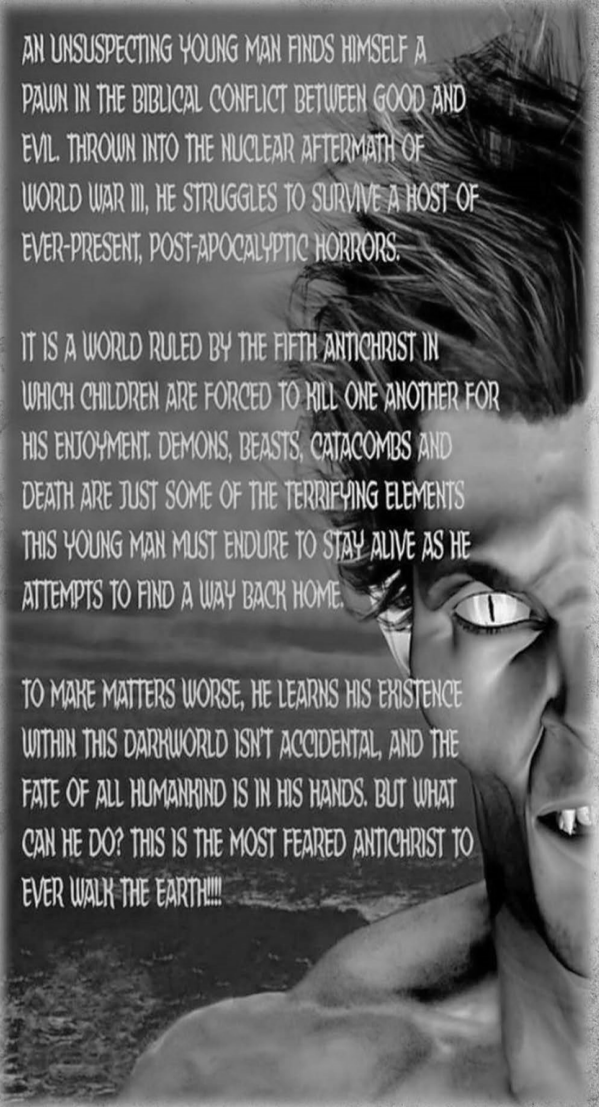


A
supernatural
thriller,
based
on
the
biblical
war
between...
"Good
and
Evil"





AN UNSUSPECTING YOUNG MAN FINDS HIMSELF A PAWN IN THE BIBLICAL CONFLICT BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL. THROWN INTO THE NUCLEAR AFTERMATH OF WORLD WAR III, HE STRUGGLES TO SURVIVE A HOST OF EVER-PRESENT, POST-APOCALYPTIC HORRORS.

IT IS A WORLD RULED BY THE FIFTH ANTICHRIST IN WHICH CHILDREN ARE FORCED TO KILL ONE ANOTHER FOR HIS ENJOYMENT. DEMONS, BEASTS, CATACOMBS AND DEATH ARE JUST SOME OF THE TERRIFYING ELEMENTS THIS YOUNG MAN MUST ENDURE TO STAY ALIVE AS HE ATTEMPTS TO FIND A WAY BACK HOME.

TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, HE LEARNS HIS EXISTENCE WITHIN THIS DARKWORLD ISN'T ACCIDENTAL, AND THE FATE OF ALL HUMANKIND IS IN HIS HANDS. BUT WHAT CAN HE DO? THIS IS THE MOST FEARED ANTICHRIST TO EVER WALK THE EARTH!!!!

*Charles W. Staunton,
proudly presents...*

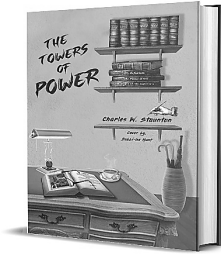
**"THE
TOWERS
OF
POWER"**

Tome one: The Antichrists - Scrolls 1-8

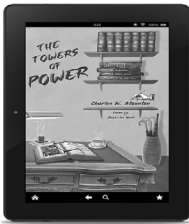


*This book is the first of eight in the
"Red Dragon series"*

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Acknowledgments...

Original - Edited By Karl Monger

4th Addition - Edited By Keidi Keating

Front Cover - Bobbi-Lee Hunt

Illustrations - Bobbi-Lee Hunt

Joseph Mueller

Michael Smith

Charles W. Staunton

Formatting / Design - Charles W. Staunton

Website - CharlesWStaunton.com

Story Creation Date - 1980

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Library of Congress Number - TXU001780994



CIMMERIAN PUBLISHING
NEW YORK

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Find a nice comfortable place to sit.

Fix your favorite Leverage.

Turn off your phone.

Take a few deep breaths.

Open your mind.

Read the book.

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Book reviews are always welcomed.

