Tenebrous Press Sampler 2021-2022

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Written & Illustrated by: various
Release Date: June 1, 2021
ISBN (print) 978-1-7379823-7-1
ISBN (ePub) 978-1-7379823-6-4
**About GREEN INFERNO:**

Corruption, injustice, rage and contagion have carved the remaining shreds of mankind’s naïveté into cruel focus.

Lurking on the periphery of our collective vision is a stark realization: our planet’s tolerance for the human pest has reached a burning point. Earth is at the end of its rope.

Turbulent times call for new voices. With that in mind, Green Inferno claws up from the gloom to stake its claim on the world of Horror. Nineteen unique voices from around the world have gathered to share their dark visions with you…

Literary Horror and Comics collide in a terrifying miasma of Terrestrial Horror: tales of terror bound only by the constraints of our angry world.

From cruel comedy to nihilistic dread; from ghastly dinner parties, to aquatic leviathans, to rural bloodbaths, and all macabre stops in between; Green Inferno lives up to its central conceit:

*The world celebrates your demise.*

**Praise for GREEN INFERNO:**

“The stories in GREEN INFERNO are so good, are so full of the very best horror can offer, you won’t even feel bad that the world has turned against us and wants us dead!”

- **Cullen Bunn, author of** *Harrow County, The Sixth Gun, Star Wars: Darth Maul*

“Visual, visceral, gut-churning, mind-blowing horrors await...a lush treasure trove of grim global tales that are strangely full of hope...But not for us.”

- **S.A. Sidor, author of** *The Last Ritual*
SOFTER THAN SUNSHINE
(excerpt)
by HARRY NORDLINGER

Green Inferno

Hmmmm...

That's strange.

I don't remember these trees being here before.
“That dog has gills.”
“Ayup.”

The porch creaked when I leaned closer to my old buddy, Vernon. “Should we talk to her about it?”

“Nah.” He took a swig of beer and left the bottle on my banister before heading back in next door. I emptied mine in the magnolia bush. The way things were going, it was probably time to quit, anyway.

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I only lasted about half a day. Talking to her wasn’t high on my list of likes, either, but we had to know. Two years ago, just before the meteor hit, all the wild game took off. We didn’t even think it was weird; animals always know things we don’t. Six houses got knocked flat, though, and she was out there taking notes.

Last year, all the pets suddenly became burrowers the week before that sandstorm rolled in. By then, I was sure she must have had a hand in it. We survived by hunkering down in wine cellars and cowering in bathtubs. Gills, though? Gills were worse.

Her house was just a few down. Pumpkins and plastic skeletons decorated her front lawn, not a care in the world that it was the middle of August. She kept putting the damned things up earlier and earlier each year. The first time I’d knocked on her door, I admit, the pop-up Dracula with realistic blood splatter scared the daylights out of me. This time, I only jumped a little.

There was no answer. I thought I heard some shuffling inside, but nothing after that. I went back home and cracked open a beer.

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Half the cats in the neighborhood waddled in the pond, teaching the kittens how to use their new webbed paws.

Anxiety was one thing, but we were whipped up into a full-on frothy panic. Some of the neighbors packed up, overburdened trucks groaning as they pulled out and West. Vernon went “fishing”, the coward. Twenty years of friendship, and all he had to say was “gone fishing” scribbled on a note. Some of us had homes we didn’t want to abandon just because she couldn’t keep her fingers out of Nature’s business.

I knocked again, and nothing. Dust fell off the top of the doorframe. Even the Dracula was switched off. “I’m coming back with the police,” I shouted at the door. It wasn’t police business, and I had every intention of sorting this out myself, but I didn’t want to sound like an armed lunatic.

By that evening, a dozen of us had gathered with firepower. I didn’t want to say anything, but some of the guys were looking a little blue; scratching at scabs behind their ears and itching their tailbones. Everyone was breathing heavy; even me. One of the guys said he thought he saw a flock of low-flying birds with fins go diving and never come back up. Enough was enough. Someone had to stop her.

The cheap plywood door went down like tissue paper.

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We found her in the attic, naked and grunting over chalk drawings like some sort of feral animal. The whole place was hung with fish bones and long, slime-covered eels. She’d strung a few around her neck, too, one’s tail in the mouth of the other. You wouldn’t believe the unholy stench of the place.

