



Wetbones

John Shirley

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A flesh-and-soul-devouring addiction runs rampant through the dark playground of the Hollywood elite

Welcome to Los Angeles, where every addiction is encouraged. . . Struggling Hollywood screenwriter Tom Prentice can hardly believe that the emaciated and mutilated corpse lying on the morgue slab was once his ex-wife. Then his roommate's missing brother turns up in a local hospital having sliced open his own chest and legs for some sick, inexplicable reason. In Oakland, the Reverend Garner, a recovering addict, leaves his ministry in search of his teenage daughter, who was last seen in the company of her ghoulish kidnapper. And the Los Angeles police are meanwhile baffled in their hunt for the elusive "Wetbones" serial killer who leaves nothing of his victims behind except a damp, grisly pile of bones.

Though Tom, the reverend, and the LAPD are on separate quests for answers, they are all being led into the darkest shadows of Hollywood, where the debauchery never ceases and pleasure is a drug that devours human flesh, blood, and sanity. But the true source of the all-consuming addiction is the most horrifying revelation of all, for it is not of this rational Earth.

From International Horror Guild Award-winning author John Shirley, the acclaimed "splatterpunk" classic *Wetbones* combines the monstrous inventiveness of H. P. Lovecraft with the exquisite excess of Clive Barker. A true masterwork of modern terror, it's decidedly not for the faint of heart.

Wetbones Details

Date : Published 1991 by Mark V. Ziesing

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Author : John Shirley

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Genre : Horror, Fiction, Splatterpunk, Thriller

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From Reader Review Wetbones for online ebook

Randolph says

Well worth the price of admission, which in this case wasn't much since I got a well worn copy from a used book store (still worth full price). Clive Barker meets Lovecraft's From Beyond. Not for the faint hearted - lotsa really explicit grue, perverted sex, sado-masochism; all those things we love in good fiction. Still a good story well told with good characters that we want to see how they might or might not get out of this mess they are in.

Ian says

John Shirley delivers another great horror / mystery novel with a heavy dose of social commentary; think of it as Raymond Chandler meets Clive Barker.

Martha says

I didn't really like this book, but I didn't exactly dislike it either. It was definitely better than I expected, but not exactly a gripping read.

There were some problems reading this book, which are why it took me so long to read. First off, the editing is terrible. Words are totally wrong or misspelled often, and punctuation is frequently left out.

The almost complete lack of sympathetic characters becomes grating. There are a few you may like in the beginning, but if you're like me, you'll change your mind. I could describe almost all the characters in this book by saying they're murderers, sexual deviants, drug addicts, or philanderers. That doesn't exactly create a very readable book.

The positives of this book are the lack of fluff to the story, it isn't bloated with subplots or forgettable characters. However much I didn't care for many of the characters, I didn't have a hard time keeping them straight. The writing of this book would have come off as more than decent if the editing had been better. As it is, I think Shirley is a competent but not remarkable writer.

The gore is rather strong in parts of the story. I didn't really have a problem with it, but I'm a somewhat jaded horror reader. I think readers that are unbothered by gore in say, Clive Barker's writing, will have no problem here.

The story involving psychic vampires and tentacled, wormy Elder God-like creatures is interesting. I still believe Carrion Comfort by Dan Simmons is the ultimate masterpiece on psychic vampires.

I wouldn't recommend this book but I wouldn't warn you not to read it either. It's just mediocre light reading.

Rbell says

Creepy and a little disturbing.

Clare Lune says

Gross! Loved it.

Elusive says

In 'Wetbones', something incredibly dark and disturbing lurks beneath the polished veneer of Los Angeles where glitz and glamour is just around the corner. Many people have disappeared while several unlucky ones have turned up in the form of a pile of bones. In the meantime, the living are suffering - aspiring screenwriter Prentice is struggling to come to terms with his wife Amy's death, Prentice's friend Jeff is looking for his brother Mitch while recovering addict Garner is desperately trying to find his kidnapped daughter Constance. What's happening to the missing people and more importantly, can they be saved?

This is hands down the most gory, disturbing book I've ever read. Even though I've devoured the works of authors such as Richard Laymon and Bentley Little, I found the bloodbath here to be on a whole new level. The author certainly didn't hold back at any point, thus resulting in numerous pages filled with intricate descriptions regarding everything the victims were going through. Self-mutilation, murder, rape, torture, violence, addiction - you name it, 'Wetbones' has got it all served up in generous amounts for your enjoyment. I'm somewhat desensitized to this sort of content by now but it's still morbid nevertheless.

The horror wasn't merely physical though. There's no doubt that by just reading about these characters hacking off their own (and others') limbs, one would easily feel repulsed and disturbed. However, there's more than that - the fact that the aforementioned characters were being mentally controlled by mysterious psychic entities was the core of the horror for me. They became puppets who could even be made to enjoy their own pain. In short, there were no limits. Besides that, drug addiction was portrayed very realistically. In some ways, that was scarier than the supernatural beings taking over the minds of humans.