"I AM THAT I AM"

In the beginning, God walked upon the vast oceans of darkness, and he walked into the spheres of time, but...he walked alone. As sadness touched his heart, he placed his right hand inside his body and withdrew it; the blood from his heart trickling through his mighty fingers to fall upon the universe.

Life was created.

יְהוָה

Seeing this to be good, God placed his hand back into his body; however this time, he removed one of his ribs. Blowing gently upon it, he birthed his very first angel, one he would name... "Metatron."

'The guardian of life'.

This powerful Seraphim stands at the gates of heaven and reads the names of the dead...from the book of life. This angel is charged with the placement of souls, whether it be in Heaven or Hell.

Once again, our heavenly father placed his hand inside his body, withdrawing not one, but two ribs; he held one in his right hand, the other in his left.

Blowing gently on the rib in his right hand, he birthed his second angel, one he would name... "Michael."

This Cherubim angel is the 'guardian of light'.

Blowing gently on the rib in his left hand, he birthed a third angel, one he would name... "Samuel."

This Cherubim angel is the 'guardian of night'.

Gabriel, Rafael, Ariel, Uriel, and Abaddon were the first of the Archangels. Enriched with beauty and strength, they were placed high in God's court.

Upon their celestial births, the lesser angels were sent to the worlds where God's precious blood had fallen...sent to water the seeds of life with his unbreakable love. In the fullness of time, these worlds became populated with his children...who gave birth to their children.

God was joyful.



*Thence he came...an extremely powerful immortal
who was there in the beginning.*

He who dwells inside the abyss!

He who is the evil within the darkness!

*He who is the jackal to all that is holy took from
God a son and fashioned an instrument of terror,
one he would use to destroy all that was created.*

On top of an anvil it was shaped.

In the fires of Hell it was forged.

*After the days of Adam, and before the coming of
Moses, the battle against all that is sacred began.*

*It is written that one day war will come to us, and
the lands will be covered with blood...for he who
inhabits the 'Ninth Hell' has sought long to murder
the children of God. And if he is successful...*

The Christ will be destroyed!





1st scroll

Scott Miller

2nd scroll

Rockit

3rd scroll

Watched

4th scroll

Brother's Death

5th scroll

Steel Bridge

6th scroll

Dark World

7th scroll

Lipton

8th scroll

Scrolls of Lucifer



“I stood upon the sands of the sea, and I saw a beast rise, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads was the name blasphemy” – **John 7:2**



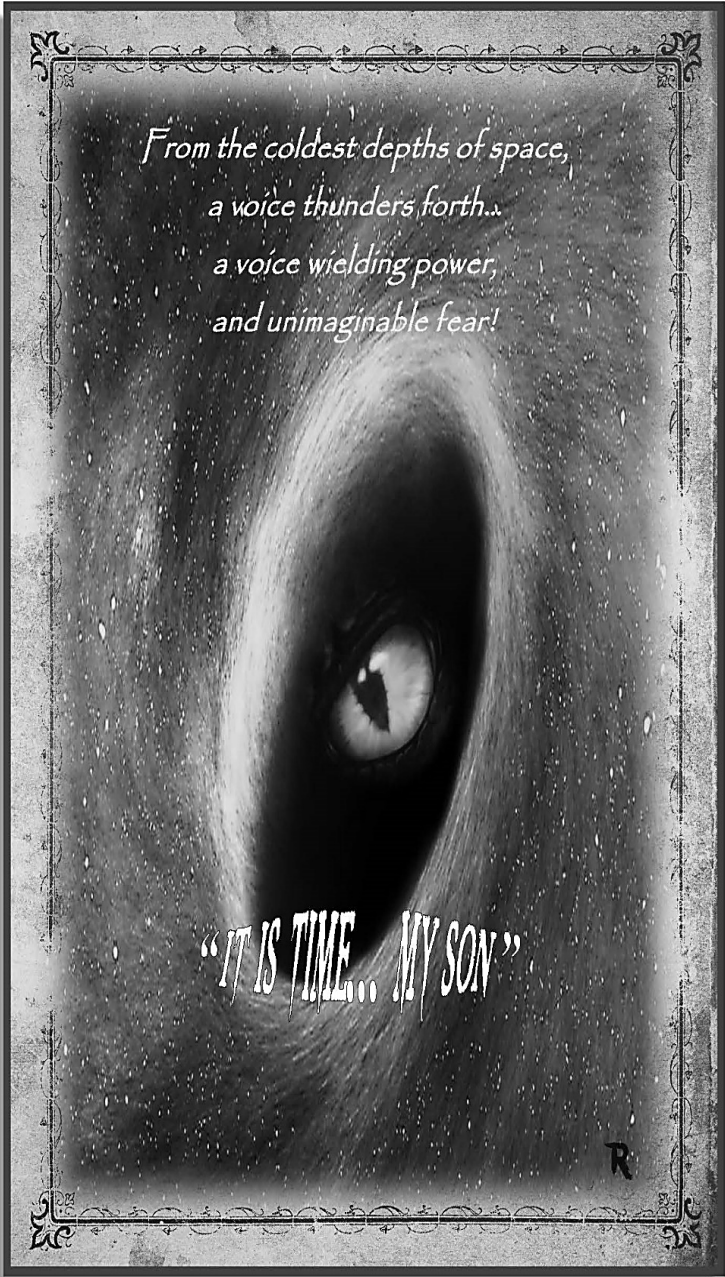
“They worshipped the dragon that giveth power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying who is like unto the beast, who is able to make war with him” – **Revelation 13:3-18**



“Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that the Antichrist are coming, for even now many Antichrists have already risen; from this we know that it is the last hour” – **John 2:18-19**



“Understand oh, son of man, for at the time of the end shall be the vision” – **Daniel 8:17**



*From the coldest depths of space,
a voice thunders forth...
a voice wielding power,
and unimaginable fear!*

"IT IS TIME... MY SON"

R



He thinks, he is dead.

Blackness encloses him, wrapping him like a blanket on a bitter winter's night. And though his eyes are open, there is only the cold cruel darkness, such darkness that it makes him believe he is slipping into madness. Inching his way to the threshold of insanity, the frightened young man touches his body and feels the firmness of it, believing he is en route to that heavenly place souls travel to after death. But, as he ponders this notion...while dangling like a puppet inside the abyss, an unimaginable horror plays out before him, one that instantly terrifies his soul:

IMAGES OF BUTCHERY AND SLAUGHTER.

An unseen explosion rumbles within this cosmic vacuum, followed by a penetrating crimson light that momentarily devours the darkness. Overcome by this mysteriousness, the young man closes his eyes, but he swiftly reopens them upon suffering an intense burning sensation on his legs; he finds himself nailed to a wooden cross, dull copper spikes

impaling his hands and feet. Looking down toward the base of the cross, tears escape his eyes, for it is submerged in an infinite lake of pure...

LIQUID FIRE.

Scorching flames gnaw his unshod feet, and upon lifting his miserable gaze, the young man spots a structure, archaic in nature, where none stood before. A bridge made from primitive stone has appeared, and scores of children stagger across it.

From the burning waters, fireballs shoot out to scorch these little ones who are forced to walk across this hellish passage; the bridge begins and ends in the waters.

Other crosses begin rising from the fiery depths...each with a screaming human nailed to it — their sorrowful cries are the stuff of madness. Upon recognizing their mommies and daddies among the crucified, the children weep harder. All the while, the young man yells at them to run away, but no sound escapes his lips.

Another explosion thunders inside the blackness, and once more, it is followed by that crimson light. Afterward, the men and women scream even louder as their sizzling flesh drops away from their mortal bodies. With trembling lips, the young man is forced to watch the gruesome affair of skin peeling from charred carcasses, and turning to ash.

Skeletons remain impaled to the crosses, their bones quickly crumbling to dust.

With his eyes returning to that bridge, the young man bears witness to the little girl who now stands all alone there, cuddling her doll with tiny arms. No older than five, the child cries out for her mommy as tears soak her freckled cheeks; she squeezes her doll against her body even tighter.

In a state of utter terror, the young man looks on as a fireball obliterates her young life, setting her body ablaze, and launching it over the stony flanks of this edifice. As the flames eat away at his body, he screams out into the blackness, "Dear God, why am I here? What did I do to deserve this?" His words are without sound.

A face materializes over the bridge.

Screaming on the inside, the young man recognizes the face. It belongs to a demon, one that has persecuted him his entire life...especially these last few days. With his life drawing to its end, hanging on the burning cross, the young man remembers, it was...

A little more than a week earlier...

"Scott, it's already a quarter past seven!" she shouts from the foot of the stairs.

Sleepily, the young man slowly lifts his head off his soft pillows, squinting at his clock radio that is cruelly, validating his mother's acute attunement for time.

Hearing his name a second time, he sits up, surrendering to the warmth and the lovely spring light streaming through his bedroom window. Rubbing the crusted flakes from his sleepy eyelids, he glances over at the framed picture on his nightstand; it displays the enchanting young lady who has recently stolen his heart. He gazes at the photograph until his exasperated mother bellows his name once more:

“SSSScotto!”

Half-asleep, the young man scuttles into his bathroom to begin enacting his daily ritual, which consists of a shower and brushing his teeth in under five minutes, a feat mastered over the years. Practically every morning, you will hear this woman, pleading for her son to wake up and get ready for school. Most days require multiple summons to get the lad out of his bed...and to the breakfast table. She learned a long time ago her son prefers his pillows to eggs.