She seemed harmless, at first. I was at the back, so I didn’t see when the first guy went down; but then she threw herself right into the middle of the group. All she did was tap Elmer on the forehead, and to the floor he went, convulsing. It was sickening to watch a big construction worker fold like that to a little woman. The others stood
around in shock as she wailed, beating her chest and yelling gibberish. Maybe she was cursing us, maybe reciting her shopping list; either way, I wasn’t going to let it go on.

I aimed the butt of my rifle at her mouth. She saw; started to say “You don’t under—” but with one hard thrust, I cut it short.

Even unconscious, she was trouble. Caleb tried to pick her up and succumbed to violent seizures right away. Her skin was probably poison, like some sort of toad. Someone brought up bright yellow latex gloves and aprons, and I rolled her into a big old carpet. We must have looked like a gaggle of idiots, coming out of the house dressed like that, carrying the carpet between us.

If it looks stupid, but it works, it ain’t stupid. She came to just as we started the fire, and it wasn’t long after that she went out for good, crackling and screaming about how we got it wrong.

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The scales on my nape were the last to fade.

We all seemed like new people by then. A lot of the pets came back, ravenous and looking for their folk. Since some families never returned, I ended up adopting myself a pup; named him Vernon. That jerk was still gone. I worried maybe he was too far away and didn’t get cured. Maybe he was slopping around in a mud puddle somewhere, breathing the filth.

New Vernon didn’t like beer, but he still hung out on the porch with me, and that was good enough.

He was one of the first to spot it. The fur down his back stood up and he growled a little puppy growl. I looked where he was pointing, and sure enough, there it was.

A wall of water, all the way from the bottom of the world to the top of the sky, steadily sweeping towards us.

Finally, we’d be out of Nature’s way, and no witches to stop it this time.
“It’s like a dream,” Vi offered, her heart in her throat. Agent Akley knew better than to christen it with such a honeyed name; this was a nightmare.
A STRANGE FINCH

by LORNA D. KEACH

It was the night of the dinner party, and Zachary Vautour snuck into the kitchen in hopes of stealing a taste.

On the menu that evening was braised California condor in truffle sauce with an amuse-bouche starter of kakapo tempura. Sadly, it wasn’t among what he felt were his most interesting selections. Although Vautour was fascinated by the small pink chunks of kakapo the chef tossed with oil, he’d already eaten condor during his last dinner party and found it to be lacking in flavor. But the kakapo wouldn’t make for a main course on its own. The plump little nuggets of flesh were so tiny, he could hardly call them a snack.

He stood over the left shoulder of his chef and plucked one chunk of kakapo out of the bowl. The chef set her tongs down with a clatter and, huffing, waited for Vautour’s long arm to leave her personal space. After he’d snatched up a morsel, he took a step back and popped it in his mouth. His chef had tried to stop him eating raw poultry before, a habit he picked up overseas, but Vautour had convinced her any arguments about the health implications were useless. He loved a good pate. He loved strange meat. He loved the creatures his suppliers smuggled in live with their glistening feathers and banshee shrieking. (He heard their exotic songs even from the kitchen, cries radiating from the lower levels of the estate in his “aviary” several hundred feet below ground, where he’d tucked away the endangered rarities to keep all to himself). The things Zachary Vautour loved, he always put in his mouth. He wanted them inside him, as complete a capture as possible.

He closed his lips around the Kakapo and breathed, inhaling its coppery scent, letting its raw, thin blood dribble down his tonsils.

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That evening, his supplier delivered a shipment at a most opportune time. “Amazing, Falke. Simply amazing.” Vautour clapped the man on the back. “You’ll stay for dinner and tell us all about your adventure, yes?”

“Sure,” Falke said, “Hope you’ve got the stomach for it. It was grisly.”

“Hah! That just whets my palate.”

At the table, Falke cut a charming, roguish figure among Vautour’s well-dressed friends; the man wore the soot-stained camp shirt he stumbled in with, his sandy hair tousled from the drive. He’d had to complete the delivery himself after some trouble with the expedition vessel, so he was eager to take part in refreshments. “At least I didn’t have to suffer through customs!” Falke laughed.

Vautour ordered the staff to bring out the crate Falke had delivered; now emptied, of course. The guests marveled at the GALAPAGOS stamped in aggressive capital letters along the lid. They insisted they see the new arrivals to Vautour’s aviary.

As they all stood up and made their way downstairs to view the cages, the chef hovered by the kitchen door, glaring, her kakapo tempura quickly losing its flavor.

