

# Two Sequels of Classic Horror Novels Evidence Varying Degrees of Success

By Robert Butterfield

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Ketchum, Jack. *Offspring*. New York: Leisure, 2007. 293 p.

Garton, Ray. *Night Life*. New York: Leisure, 2007. 338 p.

Leisure Books has just come out with paperback editions of *Offspring* and *Night Life*, sequels to, respectively, Jack Ketchum's recently reviewed *Off Season* (1981) and Ray Garton's *Live Girls* (1987). Both *Off Season* and *Live Girls* have become horror genre classics, and, having thoroughly enjoyed both these books myself, I had high hopes for the sequels. It seems that while *Offspring* has retained the sense of immediacy and dread that characterized its predecessor, *Night Life* has not fared as well. Perhaps it is because *Offspring* was originally published in 1991, while *Night Life* was not written until twenty years after *Live Girls* was first published.

*Off Season* segues seamlessly into *Offspring*, and while the basic plot configuration (cannibals terrorize a small community in Maine) and several of the principal characters from the first book remain, the sequel does not feel at all like a retread, and is every bit as compelling as the original. The blood-line of the Sawney Beane-like cannibals continues on in the sequel, and after a shocking introduction that hints at horrors to come, a new set of potential victims, David and Amy Halbard, and their infant child, Melissa, are introduced. A subplot involving a visit by Amy's best friend, Claire, and her son, Luke (who are shell-shocked after the disappearance of Claire's sociopathic husband, Steven) adds tension. George Peters, the now retired chief of police, is called back into the fray, and other characters who have managed to survive the carnage described in the first book reappear. The new characters added to the mix are plausible and provide a gripping subplot, and Ketchum almost forces the reader to go through the book in one sitting. The story unfolds at breakneck speed, and Ketchum's muscular, no-nonsense prose and plotting make the almost 300 pages fly by.

Unfortunately, this is not the case with Garton's *Night Life*, a book which is approximately the same length as *Offspring*, but which feels much, much longer. I had enjoyed *Live Girls* (which I read when it was first published), as well as many other works by Garton over the years, so I had high hopes for this sequel. Perhaps reading the book back-to-back with Ketchum's work highlighted its faults, but Garton's new novel certainly suffers in comparison. The story, which is a continuation of the basic premise of *Live Girls* (a vampire tale originally set in a New York City strip club), involves a struggle between good and bad vampires (called "brutals") and it starts out on a

somewhat promising note with a new subplot involving a horror writer who hires detectives to find out conclusively if vampires truly exist. But what seemed fresh and innovative in *Live Girls* seems contrived in *Night Life*. Garton attempts to go to great lengths to establish the plausibility of the existence of the vampires, but nothing seems to really work, and the book ultimately fails to distinguish itself from the bulk of the hundreds of other vampire novels that have been churned out in the years since *Live Girls* was published. (It certainly does not stand out in the way that, for example, Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian*, does). There are a few moments when Garton displays the fine writing he is capable of, but ultimately *Offspring* is a much more effective sequel than *Night Life*.