Today is no exception.

Having completed his drudgery in the bathroom, Scott is ready to don his favorite wrinkly jeans, football jersey and letter jacket. And, upon hearing another musical plea from his mother's highly tuned vocal cords, he is racing out of his room and down the staircase to the front door.

Due to time shortage, and a serious lack of enthusiasm, morning breakfast is out of the question; still, this charming mother always prepares a standby meal.

A glass of milk, and a blueberry muffin awaits him.

With sneakers in hand Scott drains the glass of milk, and what he does to the muffin...well, that is something else to have seen. Even with his mother's leniency, he is still going to need a miracle to get to his first class before the morning bell rings its third and final time; this miracle has twenty minutes to happen, for that is when the school's doors are closed.



Darla Miller: an attractive lady in her early forties. Alluring figure, sparkling blue eyes, and blondish-brown hair, which touches her shoulders is what this adoring mom whom Scott loves very much is all about. Mrs. Miller has just started her new job; a human resource manager for a local supermarket chain. She and Scott's father met in college, got engaged, and two years later, they married; however, as of late, they are separated.

The year is 1984...

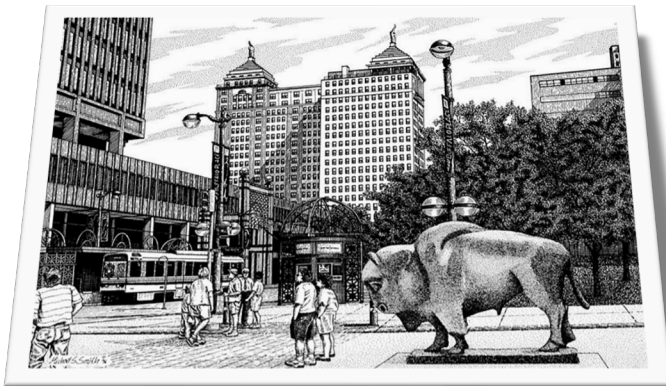
Scott and his mother live in a large city in upstate New York, which was buried in a thick layer of snow a few weeks ago. Blizzards pummel this city within the winter seasons, cocooning folks inside their homes like caterpillars waiting for the spring to reemerge as beautiful butterflies.

Prior to winter, this city exploded in color — the leaves falling from the giant oak trees seizing the lands. Blessed it be the fall holidays...for those divine skies and splendid landscaping could only have come from the gods.

With the arrival of spring, high school seniors will begin planning their futures. Many will be attending college, some will enter the military, while most will join the work force.

A handful of these young folks will venture out into the world, saying their goodbyes to lifelong friends, and to their beloved city,

Buffalo.



Lounging on the border between the United States and Canada, west of New York City, is Buffalo. Its murky waters spill into one of the Seven Wonders of the World: Niagara Falls. Buffalo is not only a rust belt city, but it is also the home of “Bethlehem Steel” — one of the nation’s biggest and most productive turn-of-the-century steel mills.

Stepping out onto his front porch, Scott immediately draws in a deep breath of cleansed air, compliments of the laborious thunderstorm of the night before; damp wooden steps leave watery telltale signs on his jeans. Amidst tying his sneakers, he glances the length of the street, and as he does, a smile shapes his lips. Whispering her name, a surge of blissfulness overtakes him,

“Lisa.”

An angry car’s engine fills the morning air, stirring those who are still beneath the covers on their beds. Not the least bit concerned, Scott is well-acquainted with the owner of the overly clean, mint-green, ‘79 Mustang’ that is speeding down the street, toward his house.



Scott Miller: a good-looking eighteen-year-old with blue eyes, and shoulder-length blond hair. Standing at six feet with an athletic build, he’s a natural to play quarterback on his school’s football team. He has a serenity about him, making him popular with teachers and students alike, and because of his flair for the game, top colleges around the country are courting him, some going as far as to extend full scholarships. His dream of playing at the professional level has prompted Scott to visit a few of these universities with his Dad, and a few others with his two best friends.

Mr. and Mrs. Miller have been separated for a tad more than two months, and with his father living in an apartment on the other side of the city, Scott finds himself spending less and less time with him -- time that was once spent as a family. He knows his parents still care for each other. Scott often hears his mother crying in her bedroom at night. More than once he has wanted to go and comfort her, but he never does and, when he is with his father, he detects sadness in him as well.

It isn't long until the shiny green car is stopping in front of his house; the driver is one of his best friends. Without missing a beat, Scott makes haste down the steps and over to the mustang. After opening the passenger door, he looks over at his mother, who is standing on the porch -- her right index finger pointing at the diamond studded watch on her slender wrist.

Looking at the driver as he climbs into the car, "You do realize we only have ten minutes," Scott says.

"Yeah, yeah," the driver nonchalantly responds.

