

Epic Rites Press

New Book Release

Blood And Greasepaint

by Karl Koweski

Blood And Greasepaint is Chicago native Karl Koweski's first full-length feature collection of short stories. The eleven well-crafted, interconnected stories work like a novel presented piecemeal, not adhering to a traditional timeline. When asked about it, Koweski explained:

"I'm a big fan of the sort of short stories Jean Shepherd wrote. Through several collections the reader got to learn the history and characteristics of an entire neighborhood and its occupants. You learned how they celebrated Christmas, Fourth of July, where they went for vacation, their favorite cars. For me, this sort of interconnected nature of the tales enriched the stories being told. Being a humorist and all around funny guy, I think the best jokes are the long-running jokes, the ones that have a little bit of history to it."

The stories in *Blood And Greasepaint* wander somewhere between the macabre, the absurd, and the grotesque. They work seamlessly to produce a surrealistic atmosphere that threatens, at every turn, to erupt into madness and mayhem.

Blood And Greasepaint is flat-out funny! I can count the number of books that make me laugh out loud on one hand – with enough fingers left over to make the OK sign and still flip the bird. *Blood And Greasepaint* is one of these rare books! Every joke is carefully constructed and waiting to detonate like a comedic landmine.



Exterior by Pablo Vision

Blood And Greasepaint
by Karl Koweski
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Just Another Southern Fried Perspective: A Review Of *Blood And Greasepaint*
by Frankie Metro

In **BLOOD AND GREASEPAINT AT THE TOMBSTONE BAR AND GRILLE** (the title story from Karl Koweski's *Blood And Greasepaint*), you will find a real mesquite, deadly motif. A subtle ambiance of death is looming over you from the first sentence, and makes itself more apparent as the story continues. This is something only the great masters like Edgar Allan Poe and Frank Miller have, until now, really honed and applied. An invisible dagger waits at your throat as you progress, cutting ever so slowly as you are compelled to read this story out loud and with a ghoulish, scraggly voice. Koweski describes the patrons of this hole in the wall by saying:

"Tombstone's clientele maintained a steady level of controlled deterioration... protruding guts, distended livers, discolored eyes."

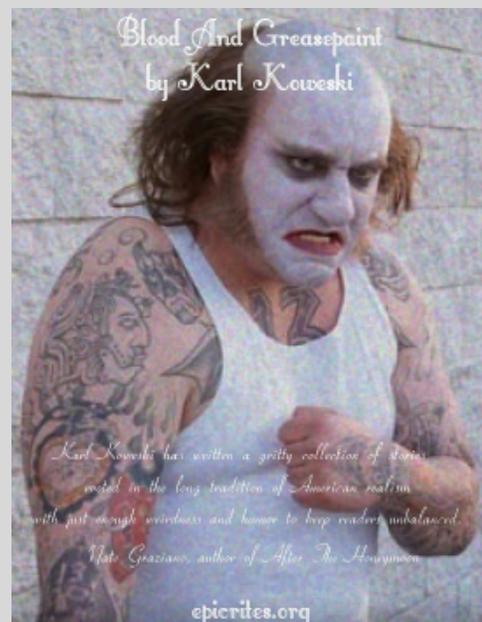
The in-depth description of the scene that follows reminds me of a key set up for the old spaghetti westerns made famous by Sergio Leone, Lee Van Cleef and Clint Eastwood.

"They kept an empty stool between each other."

Also, what is really intriguing about this particular story, is the soundtrack he creates by describing the songs played on the

jukebox in a dank corner of the bar. Names like Bob Seger and George Thorogood, symbolize the Heartland of my own youth, and the nightmares of white collar Yankee America. You will find such places only in the darkest holes of death's shadow, somewhere along the Mississippi River.

"The door swung open and a man entered the bar. His presence sucked the sound from the room. Even George Thorogood on the juke lowered his voice. The man wore a black derby hat, black slacks held up with black suspenders, shiny black shoes and a black and white vertically striped long sleeve shirt. A yellow carnation safety-pinned to his shirt at a jaunty angle, seemed to survey the room like a periscope. His face was smeared with white greasepaint."



