
Hugh B. Cave Revisited

An Interview Conducted by Tim Dill

August 1999

I first came in contact with Hugh B. Cave when I conducted an interview with him in December of 1996. I was familiar with his work, but had no knowledge of his character. During the interval between that interview and this one, Hugh and I traded letters and e-mail discussing our work and lives. Today I am very honored to be presenting this interview not only because I am a fan of Hugh Cave but because I am also a friend.

Tim Dill: Pumpkin Books just published *Isle of the Whisperers* your first novel since 1991 (*Lucifer's Eye*, Tor Books). You've written several short stories since this time; why did you choose to return to novels?

Hugh Cave: I guess I write novels when what seems to be a good idea happens along and grabs me. To stay contented, all I really have to do is keep on writing, and most of what I do these days is in the short-story form for anthologies and a few magazines, such as Cemetery Dance and Weird Tales, that I always enjoy reading. "Whisperers" kept me busy for a while, and David Marshall of Pumpkin Books (England) liked it but wanted it to be a bit longer. I liked his ideas for lengthening it, and we had a book.

Tim Dill: In *Isle of the Whisperers* your hero is a 64-year-old female archeologist. I've read quite a bit of your work but can't recall your featuring a woman as the main character before. Why did you choose Martha for this novel?

Hugh Cave: I've written more than a few short stories in which women were the main characters, but "Whisperers" is my

first such novel. On the other hand, is Martha actually the "hero" of "Whisperers?" What about Dan Lorimer, her young male assistant? And what about little Erica, when she crawls alone through the Worm Hole in the cave to carry a life-saving message to Martha? To tell the truth, I don't think I "made up" these people. With the story-line in place, they just came into being by themselves to work it out!

Tim Dill: I thought that *Isle of Whisperers* would make a great film. Any chances?

Hugh Cave: No one has approached me yet. Actually, it hasn't been out long enough for such a development. Keep some fingers crossed, hey?

Tim Dill: Have you had any of your work channeled to film or television?

Hugh Cave: Quite a few of my shorter works have been done on radio and television. "Danger By Night" had David Niven playing the lead. "The Woman at Fog Point" had Ralph Bellamy. I had a movie offer for "Murgunstrumm" but it fizzled when the star they wanted to play Murgy—I'd better not name him!—declined

to play the part because the old inn-keeper was just “too much”. My *The Cross on the Drum* almost made it onto the screen too, but the man who was to have played the hounigan (again I’d better not name him) just didn’t want to make another movie at that time. Still another one that might have become a movie was the novel you mentioned above, *Lucifer’s Eye*. I was dickering with the “producer” when he suddenly fell silent. I never did find out why.

Tim Dill: Do you currently have a literary agent?

Hugh Cave: No, I don’t. I haven’t used an agent for short stories in several years, and I sold my two most recent novels myself. To tell the truth, I enjoy dealing personally with editors and publishers.

Tim Dill: Black Dog Books is republishing several of your pulp tales. What is the process of material selection?

Hugh Cave: I put that question to Tom Roberts not long ago and he replied that he is collecting my pulp stories and wants to reprint those that hit him hard enough. Black Dog has already published *The Death-Head’s March and Others* by Geoffrey Cave and Hugh B. Cave, *White Star of Egypt* by Justin Case (one of my pulp pen-names), and a long novelette, *The Desert Host*, from Farnsworth Wright’s Magic Carpet Magazine. Wright, you’ll remember, also edited the original Weird Tales. An accomplished artist and book designer, Tom does a great job with these booklets. Up next from Tom’s Black Dog Books will be a second collection of my Justin Case stories called *Dark Doors of*

Doom (out in October, 1999), then a collection of my Shane Kelley Postal Inspector stories called *Dig The Grave Deeper* (also planned for October, 1999) to be followed by a third Justin Case collection called *Sabali Madness* due out about January 2000.

Tim Dill: Several of your pulp stories have been reprinted electronically by Vintage New Media. How is that selection process compared to other markets?

Hugh Cave: Jack Suto runs Vintage New Media and does a fine job with it. Readers who want a complete answer to this question would do well to seek out Vintagelibrary.com/ on the web. From time to time Mr. Suto has reprinted stories of mine (and of other writers) from all kinds of pulp magazines. He packages them by genre: detective, adventure, shudder stories, etc. The web-site also sells books, including my *Isle of the Whisperers*. Altogether it’s a fascinating web-site.

Tim Dill: In today’s current environment, it seems that fewer and fewer outlets are available for short stories and novels. What are your thoughts on today’s literary marketplace.