Closing the door, Scott adds, "Well?"

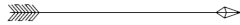
"Well, what?"

"Do you think we'll make it this time?"

"No."

"Me neither, Davey boy." Scott laughs. "Besides, we don't really want to spoil all the fun we have sneaking into school, now do we?"

The Mustang's tires smoke as they dig into the pavement, beginning their melodramatic launch to the end of the street. All the while, Mrs. Miller is shaking her pretty head, knowing full well her son is more than likely going to be late for school, again.



David Knoll: is thinner, and shorter than Scott. He has short, wavy, light-brown hair and hazel eyes. From his father, Dave inherited a big, dreadful looking nose, a genetic trait that has tormented him so. Over time, he began using it as a means of making friends, becoming a jokester, a class clown. Peddling his brand of humor in and out of the classrooms, Dave gets himself into trouble with his teachers...so much that he's repeatedly sent to the vice principal: Dave's been suspended twice this year.

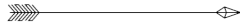
Born with health anomalies, Dave has undergone five major open-heart surgeries, making him a bona fide medical wonder. With the passing of years, he has come to accept the reality that his life will be shorter than most, and with that, he has made it his life's priority to live like a normal kid, refusing to be pitied. Scott and Dave have been friends ever since their unforgettable encounter in the third grade, at school #28. Scott saved Dave from a lynching, and to this day, he teases him about that comical account, which went along the line of...



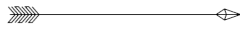
*Ten years ago.
One dark and stormy day.
{Actually, it was sunny and bright}*



It was Friday, and the end of a school day. A horde of children from the third grade were chasing little Davey home...like an angry mob after a criminal. It was said that he had done something so awful that they were going to beat him up.



Running for dear life, Dave screamed as if the Devil himself was nipping at his heels. Trying to avoid being cut off from other boys who had joined in on the pursuit, Dave accidentally bumped into Scott, who just so happened to be walking on the same dirt path to home.



Even though their eyes connected for only a second, it was long enough for Scott to feel sympathy. Dave continued running down that path, trying to get home to safety, but the mob was hot on his heels.



They pursued Dave into a backyard enclosed by a high-chained-link fence, preventing any means of escape. Scott watched the infuriated girls call him bad names, while the little boys threw small rocks and sticks at him. Dave was crying.

*Scott stepped in and bribed his judge and jurors,
promising to give them homemade chocolate chip cookies
if they would pardon Dave, so to speak.
To his surprise, it worked, and after that day these two
became inseparable...like brothers.
It was revealed later on that Dave had looked up one of
the little girls' dresses.*



“So, how did it go last night with, Lissaaa?”

“It went alright,” Scott answers coolly.

“WHAT?”

Understanding the absence of details is going to drive Dave utterly insane, Scott purposely continues being mum on the vital particulars. It's only after an extended moment or two when he finally provides him an answer---the stingiest one he could think of. **“It went okay.”**

“WHAT HAPPENED?” Dave roars, hinting the perils his friend faces if he doesn't supply details. Receiving no answer, Dave turns onto the street that leads to school. Moments later, Scott takes delivery of a punch on his left arm for deliberately prolonging crucial information. **“Tell me what happened!”**

“Damn, do you need to know everything?”

“YES!” Dave howls. **“I need to know, everything!”**

Following several seconds of tormenting the hell out of his friend, Scott finally speaks. "We had a wonderful time."

Displaying a most ill-behaved smirk, "Did you get any nookie?" Dave snickers. Scott shakes his head in disbelief, never imagining his friend was this bad. "You went to that holy garden of... Oh my God, you lucky bastard!"

"Are you done?" Scott scoffs, staring at Dave who still bears that ill-behaved smirk.

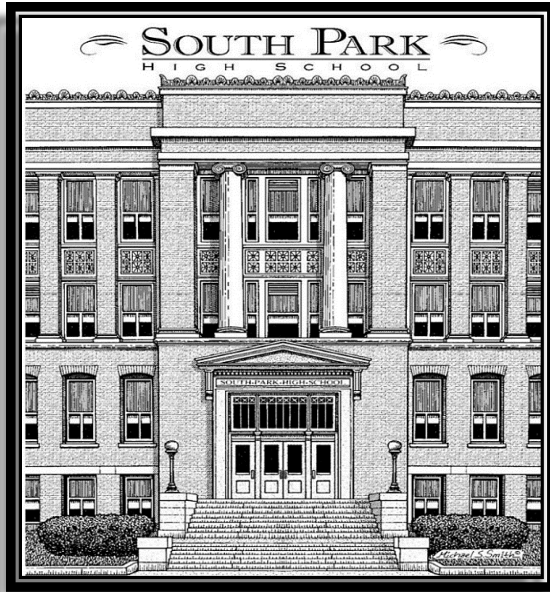
"Played a little hide the salami, didn't you?" Dave says rowdily, making obscene gestures with his right hand...while his left hand grips the steering wheel.

