the way down I instructed, “You take the fat one.”

“They’re both fat.”

“Then... wherever you land, brother.”

Dez shot me a wink. “I’ll take the cops.” He was hungry for swine. Like two starving Valkyries, we swam through the air toward our prey.

Dez landed on one of the weight-challenged cops as I subdued Gavin. I snatched his head and ripped off his sweater.

“You don’t even deserve this, motherfucker. Your gang is lame, but you’re just a rat.” I quickly began pounding his head against a discarded toilet in the alley, still shit-covered by vagrants who used it as a port-a-potty.

I looked over at Dez who was having a good time with his first pig. He ripped the asshole’s hands off by snapping the bones and stretching them loose from the veins. Then, he shoved them down his pants, one in front and one in back. Always light on his feet, Dez shuffled steadily and swept the leg completely off the other cop who was trying to make a break for it. The cop tripped, face first. The sound of his nose breaking sideways as the rest of his face splattered like a bum’s diarrhea on a curb made my eyes light up.

I went back to work on Gavin Perry. The snitch. He was after all, another vampire. I shoved his head into the bowl of the toilet. His ears crushed through the porcelain as they were cut loose by smashed shards from the seat. Furiously, I bounced him face first into the bottom of the basin. I don't want to seem overly romantic about my kills, but he wasn't going down easily. I had to use all of my strength. We had the element of surprise, which worked for us... even when dealing with a coke head.

I looked at Dez, who broke the arms backwards on his original puppet-cop. Dez discarded him by throwing him to the ground and proceeded to the second cop, who was crying with his face still buried in gravel.

He tore the law enforcement-issued pants off and yelled, "Damn, RJ, what cop goes commando?" He picked up the first cop by his neck while he took his boot and smashed the head of the other poor fuck on the ground. "This is gonna be hilarious."

I went back to Gavin. I lifted his head out of the empty toilet. "What's the big deal about to happen?"

He spat in my face. "Fuck you, junkie."

"Really?" I palmed his head with my right hand and beat it against the bottom of the toilet bowl again until my hand went completely through the front of his face. I opened my clenched hand, poked his eyeballs outward and swiped out his brain. After extracting his mind, I grabbed his neck, thrust my other arm up to the elbow through the face-cave and disconnected his skullcap. I spun around like a college hippie playing ultimate Frisbee and whizzed it toward Dez.

Why get rid of it? It probably wouldn't have tasted good. Vampire body parts all tasted like Mexican water. They were generally more dirt parts than liquid. Only the real desperate sickos liked the taste of human transfused to vamp blood... the real psychos.

"Whew." I sat down for a second and looked at Dez's flesh sculpture. "Come on, Dez." I figured my "head games" would surely overshadow anything Dez had to offer up artistically.

"Do you think I'm a pussy for reading books now?" He had taken the cops and put them on top of each other with their pants down. He might have even put the top cop's dick in the other cop's ass. Body parts from his showpiece covered the scene, but Dez lined them up as if he were delivering some sort of Al Capone-like message.

"Get your friend to pull the stolen car around; we gotta get rid of—" I made the limp wristed gesture again — "Gaaaaaavin's body."

Dez snatched the hand out of the pitcher-cop's pants and threw it at me. "High five!"

I batted the hand away and picked up the duffle bag. It was heavier than I expected.

“Well, open it.” Dez licked his lips and skipped over next to me. I’m serious, he skipped. That was how excited he got for a fix.

Slowly, I zipped back the top of the bag. Dez’s eyes ignited.

“Holy shit, Dez.” I looked over at him. “There is like fifty pounds of Charlie in here.”

He dug his hand down to the bottom of the bag and felt around. Then, he pulled out a brick and slit the top open with his bullet fingernail, scooped up a little taste tester and dabbed it on his lip. He used his tongue to roll it around on his gums. After that, he picked out another dollop and sucked it into both of his nostrils. Immediately, his face puckered up so that his top lip touched the point on his ratty nose.

“Fuck.” He sneezed, catching a handful of his own bloody snot. His mouth opened up as he gasped for air and he cranked his head around in a circle.

“RJ. This ain’t Charlie, motherfucker. This is heroin, dude.”

“What are you talking about? Why would Gavin Perry be getting a big duffle bag full of heroin? We run that shit.”

“I don’t know. Maybe these pigs made a mistake when they stole the evidence. I guess I don’t care. We just scored enough H to last us months.”

“Dez, are you nuts? King Cobra is gonna want this shit hand delivered to him, like tomorrow.”

“Fuck him, RJ. We’ll tell him that the cops didn’t bring shit. Tell him there was some kind of mix-up. We cleaned up their mess and we should be paid for it.”

I looked at the bag and licked my gums with my mouth closed. “That has to be the dumbest idea I’ve ever heard.”

Just then, the Dezien’s stolen car pulled around so we could haul off Gavin’s body and destroy the evidence of a vampire walking around and talking to cops. Dez threw the duffle bag at me and tapped me on the shoulder.

“It’s your call. Free heroin is free heroin. Cobra will never find out, dude. These are the only ones who saw us, the two pigs and that snitch.” He pointed at the cops buttfucking then at Gavin, whose mangled face was somewhat supported by his toilet seat necklace. Dez then pointed upward with his index finger. “Someone up there might have seen the bag.” He switched fingers and flipped off the sky. “But since there is no God... he’s got nothin’ to say.”