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Here is THE SCENE, made famous countless times by bandits and other lawless men. Made famous by bounty hunters and stray cow-hands who knew how to hold a Colt and not of the .45 persuasion. Now we have the obvious antagonist entering the crowded bar and all the while the protagonists (Alex and Ralph) with their backs to the door and the stale breath of death or the hot blood of the long night ahead, filling the air. In this story, Koweski has made death the silent mime in a Technicolor picture. Suddenly, you are face to face with greasepaint and an overall sense of uneasiness crawls up your spine – for what is more silent than death? And what does death primarily wear but black masks or shrouds? At least then, it is familiar, but now, you are forced to reconsider such naive notions. Here, you ask yourself: ‘Does death really wear white greasepaint?’ and you are more than ready for this to be confirmed.

Affirmative! Not only is the character death incarnate, but carries a tiny mallet in place of a scythe. The victim, a bar-rat who is a Chicago Cubs fan no less (tell me that isn’t fucking tragic!) is described by Koweski in the lines:

“His eyes bugged out comically, as though he’d just witnessed the Cubbie’s closer give up a two run homer in the bottom of the ninth inning to lose the game.”

There is a sick irony to this, the hopeless fan meeting his demise with the symbol of countless failures atop his head. Hephaestus

himself would pay close attention to such creations. Whereas he created weapons for death with iron and fire, Koweski has made weapons for death from grim humor, greasepaint and grave social interactions.

Without giving too much of the story away in this review, there is a standoff in the streets at the front of the bar between a school of mimes and the bar flies, which took me back to the first time I saw the Walter Hill film: *The Warriors* (1979), in which the dispersed group of Ajax, Snow and Swan face off with the baseball enthused street gang, The Baseball Furies, and crack their skulls with bats. Such standoffs made American action cinema something relatable and more common as opposed to the millions upon billions of dollars spent on special effects in today’s cinema, which make the viewer feel less disappointed when all is said and done.

That kind of Pulp Fiction is found in this particular story and could easily be in your neck of the woods... or the neck of the right bottle.

Cheers Karl Koweski! This bloody glass is for you.

Karl Koweski has written a gritty collection of stories rooted in the long tradition of American realism with just enough weirdness and humor to keep readers unbalanced.”
– Nate Graziano, author of *After The Honeymoon*

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Karl Koweski is a master of description, able to put things in a way grasped at a very basic level. In a recent interview, Koweski listed Stephen King as one of his major influences. King's influence is unmistakable, as flowery prose is replaced with blood and guts and meat and potatoes. As readers this is something we want, need and appreciate. Asked about his other influences, Koweski answered:

"The first author I read with any degree of hero worship was Stephen King. I guess I was ten or eleven. I'd grown up on a steady diet of Hardy Boys/ Nancy Drew type literature. Looking for something to read, I came across a box of my mother's Stephen King paperbacks. Early King: *Salem's Lot*, *The Shining*, *The Stand*, *Night Shift*. I learned my best lessons about character development, dialogue and escalating tension from those early books. For me there's no shame in preferring genre writers. I never had much use for the heavy hitters. From there I moved on to writers like Elmore Leonard, Donald Westlake, Jim Thompson, James Ellroy, Clive Barker, Joe R. Lansdale. I love to read, I love discovering writers on a daily basis. My roots will always be in genre fiction, but it doesn't stop me from branching out to literary writers like Denis Johnson, Philip Roth, Nick Tosches, and Cormac McCarthy."

Blood And Greasepaint by Karl Koweski is an American masterpiece.

**Available now from
spdbooks.org.**

"In this remarkably varied collection of short stories, Koweski uses his blow torch wit to expose the sad excesses and frailties of ordinary people he has come to love and hate." – George Anderson, *Bold Monkey*

"Karl's stories are places your wife would rather you didn't go, but sometimes you just have to. All the fun and adventure of a drunken night in the bad part of town, but no hangover in the morning." – William Taylor Jr., author of *The Hunger Season*

"Karl Koweski has written a gritty collection of stories rooted in the long tradition of American realism with just enough weirdness and humor to keep readers unbalanced." – Nate Graziano, author of *After The Honey*

"Karl Koweski's writing makes me laugh out loud and cringe at the same time. It takes talent and endurance to pull that off and Koweski is a master at both." – Tony DuShane, author of *Confessions of a Teenage Jesus Jerk*

"Blood And Greasepaint by Karl Koweski is flat out funny – every joke carefully constructed and waiting to detonate like a comedic landmine." – Wolfgang Carstens, author of *Crudely Mistaken For Life*

"Koweski once again shows his breadth as a writer in this witty and engaging collection." – Rebecca Schumejda, author of *Falling Forward*

"Koweski has made weapons for death from grim humor, greasepaint and grave social interactions." – Frankie Metro, *The HIGHdra Syndicate*