"Did you get any last night?" Scott sasses.

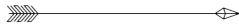
"No, I didn't as a matter of fact." Dave smiles. "But, I do masturbate quite well." As the Mustang pulls into the parking lot directly across from their school, the two know they're in trouble, for the parking lot is not only full, but also void of students. And, with the tolling of the morning bell, signifying the start of the first class for the day, the two are quick in exiting the mustang.

Unfortunately, with everyone already inside, these two delinquents find themselves in the same state of affairs they have been in so many times before. They must now undertake the perilous task of sneaking past the school's security team without being caught, but that is not all, as they would also still need to avoid...

curly.



South Park High: a four-story building, built in the latter part of “1915” — known as the first school in buffalo that successfully segregated in the 60’s. There are two full-size gymnasiums, a large underground, Olympic-size swimming pool, and an auditorium featuring a high, theatrical ceiling. In addition to the main entrance; four large wooden doors with oversize glass windowpanes, there are two on the sides, and two more on the backside of the school.



Curly: is the head of the school’s security team, a mammoth black man with a shiny bald head, and arms the size of tree trunks. One could easily argue that Curly takes his job a tad too serious...for he is relentless on his watch, especially toward those who fail—or won’t, follow the policies of this

esteemed institution. Displaying a lone wolf personality, Curly can easily be mistaken as someone who doesn't like people, explicitly those foolish mortals who try to sneak in late for class. Curly is a former Marine drill instructor and a Vietnam vet. Today's conundrum is what door will Curly be hiding behind? And, if it is not him, then which of the other three security guards will it be?



Today, the hulking behemoth is lingering just outside the front entrance doors, standing atop the concrete steps. Because of their chronic tardiness, Scott and Dave have become priority targets. The giant of a man in his washed-out uniform hungers to start the week off with his two crafty and elusive adversaries spending quality time with the vice principal. He yearns for them to receive their much overdue chastising on tardiness.

It is Monday, and they are late again!

Curly has been monitoring the pair since they drove into the parking lot, located on the other side of the street that has the same name: South Park Avenue. Perched on the giant steps, he bears resemblance to a stone gargoyle, ready to hammer the malicious spirits that dare to invade his domain. This unrelenting supervisor can already taste the fruits of victory that will be his once he apprehends these perpetrators — these two who have eluded him on way too many occasions.

He waits for the two mice to enter his inescapable trap, waiting to strike down with his mighty gauntlet of justice.

After crossing the street, Scott and Dave stop dead in their tracks...for they spot the massive security sentinel atop the steps. Realizing he has already spotted them, they stare at each other, anticipating what move their opponent is going to make.

The scene unfolds like a classical Western showdown, drawn straight from history books, the one where the town sheriff — in this case being Curly — is determined to catch the two villain — Scott and Dave — and lock them away in a municipal jailhouse...or detention hall in this case.

As cheers of encouragement descend from above, all three tilt their heads and eyeballs up toward the students, and the handful of teachers poking their heads out of the second, third and fourth floor windows. Dreading this unsolicited attention, the two mice return their attention to the snarling mouse-trapper who is no further than twenty or thirty yards away.

Convinced of a betting pool for this recurring event, the pressure is now on Curly to catch them, because if he fails, he will look bad, whereas if he doesn't, well...it will be worse for the two mice. Having to act fast as their opponent is now more determined to catch them, Scott and Dave bolt like an arrow toward the backside of the school, hoping to gain safe entrance there.

Unfortunately for the two infamous outlaws, Curly has prophesied which door they are heading for and scurrying back inside, he runs like a madman down the lengthy hallway toward the rear of the building.

“Run faster, Dave!” Scott roars.

“I’m running as fast as I can!” Dave roars back.

Making track toward the backside, the two are pleased to discover the water puddles generated by the heavy rains that came in the night have evaporated; the soil provides a favorable degree of traction.

Closing in on the staircase at the end the hallway that leads to the basement floor, the supervisor nearly topples a middle-aged teacher from the tenth-grade home economics class. The woman gawks in utter terror at the two hundred and sixty pounds of man-train barreling down the hallway, with a force that will indubitably pulverize her if she remains within his destructive path.

“MY LORD!” the woman screams.

With mere seconds to dodge the human locomotive, the teacher pitches the papers she is holding into the air and scampers into the room directly in front of her. Grunting, Curly continues down the empty hallway, passing the room

that holds the teacher. From past experience, Scott knows the beefy supervisor is fully cognizant of what door they are heading for...

“Stop!” he yells.

“What?!” Dave barks, just as he is about to open that first door on the backside. Without responding, Scott runs for the second door, completely aware he is taking a chance in doing so; there is an important game on Saturday, and he can't afford to be caught...for pressure may be brought to bear that could keep him on the sidelines.

