

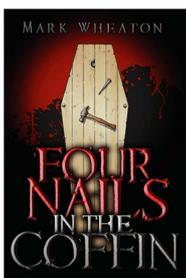
## “FOUR NAILS IN THE COFFIN” (Book Review)

Written by Michael Compton  
Sunday, 04 July 2010 10:24

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Anyone who reads their fair share of short stories and novellas knows that, among the foremost fundamentals of good storytelling thrown out the window, character development is usually first to go. As they're shorter forms than the standard novel, their authors are often all too quick to jump into the action, leaving us with flat, two-dimensional characters whose personal predicaments and perils we couldn't care less about. Thankfully, this is not the case in the four stories laid out in the remarkably character-driven **FOUR NAILS IN THE COFFIN**, by author/screenwriter Mark Wheaton (pictured).



Initially written individually for download via Amazon's Kindle, the four novellas that make up **FOUR NAILS** are now available in a print-on-demand collection. Despite falling victim to many of the pitfalls that come with this sort of self-published book, such as the more than occasional typo and excessive usage of exclamation points!!!, Wheaton rather convincingly showcases his talents as a writer of horror prose, taking his time to craft characters who are thoroughly fleshed out and engaging without holding off too long on the suspense.

The opening story, “Bones,” is a tale of flesheating zombie terror. What separates it from the current horde of undead drivel is the simple fact that the protagonist (and title character) is a dog. Now, before your fragile mind breaks with bad memories of the insipid original **HILLS HAVE EYES 2**, wherein a canine is not only featured prevalently but even has its own flashback, rest assured that this attempt is handled with a greater degree of subtlety and intelligence. With likeminded novelty comes “Night of the Scorpions,” in which Presidio County Deputy Sheriff Sarah Hopkins, Mexican emigrant Ruben Gonzales and others confront a host of overgrown arthropods in the south Texas desert.

The other two tales stand out as personal favorites. In “Sunday Billy Sunday,” an obsessed

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Catholic priest, Father Billy Costa, tries to repeat his perceived visitation with Jesus Christ, attempting to force the hand of God to intervene by embarking on a summer camp killing spree. In “Last Tuesday,” life insurance salesman Daniel Towne comes to the realization that he has no recollection of the previous Tuesday, uncovers its uncanny connection with a series of double suicides in the area and gets a little first-hand experience as to just what sacrifices one must undergo in order to have children.

A strong suit found in all four of these pieces (regardless of their length, averaging around 100 pages) is pacing. All the necessary information, plot points, character motivations, conflicts and resolutions are delivered in more than equitable time, and with great payoffs. Wheaton’s screenwriting credits include THE MESSENGERS, starring Kristen Stewart, as well as the 2009 remake of FRIDAY THE 13TH. While this information might lead some avid fans of fright to allow this tome to collect dust in the horror section of their favorite bookstore, Wheaton, unhindered by producers and directors eager to tame genre properties to studio conventions, proves here to be a quite gifted storyteller undeniably worthy of an interested reader’s time and attention.



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