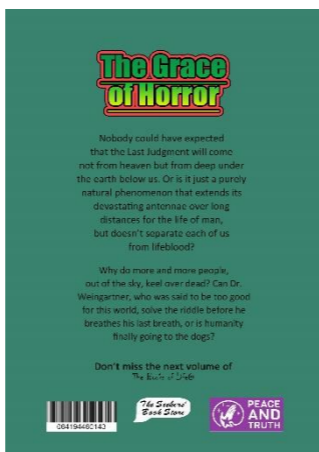


George M. Grow
Honey Fungus
Beast from the Underworld

The Final Days of Humankind



From the series
The Books of Life®



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Reading sample, page 21

In front of the little country house

The front of the free-standing cottage is in the middle of the stage, on the right, the actors. The left third is cloaked in darkness.

SHERIFF. Dum-dee dum dum dum, dum-dee da da. (To Weingartner.) This was a hit about twenty years ago, as shabby as this house. (Towards a woman.) Is the watch correct?

WEINGARTNER (to the Sheriff). Do you want to keep waiting?

FIRST WOMAN. Another six minutes.

MAN WITH PICKAX. Not that he gives us the slip.

WEINGARTNER. You haven't said yet what your suspicion is based on, Sheriff.

SHERIFF. A good nose does not need any reasons. Normally, strange occurrences have a strange cause, and nobody in the whole town is stranger than old John.

WEINGARTNER. I see. That's why you didn't get a search warrant. For someone who sticks to nothing but facts, a strange approach, don't you think?

SHERIFF. Aha, and you, Doctor, aren't strange at all. Your jacket could be from the circus, isn't it?

FIRST WOMAN. If you want to turn the corner you must step out of line.

SHERIFF. I bet, and you got the hang of it, you know the drill.

WEINGARTNER. Is he home at all?

SECOND WOMAN. Certainly he is. It's said that he used to get out among the people in the past, but for

years, they've only seen him driving around his pickup. What does he live on, where does he shop, does he never get ill and never need a doctor, what does he do all alone in his house?

SHERIFF. Brooding.

WEINGARTNER (to the Sheriff). And what are we still waiting for? Not for him to slip through your fingers.

SHERIFF. My deputies have taken up position behind the house. If he tries to run off through the fields, he'll run directly into their arms. How much longer?

FIRST WOMAN. Two minutes to go.

SHERIFF (gooses the walkie-talkie). Wood Spirit, this is Bravo one! What's the word? Over.

WOOD SPIRIT. This is Wood Spirit! The farm road and the edge of the wood are sealed off. Not even a mouse could get through unseen. Over.

SHERIFF. Keep your eyes open, we're moving in now, over. (He clips the radio to his belt. To the crowd.) Now, if you will step back, you never know. Doctor, that goes for you too. (He takes out his service weapon from its holster, steps forward and shakes the front doorknob twice.) John, open up, we know you are in there! (He shakes harder.) Let us in or we'll break down the door!

FIRST WOMAN. He isn't moving, not at all, tell me, is he dead?

MAN WITH PICKAX. He has finished himself off.

SECOND WOMAN. Himself? This cannot be true, I can't accept that, this would be too simple. He took my child, my only child from me, and then he simply ... himself ...

that'd be too easy for him!

SHERIFF. Hang on a minute!

MAN WITH PICKAX. Put in irons and decapitated, that's what he deserves. Off with his head, off with his head!

SHERIFF. John, answer the door, this is your last warning! (Silence.)

WEINGARTNER. And where do we go from here?

SHERIFF. Law must turn a blind eye now. (To the people.) That won't go any further, the consequences are mine, you have nothing to do with that, you have seen nothing, understood?

ALL TOGETHER. Understood.

SHERIFF (points his gun at the door lock).

MAN WITH PICKAX. Do you want to shoot the door, let me try!

FIRST WOMAN. You can't shoot doors and you can't shoot spirits. His revenge will be terrible.

MAN WITH THE PICKAX. Gracious goodness, it can't get any worse; I'm going to get him out! (He rolls up his sleeves, spits into his hands, snaps the ax, lunges out and hits the spot exactly. The gate bursts open. Everyone retreats).

SHERIFF (leaning against the doorframe, with gun at the ready.) John, it's no use, come out with your hands up!

WEINGARTNER. What do you see, Sheriff, is he there?

SECOND WOMAN (low). Better not.

SHERIFF. John, I'm coming in now, don't be silly, we only want to take a look around! (With his weapon at the ready, he takes a step into the doorway, glances quickly around and enters timidly. With his first step over the threshold, the house inside illuminates gloomily. While

he is inspecting the side rooms...)

FIRST WOMAN. I tell you, he can disappear into thin air. He certainly is watching us. Can't you smell it?

SECOND WOMAN. Is he decaying?
(She coughs and takes a handkerchief to her face.)

FIRST WOMAN (buries her nose in her sleeve). Ugh, disgusting. No one is gonna get me in there. I've warned you. If it gets to an old woman like me, well, all right, yet still my knees are shaking.

WEINGARTNER. Where does the stink come from, can you make anything out, Sheriff?

FIRST WOMAN. He can't smell us just like we can't smell him. This spirit is an ungracious spirit. He plays practical jokes on us. He leads hikers astray or lets them go around in circles till they get stuck someplace on a cliff or at the edge of a marsh without caring about them. He breaks the axles of passing cars, or he lets the air out of the tires. If someone divines who has played this trick on him and starts complaining about him, he sends them a swarm of hornets, a hail of stones or strange illnesses. Be careful, the stink could be a sign!

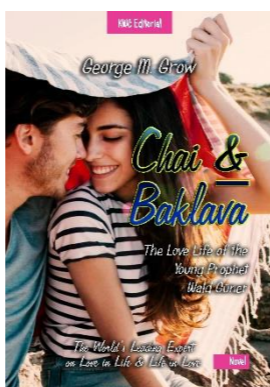
SHERIFF (calls out of the chamber). Dum-dee dum dum dum, dum-dee da da ... Yeah, you see, everything has a rational explanation. Boo, pshaw, cough! It's coming out from the hole in the floor!

WEINGARTNER: Who, old John?

SECOND WOMAN. The Lord helps us!

End of the reading

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