Of the few times Curly netted him, one was just before a game, Scott was not allowed to play...well, not until they were down by a pair of touchdowns heading into the fourth quarter. The principal allowed the coach to bend the rules and bring in their stellar performer, especially since they were playing a rival school. It is common knowledge that the head cheeses of the schools ran private bets on the games.

Upon reaching the second door, Scott quickly opens it, trusting his hypothesis is correct. Rushing inside, they encounter zilch on the basement floor, and, to their salvation, a nearby staircase is also unoccupied. Waiting a moment to make sure nobody is descending the stairs, they make their move, disappearing like phantoms up them.

“That was close,” Scott says.

“It didn't help with those fools yelling!” Dave scoffs.

“No, it didn't.”

"I wanted to throw my shoe at them!" Dave sneers.

"Thank God you didn't." Scott chuckles.

"You're hilarious."

"Let's keep moving."

Pausing momentarily at the first floor landing. "Why is Curly so mean?" Dave asks, struggling to catch his breath.

"Have you looked into his eyes?" Scott responds.

"Yeah."

"Then you know why, the man hates everyone. I'll see you later." Scott makes like a thief down the first floor hallway, whereas Dave continues up the stairs, having two more floors to go before his epic journey is over.

Hearing the closing of a hallway locker, Scott pokes his head around the corner, discovering the corridor to be deserted. Quickstepping over to his locker, which is across from the room he seeks, he unravels the combination to his lock and opens the locker. Grabbing a notebook, pen, and a small backpack, as well as a cumbersome book that reads, "American English" he advances to the closed-door of...



Like a seasoned thief entering a jewelry store, Scott opens the door with a polished grace and spots the teacher at the blackboard writing words upon it. With his backside facing him, Scott employs stealth, attempting to slip into his assigned desk by the back window. And, with his objective mere feet away...

"I see we are late again, Mr. Miller."

Cursing internally, Scott stops dead in his track, slowly turning toward the teacher who is still writing on the blackboard, his backside still facing him.

"Don't just stand there like a statue, take your seat and write these words down." Obeying the teacher's directive, Scott hastens to his desk and opens his notebook. As he begins writing down the words, the boy seated on his right, wearing his favorite, Fred Flintstone baseball cap sneaks him a small bag of BBQ chips, which he graciously accepts.

"Thanks, Keith."

"You get away with too much," the boy scoffs.

"I do?"

"Yeah, you do, and it sickens me."

"It's called, public relations skills."

"You mean, ass-kissing skills," Keith jeers; Scott winks and smiles. Shaking his head, the boy resumes writing down the words, whereas Scott slips a few of those tasty BBQ chips into his mouth. Given Mr. Cummins's placid demeanor, Scott knows he isn't going to catch hell from his teacher.

Furthermore, Scott isn't the least bit concerned with Curly showing up to drag him down to the vice principal's office, as this isn't his style. The security supervisor wants to catch him in the act, making the chastising sweeter.

"There is going to be a test on these words next week," Mr. Cummins says, slowly turning from the blackboard to face his class. **"You will be required to spell each word, then, you will be asked to use it in a sentence that contains both an adverb and pronoun."** The class moans in displeasure.

Before the minute hand on the clock moves its seventh time, a boy with short black hair walks into the classroom, holding a piece of paper inside his left hand. Upon seeing the lad, Mr. Cummins walks over and says hello; he takes the paper and reads it. In the interim, Scott takes full advantage of the distraction, by depositing a couple of those tasty chips into his mouth as he continues to write the words into his notebook.



Mr. Cummins: five feet, eight inches. He has long, thinning brown hair, which he mostly keeps in a ponytail; this man of fifty was a true rebel in the sixties, wearing much of the same jewelry to this day. He is a tolerant teacher, always on the side of clemency; at all times will you see a smile on his face. Regrettably, tragedy struck last year...victim of a negligent driver, which is reason for his walking stick; the motorcycle accident made him a widower.

“My beloved, students,” Mr. Cummins says, “I need to leave for a while. I expect you all to behave like adults.”

Seconds after the teacher leaves with the boy, a petite, very pretty girl sitting in the desk directly in front of Scott turns around and shyly whispers hello. She receives a smile and salutations of her own, but that is as far as it goes, for Scott’s attention drifts away, leaving the brokenhearted girl to turn around and resume her studies.

One thing occupies his mind – *Lisa*.

Contrary to what Dave thinks, nothing remotely sexual happened with the blonde beauty. They patronized several stores at the downtown mall, finishing off the day with a late lunch at one of the finer eateries there. Before dating, they always said hello when they passed each other in the halls, but it never went any further than that. With Scott being the football hero and Lisa being every teenager’s fantasy, it was destined to happen. This delectable young lady has tormented the hell out of countless young men throughout her years, unintentionally and intentionally.