Hugh Cave: When I was a young man almost every drugstore in the land had a rack of “all-fiction” magazines on display. (There were more than a hundred titles and they weren’t called “pulp” then.) Any would-be writer could do what I did at the time: read them, write the kind of stories they published, and mail the stories in. It was the same with the so-called “slicks”, such as the Saturday Evening Post (which published 43 stories of mine) and Good

Housekeeping (which published 36), although the slicks paid better and were harder to sell to. Now what is there? The pulps are gone. Most of the slicks no longer use fiction. There exists a mere handful of small-press magazines that a would-be writer can direct his work to. As for book publishing, there used to be many such publishers of all shapes and sizes. Now there are just a handful of conglomerates. You can still be published, of course—there are some fine “small presses” out there—but all in all unless you are a very big name, it is much harder to make a living as a “writer”.

Tim Dill: Since our last interview (December '96) a tremendous amount of your work has been republished. What is forthcoming?

Hugh Cave: A possible sequel to *Isle of the Whisperers* from Pumpkin Books. A new novel called *The Dawning* from Leisure Books. A collection of my Peter Kane stories from Dime Detective Magazine, called *Bottled in Blonde*, from award-winning Fedogan & Bremer. The Black Dog Books items mentioned above. A new short story in *Northern Frights 5*, the great Don Hutchison anthology series. A new short story in Cemetery Dance. And—with luck—a handful of other projects now in the formative stage.

Tim Dill: What is your writing pattern? Do you work at a steady pace on a defined project or have spurts of creative activity?

Hugh Cave: I've been at this wonderful game long enough now to work whenever I feel like it. Which could be all morning, all

afternoon, all day, and at times even all night. I kid you not. Ask my Peggy.

Tim Dill: I recently read *Conquering Kilmarnie*, a novel of yours from 1989 (Macmillan) that was billed as a children's book. I was shocked to find that it was just as entertaining to an adult as a child. Did you conduct much research in the children's book segment prior to starting this tale?

Hugh Cave: My very first book (of the 37 I've had published to date) was *Fishermen Four*, a boys' book done by Dodd Mead in 1942. I had an urge to try the field again in 1988 with *The Voyage* (Macmillan, U.S. & Collins, England) and again in 1989 with *Conquering Kilmarnie* (again Macmillan and Collins.) I'm flattered that you liked the latter as an adult, but no one has suggested I write any more such novels. “Kilmarnie” may have had an adult feel for you because it's about the adventures of a Jamaican boy and an American boy on a coffee plantation in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica, and I owned and ran such a plantation for 15 years.

Tim Dill: *Pulp Man's Odyssey: The Hugh B. Cave Story* by Audrey Parente was written several years ago as a biography of your writing career. A new much larger biography is in development. What is the status of this project?

Hugh Cave: Milt Thomas, who accompanied me to the London World Fantasy Convention in October, 1997, is writing such a biography. He's a published author and a darned good one. He is also a trusted friend and my literary executor. Anyone interested in publishing his book

about me is invited to write to me at 437 Thomas Street, Sebastian, FL 32958 or e-mail me at Hughbcave@aol.com. When finished, Milt's bio will be a whole-life story, not just a resume of my career as a writer.

Tim Dill: In 1997 at the World Fantasy Convention in London you received the prestigious Life Achievement Award. Can you tell us about the convention and then your return to the US?

Hugh Cave: Actually, the Howie they gave me says "Special Committee Award" on it, but Steve Jones did tell me it was a Lifetime Achievement Award. I had an earlier one in 1991 from the Horror Writers Association, and have since been given a Grandmaster Award by the International Horror Guild. But the flight home from that London convention was pretty stressful, even with my friend Milt Thomas along, and I ended up in the hospital with a bleeding ulcer. Trying to find out what brought on the ulcer (which was later determined to have been caused by water I drank in the boonies of Haiti years before!) the medics discovered I had a 95 per cent blockage in both carotid arteries (which supply blood to the brain). The surgeon who repaired them told me I was lucky I got to the hospital when I did. Had those blocked-up arteries not been discovered within 48 hours, I would have said farewell to you all.

Tim Dill: During your pulp days, you had several continuing characters such as The Eel. Were you ever offered a writing stint for a continuing character in a Hero Pulp, such as Doc Savage? If not, would you have accepted such an offer?

Hugh Cave: If any editor had invited me to write a Hero Pulp tale, I probably would have at least tried to do so. Pulp editors seemed to be content with letting me write my stories about The Eel and Peter Kane and Shane Kelley and Tsiang House, etc.

Tim Dill: Your guest house burned many years ago containing your collection of pulp magazines that contained your stories. Recently, Tom Roberts of Black Dog Books has led an Internet-based campaign to recover your material. Can you give us an up-date on the project and its background?

Hugh Cave: Tom and I were swapping letters about his work and mine, and I happened to mention that fire. He took it on as a project. To date he has persuaded a dozen or more fan friends to send him stories of mine, which stories he sends me copies of. I wrote some 800 stories for the pulps under my own and several pen-names before moving on into books and the slicks. Thanks to Tom, I've been able to replace all but about 50 of them. The fans have been simply wonderful, and my heart goes out to them for their caring and kindness. God bless them all—and Tom Roberts—and you, Tim Dill.

THE END



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