

# Don't Trust Anyone Over 19, Let Alone Over 30

By June Pulliam

Simon Clark. *Blood Crazy*. New York: Leisure, 2001. 394 p.

Most good horror serves a didactic function. Stephen King's *Carrie* teaches a timely lesson about the inadvisability of picking on people who are different from everyone else, even if they may seem relatively powerless at the time. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is about irresponsible parenting as much as it's about the parameters of human knowledge. And Simon Clark's *Blood Crazy* teaches us that the monster in the mirror, that ugly part of ourselves that we would fain repress, is created by our conscious minds; it is not something waiting to spring from the shadows of our unconscious minds. In *Blood Crazy*, young people are more likely to understand this since their consciousnesses aren't as fully formed as that of their elders and they have yet to be co-opted into perpetuating the status quo—allegedly for the greater good.

Clark's novel begins by telling us that "you, too, have a monster to kill." And this book might just save your life." The basic story line is this: one day in the near future everyone over nineteen is suddenly infected with a sort of evolutionary Y2K bug. Adults all over the world are seized with an insatiable desire to kill the young, especially their own offspring, and the surviving youth must band together to fend off further assaults by the older generations so that they can re-establish civilization. One might be tempted to make glib comparisons to other seemingly similar texts—*Night of the Living Dead* meets *Lord of the Flies* or *Road Warrior*, for example. But *Blood Crazy* defies such neat comparisons, and Clark's skill allows him to take what could be a cheesy and predictable story in the hands of someone less competent and make a truly frightening and original tale.

*Blood Crazy* begins with a perfectly ordinary day in a small English town. Nick Aten (rhymes with Satan), the novel's protagonist, has two things on his mind—the Big Macs he plans on eating, and how he's going to get even with his nemesis, local bully Tug Slatter. However, this day turns out to be like one of those events Nick was told about in school: a "colossal event that splits time in two . . . like the birth of Jesus. Everything before —B. C. Everything after —A. D." Nick awakens the next morning to find his little brother dead beneath the pulverized contents of his bedroom. The world has changed, and not just for him. He flees the house in order to pursue his sibling's killers, only to see a world gone mad. Gangs of adults chase down and rip apart anyone under 20. The landscape is littered with the bodies of murdered children, their remains mutilated almost beyond recognition, and glassy eyed adults who no longer seem human.

Soon Nick finds various colonies of survivors. The first such colony is one whose existence is rendered precarious by its inhabitants' lack of leadership and zombie-fighting

experience. Inevitably, Nick forms his first adult relationship with a young woman his age and begins a fledgling family. Later, when the colony's stable regime is overthrown by a coterie of thugs, everyone is in danger of being destroyed by the murderous adults, among them, Nick's parents, who have amassed outside the village walls.

Nick's attempts to save his friends and new family lead him around the country where he can gain a better perspective of this phenomenon. He discovers that the zombie problem is worldwide, not an isolated bit of mass insanity as he had first hoped. And the truth is out there. Eventually, his ramblings ultimately bring him to a successful colony led by a young woman, a psychology student from the time before, who believes that the adults' sudden insanity is some sort of evolutionary change brought about in the first place by the over-civilization of humanity. She theorizes that humans have suppressed that primitive animal voice in their heads that gives them a preternatural knowledge about how to survive, and that adults are especially adept at suppressing this voice since to be an adult is, in a sense, to suppress one's own animal instincts in favor of working towards the greater good. These adults have now evolved into some sort of higher life form who, like the Borg of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, completely repress individual desires in the service of collective efforts. Like other evolved life forms, they attempt to destroy other species that compete with them for resources. Since the zombies' children are unaffected by this change, the adults perceive them as a different species, and hence, work to annihilate them. The only chance for the young to overcome this great change in life on planet Earth is if they reacquaint themselves with that animal part of their brain that understands survival. This area of the brain has been preserved through religious tradition, which gave this primitive voice importance by raising it to the status of a god.

Clark breathes new life into a collection of old themes: Over-civilization is ultimately dangerous; too much collective effort leads to needless oppression of individuals; the old and the young are destined to be at odds with one another—with his emphasis on characterization. Nick goes from being an undistinguished student devoid of ambition to the savior of the human race as we know it. But this journey isn't made because he's yet another testosterone-poisoned action hero (although he's fairly adept at administering an ass-whooping when the need arises). Instead, Nick is able to survive and pen his cautionary tale because he's able to reconsider everything previously presented to him as Knowledge. Perhaps he's able to survive because he wasn't an "A" student as was his late brother, who never really had a chance. Nick is not an anti-intellectual, but he's also not pre-programmed to accept as Truth ideas that might be based on fallacious reasoning.

*Blood Crazy* is true to its promise at the beginning—it's a mirror showing that monster in each of us who must be killed if we are to survive. But that monster isn't what we've always been told it is, that nasty, primitive part of ourselves, the repository of socially unacceptable emotions (perhaps the enjoyment of horror would fit into this category) such as sexual desire, anger, fear. Instead, it's that part of ourselves that denies we have these feelings because they're too frightening, too threatening to our culture. But as any good Freudian knows, what is repressed does not go away. Instead, it comes bobbing up, sometimes at the most inconvenient times. Or worse still, these stillborn feelings fester and twist the entire system into an everyday sort of monster, that creature who

bottles up his or her own natural impulses in order to be a model spouse, parent, employee, or member of a congregation. In doing what philosopher Herbert Marcuse, in his work *Eros and Civilization*, described as "surplus repression," we may be more efficient, but we are also ready to explode and become something unrecognizable to ourselves.