Twisting his body around and resting his elbows upon the ledge of the windowsill, Scott gazes at the small park behind the school. Inserting chips into his mouth, his nostrils take joy with the flowery fragrance that comes with spring, delivered by a friendly gust of warm air that nuzzles his face. Continuing to satisfy his belly, his mind transports him back in time to when he was a small boy playing in this same park

with his parents, remembering the happiness they shared with him and each other. Elevating his chin, he stares into the cloudless sky. It is a handsome day.

Something is wrong!

An internal warning grips his being, a familiar tingling in his stomach that from past experiences had proven to be accurate -- something was amiss. Scanning the area behind the school, starting with the neighboring houses, then the corner store, he sees nothing unusual. Choosing to ignore the oddness, he resumes writing down the remaining words from the chalkboard into his notebook, but before his pen touches the paper it dawns on him: *the silence!*

Normally at this time of the day, a car would be driving down the street that borders the other side of the park.

He doesn't see any joggers, nor any bicyclists shaking off the cobwebs from the long, cold winter.

What is more, he does not observe:

Birds flying in the sky.

Children on the swing sets.

Someone walking their dog.

Not a single couple admiring the beautiful gardens the city planted inside the park just last spring, nor does he hear a sound coming from the residential homes no further than a hundred or so yards away. He hears nothing, absolutely nothing; furthermore, he believes he is being...*watched!*

It's been this type of abnormality...this unnerving brand of bizarreness that he has been forced to endure his whole life. Even when he was just a babe being pushed down the street inside his stroller, he felt the presence of Evil, even though he knew not what Evil was. This awareness only intensified the older he got – often lasting no longer than a beat or two of his trembling heart.

Staring into the blue skies, he observes a cloud moving steadily in his direction.

Strange, that cloud wasn't there a second ago!

It's not the shape of the cloud that concerns him, but the disturbing greenish tint within it. Seconds later, the cloud begins turning brown. Inching his head closer to the window, he watches the cloud turn blood-red, swearing on his soul something is taking shape inside it.

Grinning face...fanged teeth...demonic eyes!

The school bell rings, signifying the end of first class.

A bit startled, Scott removes his eyes from the waning vision and directs them to the front of the room...to the door to which Mr. Cummins now stands at, saying goodbye to his students as they walk past him.

He pokes his head back out the window. **“Nothing.”**

“Scott, did you say something?” Keith asks, putting his notebook inside his backpack.

“Where did the face go?” Scott whispers to himself.

“Where did what go?”

“What?” Scott asks, turning to Keith.

“You just said, where did the face go?”

“I did?”

“Duh, yeah.”

“I was just looking out the...”

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m good.” Scott’s eyes return to the door—to the students who are asking Mr. Cummins questions about the upcoming test.

“See you later,” Keith says as he is about to walk away.

“Hey, did you see a strange looking cloud in the sky?”

“Scott, I think you’re strange.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, you’ve lost your mind,” Keith says, walking over to the window, and looking out. “There aren’t any clouds in the sky.” Shaking his head, Keith heads for the door, but Scott returns to the window, and sticks his head out of it.

“He’s right.” His gaze descends to the cars currently driving down the street, on both sides of the park. “I must be imagining things again.” After grabbing his books, Scott stuffs that half-eaten bag of chips inside his backpack and heads for the door, but, just as he is about to leave, a small tin wastebasket is held out by an outstretched hand. When the initial uncertainty vanishes from his face, Scott reaches into his backpack to extract those munchies, dropping them into the litterbin.

“Thank you kindly, Mr. Miller,” Mr. Cummins says with a smile. “Have yourself a wonderful day.”

“You too, Mr. Cummins.” Scott rolls his eyes as his feet steer him through the door. He has long held teachers were born with eyes in the back of their heads. The reason for this assumption is the fact that they know...*too damn much!*

Once inside the hallway, Scott becomes conscious of a cool draft blowing freely inside the hallway, brushing his face like a spider's web. Upon reaching his locker, he scans the lively corridor for the source of the breeze; another one is felt, confirming the first was not imaginary.

Shrugging off the queerness, he opens his locker, but before the first book can successfully slide off his fingers to touch the metal shelf, that image from the cloud appears in his head, soon replaced by a carousal of emotions that is swift in choking his senses. In opposition to his willpower, his mind conjures a most unwanted memory.

When he was eight years old, Scott liked to stargaze from his bedroom window, using an apprentice telescope his father got him. It was during one nocturnal occasion that he first laid eyes upon... *Him!*

*Garbed in dark clothing.
Standing next to the oak tree.
Staring at him from inside the shadows.
Across the street, by the neighbor's house.*