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Down below, in a wire-and-steel enclosure beside the Spix’s macaw and the dwarf cassowary, was a goose-looking bird with a white breast, brown wings, and webbed feet the color of the sky.

“The Galápagos blue-footed booby,” Vautour announced. He knew he should have kept his acquisition a secret to capitalize on the element of surprise for his guests, but the next two events were planned for the cassowary and the macaw, and he couldn’t contain his urge to brag.

When one guest commented that boobies were relatively prolific in South America, Vautour huffed that any chump could not just waltz in and grab something off Darwin Island. He demanded Falke
“tell them how tough it was.”

Vautour, while conversation distracted the others, reached his thick white fingers through the booby’s enclosure and plucked out a small tuft of feather. He placed it in his mouth; the rancid odor rose up his nasal cavity, the dry fluff sank into his tongue like a salty cotton candy. He imagined the infinitesimal mites inside it squirming against the landscape of his taste buds.

His guests, however, paid no notice to Vautour’s unhygienic nibble, as someone pointed out a nearby enclosure with another new arrival to the edible collection. Vautour was at a loss; he’d never seen the thing before either.

“Oh, that thing,” Falke muttered. “It was a stowaway.” The bird inside the cage was similar to a sparrow or a songbird—finch-like—with dark feathers and a heavy beak down-turned in a scowl. It blinked eyes like tiny cold marbles in a broad head.

“He looks like he sucked a lemon!” One guest commented.
“HE sucked something,” Falke said. “I found him attached to the booby.”

The guests erupted in laughter at that, Vautour included.

Falke nodded, smiled, went along with the joke until the tittering stopped, whereupon he said, “The little guy was on the booby’s tail feathers, pecking the shit out of him and slurping up the blood. The Russians said some finches on the island did that when water was hard to find. Turned to blood-drinkers.”

The guests’ laughter died down.

“This guy was different though. Hungrier,” Falke said. “When I caught him he looked about ready to stick his entire head in and eat the booby from the inside.” He kept his tone jovial. “The booby didn’t even notice it was there. It was too stupid—or numb—to see it was being eaten. Maybe this finch has got weird enzymes in its spit or something. Sure is a greedy little vampire fuck, though. I could barely pull him off.”
Silence followed.

Vautour broke it by saying, “I imagine vampire birds taste excellent. Extra gamey!”

The joke livened things up. Bright faces and conversation returned to his guests, and they fluttered with smiles and laughter before moving upstairs to take part in a now-soggy tempura. Vautour would, of course, blame the sogginess on the fact he’d hired a three-star chef.

As they left the aviary, Vautour heard creaking, as if the enclosure wire strained against a substantial force. He paid it no mind. The cassowary was a real prick, but so far its cage had held.

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While heaping great forkfuls of condor into their mouths, glistening lips shining beneath the track lighting of the formal dining room, conversation again turned to the booby downstairs, with one guest asking Falke if the Russians gave him much trouble.

Falke shook his head. “The Russians had the trouble themselves.”

The *Krasnaya Ptitsa*—the expedition vessel he’d commissioned to smuggle the birds off Galápagos—had ended its “scientific mission” drifting lifeless off the coast of Portoviejo; a minor international incident for the Ecuadorians. If it hadn’t been for Falke’s contacts, the contents of the ship would still be under lockdown and he’d never have gotten the birds out of the country. Investigators suspected smugglers out of Hong Kong. The entire crew, Falke explained, had been murdered.

“Details, man,” Vautour said. “Give us the gory details.”

Falke didn’t know much beyond that, apart from the fact his contacts told him the crew’s backs had been broken--demolished, really--as if someone had taken a pickaxe to their lumbar areas and chipped away a huge bloody hole.

“I’ve never heard of the Chinese doing that,” one guest muttered.
“Maybe,” another said, “it was the CIA.”

“Nonsense.” Vautour quieted such talk with a gruff command. “Our people have subtlety.”

As he said it, he shifted in his seat, trying to ignore the ache creeping up his bones. His back was killing him. Vautour’s lavish dining set, imported from Milan, had started to fall apart apparently. The chair must have had some piece jutting out that stabbed him right in the spine. Vautour resolved to order his assistants to purchase new chairs the very next morning.

