

WOLFGANG HOHLBEIN



*IN THE BEAST'S
SHADOW*

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What is The Hexer from Salem?

The Hexer from Salem, a novel series in the vein of H.P. Lovecraft, was created and written almost entirely by Wolfgang Hohlbein. The epic began in 1984 in a pulp-fiction series: Ghost-Thrillers from Bastei Publishing and later as a stand-alone series under *The Hexer from Salem*, before it finally became available in paperback and collectors editions.

The story takes place primarily in nineteenth century London, following the chilling adventures of The Hexer, Robert Craven and, later on, his son as they encounter the Great Aged — godlike creatures hostile to humans — and their representatives on earth.

The Author

Wolfgang Hohlbein is a phenomenon: With more than 200 books selling over 40 million copies worldwide, he is one of Germany's most prolific fantasy writers. Hohlbein is well-known for his young adult books and above all his novel series, *The Hexer from Salem*.

Wolfgang Hohlbein



Episode 5: In the Beast's Shadow

Translated by William Glucroft

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In the beast's shadow

As it so often is after a storm, the ocean was calm and unnaturally smooth. It was still, and even the wind, howling the whole night along the cliff-lined coast, and the waves, bursting into white spray against the craggy rocks, had faded to nothing by sunrise. The only sounds to break the silence were the steps of three men, carefully approaching a gray-white marble cliff.

Bensen's hands were bloody and sore when he reached the beach. Getting down to the sand hadn't been particularly dangerous; Bensen had grown up climbing the cliffs on these shores, and the rocks here weren't as sharp and steep as elsewhere. Even an amateur climber could master the way in a short time. It was the edges of the chalky cliffs that tore up his hands, and the salty residue with which the storm had coated the rocks burned terribly.

Waiting for the two others to catch up, Bensen wiped some of the blood away with his handkerchief. Norris was getting down without trouble; Mahoney was another story. Grimacing and trembling in fear, he stood on a narrow rock ledge seemingly unable to decide if he would wet himself or simply turn around.

"What are you waiting for, Floyd?" Bensen called out. "The rocks won't turn to stairs for you. Let's go!"

"I ... damn it. I can't!" Mahoney called back. "I'm afraid of heights, you know. I can't come down."

"Then jump!" Bensen yelled. "It's not high. And it's soft sand."

"Jump?" Mahoney croaked. Even from where he was standing, Bensen could see him go pale. "Are you crazy?"

That's twenty feet!"

Bensen grinned, taking a step away from the cliff to give Norris room, then turned with a shrug. Mahoney wouldn't have even joined them had it been up to him. But Norris convinced him otherwise, and he was probably right. Floyd Mahoney was probably the biggest coward for a hundred miles, but also the best diver in Durness. They needed him.

Maybe.

Norris made a soft landing in the sand, got to his feet, and stared uncertainly at his hands, which were just as bloody and torn up as Bensen's. Finally, he gazed out to the water. The wind was as quiet as ever and the tide had gone out, leaving thirty or forty feet of wet sand pounded by the waves from the night before.

A deep furrow in Norris's brow made him look older and more serious than he was. "Nothing to see," he mumbled.

Before answering, Bensen rummaged for a cigarette in his bag and lit a match with his cold hands. "Was it your idea or mine coming here?"

The furrow deepened. "Jesus, I know what I saw," he said reluctantly. "It's here."

Bensen took a long drag, coughed a few times, then flicked the cigarette into the wet sand with a curse. The smoke left a bitter taste in his mouth and his breathing was labored and wheezing. It had been a harder journey than they'd expected. Norris watched with a frown but was careful to say nothing. They waited in silence until Mahoney finally made it down to them. His face was white and sweaty despite the cold.

"Any idea how we get out of here?" he asked.

Bensen grinned. "The same way we got down here, Floyd. We climb."

Mahoney went even paler but didn't respond, looking instead past the other two out towards the water. The waves were almost non-existent — even the surf was hushed — as if the ocean had used up all its strength.