



HARLAN COUNTY HORRORS

EDITED BY
MARI ADKINS

Sample file

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In loving memory

John Thomas Adkins
June 8, 1961 - October 1, 1980

Sample file

Introduction
by Mari Adkins

When I close my eyes and think of Harlan County, the first images to appear behind my eyelids are of Martin's Fork Lake, the view from Raven Rock at Kingdom Come, the night sky at Camp Blanton, and the gazebo at Resthaven. Savage beauty draped in a cloak of savage darkness is the epitome of Harlan County. Ugliness, wastefulness, and scars caused by deep, strip, and mountaintop removal mining—and other things—have altered the lush, verdant landscape. The very beauty and abundant game that enticed the pioneers to remain there and evolve into rugged mountaineers would become their downfall.

In the beginning, a pioneer could claim for his own any scrap of land on any hillside or creek bottom. With the abundance of wild game, he didn't have to bother with sowing large crops; small "kitchen door" gardens for needed vegetables and herbs sufficed. The early mountaineer and his family lived a solitary existence, rarely seeing anyone outside their farmstead, as they had no need.

Things began to change once the timber barons came into the Cumberland Plateau in the mid- to late-1800s and saw the vast stands of enormous hardwood trees. Once these were depleted—leaving the landowners with little cash in return, for they had been convinced to sell the timber rights without any claim to the actual land—the area became ripe for the removal of the black gold buried beneath the mountains and hillsides. With water supplies oftentimes buried or otherwise left useless from logging operations, the mountaineer found himself with no choice but to sell his land for what little he could receive for it and move his family into any one of the number of growing, thriving company owned and operated mining towns.

In the mid- to late-1960s things began to change somewhat, as new roads into the plateau brought in a handful of new jobs and opportunities. But unless brought on by outside forces, change has always been slow to come in the Kentucky mountains.

At the brink of my own change and awakening within Harlan County, I moved to Loyall in October 1995. I can't, in all honesty, make any sweeping proclamations about love at first sight, but I can say the county grew on me, tugged at some deep, hidden place within my soul. And I came to call that place "home." I know I sit and talk about Harlan County enough to make peoples' ears bleed, and my

running joke is that I know more about Harlan County and love it more than some of its native people. In fact, I'm prone to—and know for—packing friends into my car to make the long drive down so I can share the county with them.

This love brought about the birth of the book you now hold in your hands. I can't quite remember what we said in the Spring of 2007, but one day while I waxed on about Harlan, Jason Sizemore—esteemed High Overlord of Apex Publications—said, “We should do a special Harlan County anthology. Fill it with regional stories by regional writers.” I thought it would be fun. So we went to work, but due to the fickleness of the publishing industry, we had to cancel our plans. Admittedly, when the idea first came about, Jason and I thought we were just joking around. But then a miracle happened in the spring of 2008. We got serious and said, “We can do this.” Then he looked at me and said, “You can do this.” So I did this. I reassembled writers, sent out announcements, and we all went to work.

The Harlan County backdrop described above—the futility of the mountaineer—is difficult to understand or imagine unless it's witnessed or experienced. One only need to step into the county to feel the hopelessness some of these people still live with every day, the darkness enshrouding their lives. With this in mind, I told the writers, “Go forth and create an image of Harlan County.”

From the time the first stories began coming in, I knew *Harlan County Horrors* was going to be something special. Aliens, witches, vampires, portals to hell, zombies, djin, Aztec priests, chupacabra, zombies, and more dance a magical, oppressive, often violent reel through coal, ash, and blood.

It is my sincere hope that you derive as much pleasure from *Harlan County Horrors* as I did in putting it together. It is my gift of love to the county and to its people.

Mari Adkins
June 2009
Lexington, KY