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After dinner, Vautour’s guests drifted off, pausing at the door to give Vautour air-kisses and promise to invite him to their own dinner parties. (The prospect annoyed him. One of his friends was into big cats, though lion tasted like shit in Vautour’s opinion; another was far too interested in herbal hallucinogens pirated from the Amazon).

When they were gone, Vautour killed time until the midnight hour by drinking several tumblers of 25-year-old scotch in his den, a room full of avian specimens that hadn’t made it to the table: herons and spoonbills and nightjars and owlets; birds that died or went rotten before reaching the kitchen. Unwilling to lose an investment, he’d had them all stuffed. His staff spent hours dusting the glorious taxidermy every week. Despite their beauty, and the occasional lick Vautour gave them, the ache in his bones didn’t let up.

He was somewhat concerned that the raw kakapo had given him flu-like symptoms, as his body hurt with a dull, pervasive misery difficult to isolate. Vautour, unrepentant, decided to sit for a while in the sauna. That would do the trick: sweat out the pollution. If that didn’t work, he could have his personal nurse practitioner come in and pump his stomach. It was a necessary step now and then, such as the time he had that crane torisashi in Kyoto. His nurse practitioner said he almost died; he had merely replied, *hah!*

After ordering his overnight staff out of bed to prepare the
sauna, Vautour made his way to the spa, limping up steps to the east-wing master bedroom *en suite* and pissing aggressively into the toilet. The bidet had barely gotten the chance to finish before he threw off his clothes. Naked, he lumbered to the shower, paying little attention to his broad, meaty body in the wraparound bathroom mirrors. He ran the hot at maximum force and stood under it for several minutes before he saw rivulets of blood running down his ankles. Streams of thin red on the white marble floor. The ache hit him suddenly; sharp, excruciating. He could tell now it emanated from his tailbone. Every time the scalding water touched that spot, Vautour yelped.

He limped over to the intercom to alert his staff something was wrong, but before he reached it he stumbled in front of the sinks. He turned to check his back in the mirror, but his middle was too thick, his spine too inflexible, his ass too broad from years of sitting and boozing and eating rich foods. It felt like someone was stabbing him, but he couldn’t see a damned thing. Nothing except the blood leaking down his haunches.

Grimacing through tears and trying not to howl, Vautour grabbed a shaving mirror, positioning it so he could examine himself in the bathroom mirror behind him and find exactly what was bleeding. (Surely it was just an exploded hemorrhoid, or a cut by that damned dining chair. He resolved to sue the manufacturer.) He wiped the steam off the glass, twisted right and left, lifted the magnified mirror several inches before he found it, the source of his pain.

There was a throbbing red hole in his back the size of his fist, and a cluster of black protrusions shivering within it. (How could he have missed such a wound? He was struck dumb with embarrassment. Had he bled on the chair? Left dribbles of blood on his guests’ shoes? In an uncharacteristic moment of self-awareness, he wondered if something had been said, something he hadn’t paid attention to, that might have warned him this would happen.) The black protrusions moved in and out, dipping, squirming; he watched them for several seconds, the horror outweighing his pain as he squinted. Then he realized what they were.
The feathers of the small stowaway bird were darker now, soaked by his bodily fluids. His blood was sludgy, like tree sap; coagulated. The bird’s feet clamped onto the edge of Vautour’s wound as though his swollen flesh was the lip of a knothole. The bird dipped into the gore and peeked back out, mimicking a woodpecker that slurped termites and grubs from a chasm in a tree. Behind the bird, Vautour could see a hint of his spine, vertebrae glistening.

As if aware it was being watched, the bird peeked out and went still. Gummy red meat dangled from its beak. It cocked its head as if listening for a far off predator. Such a predator never came; so, as Vautour stood quaking in his shock, it returned to its fleshy burrow.

By the time help arrived, Vautour was on the floor, bleeding out, arms twisted as he grasped at the wound. The EMTs, struggling to identify a weapon, any nearby object that could have demolished the man’s spine in such a way, were at a loss. The authorities would have to come in later to determine the source of the attack. (Although one technician, wrestling with the QuickClot gauze, glimpsed a black feather behind the toilet, something she kept to herself. She’d seen the endangered stuffed birds in the den and thought, *what an asshole.*) When they shouted at Vautour to tell them what happened, all they got from him were screams: *it’s inside me, it’s inside me, it’s inside me.*

The **INFERNO** still rages...

**GREEN INFERNO Vol. 2**

Fall 2022