

WOLFGANG HOHLBEIN



The Hexer from Salem

SATAN'S BOOKS

06

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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 6: Satan's Books

Translated by William Glucroft

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Satan's Books

The light of the oil lamp cast flickering patterns on the walls, creating a sense of life where there was none. The air was musty and the floor under the two men's feet was strewn with trash and fine shards of glass. A spider web wafted in the wind like a gray curtain, and eerie rattling noises came up from the bowels of the building. They were the sounds of heavy, labored breathing; at least that's what Tremayn's over-wrought imagination believed.

He stood still. The lamp in his hand trembled, and he had to try with all his might to fight the growing urge to turn and run. To run as fast and as far away as he could from this cursed, sinister house that seemed more like a giant, damp grave with each passing moment ...

"What's going on with you?" Gordon asked. "Scared?"

Tremayn turned to the man two heads taller than him, ready with a sharp response, but gave a crooked grin instead, then continued on with the lamp held out in front of him, like a weapon. The tremor in Gordon's own voice was audible. His mocking question was nothing more than a feeble attempt to mask his own fear. Tremayn was scared, sure, but Gordon was too, at least as much, if not more. It had been a stupid idea to come here, alone and unarmed, but neither was prepared to be the first to admit how afraid he was. So they kept on going, against their better judgment.

The flickering yellow light of the lamp revealed a door, and the draft that had accompanied them into the house kicked up thin veils of dust. Tremayn forced down the urge to cough. His heart was racing. It was cold now that the

sun had set, taking its barely-warming rays with it. Nevertheless, Tremayn was soaked in sweat.

Gordon motioned forward with a silent nod of his head and Tremayn lifted the lamp a bit higher to make out more of their surroundings. The flame flickered briefly, almost as if it were shrinking away from the encroaching shadows — or something hidden within them. He pushed those thoughts away and squinted intently into the yellow-grayish twilight to see more clearly whatever it was Gordon wanted him to notice.

The door was ajar, and something gray and wet was shimmering along its lower edge ...

Tremayn fought against the nausea rising in his throat, crouched, and leaned forward. The foot of the door was coated in a thin, moist crust, and Tremayn could now see a trail where something had been dragged, almost half a meter wide, cutting through the dust and dirt, extending from the door and leading off beyond it.

Involuntarily, he thought of the trail that had led them here. It was a wide path, smooth, almost as though something heavy had been pulled along it, leading through the woods to the dilapidated house. Even there he had noticed the occasional small puddle of this same gray substance: a kind of slime, as though a giant snail had crawled along the underbrush, absorbing everything in its path. The sinking feeling in his stomach grew stronger.

With a jerk he stood up and looked at Gordon. "Let's get out of here," he said. "I don't like this at all."

Again, Gordon tried to laugh, but his voice trembled so much that he gave up after a few seconds. He reached into his bag, rummaged around, and dramatically pulled his hand out a moment later, his fingers gripping a switchblade.

"Afraid?" he asked. "Maybe there's a monster waiting for us up there." He bristled with belligerent energy, shoved the knife into Tremayn's hand, and kicked the door

open. The hallway beyond it extended just a few more steps, ending at the bottom of a rotting wooden staircase that disappeared into the darkness above.

"Let's go already, coward," he growled. "There's nothing up there. Just a few spiders and bats, maybe."

Tremayn swallowed the response that almost escaped his lips and looked back once more before following him in. The worn-out stairs creaked audibly under their weight as they climbed them together. The house was full of sounds, as old abandoned houses often are, and the musty smell that Tremayn had already detected was now stronger.

Gordon stopped when they reached another door. This one was also ajar and covered in the gray, shimmering substance.

Tremayn wrinkled his nose when Gordon pushed the door open and a truly breathtaking stench washed over them.

They were in the attic. The room before them was long and dark, a tangle of half-rotten beams and dusty cobwebs. Parts of the roof were caved in, allowing brief glimpses of the velvety blue night sky. The sounds from the forest outside mingled with the creaking and groaning of the house.

Gordon tapped him on the shoulder and motioned to the left. The attic wasn't empty. A large, imposing desk stood in the middle of the room, covered in thick layers of dust and coated in black dirt. On it stood two old oil lamps, emitting a flickering red-yellow light. Behind the desk sat a man.

Tremayn swallowed hard to clear the bitter knot that was suddenly in his throat. For a fraction of a second, he was sure the man was dead. Then he realized that wasn't the case. The man was sitting unnaturally stiff in a high-backed, carved chair, his eyes open wide and fixed, and dust had settled into the sunken areas of his face. He never blinked. Lying before him was an enormous, dark-gray book bound in hardened pig leather. It was open and,