The main characters were gradually fleshed out. Prentice mourned the loss of Amy as he helped Jeff figure out the whereabouts of Mitch yet he was swayed by the possibility of landing a contract with a powerful man in the industry. Garner was a worried father who later devolved though he couldn't be completely blamed for that. However, there were a few really awesome characters namely Drax, Jeff and Lonny. Naturally I found myself rooting for them to defeat the evil beings. Best of all, nothing was easy or convenient for the protagonists - they had to put a lot of effort into achieving their goals and this touch of realism amidst the supernatural elements was simply delightful.

Overall, 'Wetbones' was akin to an unforgettable adventure that delivered one hell of a ride. Jam-packed with tons of action, blood and guts, this was truly an engrossing, unpredictable read worth every minute.

Elke says

When I purchased this book I was not quite sure what I would get. I had a rough image of very explicit gore mixed with some esoteric sounding mind control. Considering this, the book did not disappoint me. However, it did not rise above my cautious expectations either, though I liked that the author did not just

write a plain torture novel, but put some interesting idea behind the how and why with the Akishra and Spirit involved.

There are some really disgusting scenes in this book, if you are into this kind of stuff. But there are also stories of several people accidentally thrown into the perverse universe of the Doublekey Ranch, who not only have to face the sadistic owners, but also some fantastic force - the above mentioned Akishra - which makes it possible to control both mind and body.

The masters of this power are able to stimulate the pleasure centre of the brain while at the same time forcing their victim to mutilate the own body. Thereby causing extreme pain to oneself - or other victims - is not only made tolerable but even badly desired in order to reach the highest planes of pleasure.

This is a really sick idea, and Shirley did a great job expanding it into a complete novel. So, keep hold of your stomach and enjoy the ride.

Tom Whalley says

Wetbones, by John Shirley, is the grossest book I've read. I encourage everybody to read this disgusting, gross, splattery book of gore and talk about it in public. Loudly. With sound effects. Preferably the ones that use the consonant strings of "schl" and "plshcr."

There's nothing ultra unique about Wetbones on a standard plot level. A group of white men (one of them being a struggling writer) in the greater Hollywood area deal with a vaguely supernatural serial killer, as they all struggle with smoking/having sex/doing drugs just *too much* while women experience the real horrors of the fiction. It's, in its plot, the shitty John Everyman of horror novels.

That's not why you read Wetbones though.

Wetbones is a book where a psychic mentally violates a preacher's daughter into getting off murdering men. It's a book where a kid in juvie starts pulling strings of his own muscle out of his arm and starts cutting his own dick up. It's a book where psychic influence causes a woman to stand still as a giant rose bush grows around her, vines eating into her flesh. It's a book where the phrase "was fucking the hole in the side of his innards with a severed arm" is used and makes you feel really gross instead of just laughing because dammit, John Shirley has done something I find very few authors can pull off well.

John Shirley, the magnificent creep that he is, can write a horror novel and keep the pacing and suspense building perfectly the whole way through without a single bit of downtime. It's amazing. There's no downtime, no point where I just wanted the pages to keep moving, no space where I was getting frustrated because questions weren't being answered or because of lackluster character moments. The book opens and just slowly accelerates the whole way through, leaving you feeling really, really gross by the time you're done. It's the kind of book you read in a day and later, desperately hope that day doesn't happen again.

And it's so thoroughly 1990s I wanted to cry.

John Shirley's Wetbones is a book for everybody to read, cringe at and discuss loudly in public. With plenty of "schl" and "plshcr."

David Agranoff says

I have been reading horror novels for a quarter of a century now. Since I discovered Clive Barker and Stephen King in the 7th grade I have read several hundred horror novels and equal number of science fiction. I have read horror novels that effected me emotionally like the family tragedy in King's *The Shining*, terrorized me like McCammon's vision of nuclear aftermath in *Swan Song*, Poppy Z. Brite made me squirm in disgust with *Exquisite Corpse*, and Barker expanded my thinking of the fantastic with *The Great and Secret Show*.

One novel has affected me on all those levels deeper than any other. John Shirley's 1990 masterpiece *Wetbones*. I think of this book as *Requiem for Dream* written by Lovecraft and directed by a young David Cronenberg.

John Shirley is a master at using the horror and science fiction novel as means of making a socio-political point. *Wetbones* is very much a horror novel about addiction, and while it drags the reader through a disgusting and hurtful gutter that reflects real life all too well it also has monsters.

Freaky as hell monsters, probably one of the sickest and most awful serial killers in print, without a doubt my favorite horror novel ever written. How about some other opinions...

Timothy Mayer says

First of all I want to give a shout-out to Glorious Trash for turning me on to this book. I'd always thought of John Shirley as a science fiction writer from the new school until encountering this punch in the gut. I'd read his *City Come A-Walking* book a few years ago, found it decent, just nothing to get excited about. No way was I prepared me for *Wetbones*. Holy Mother of Pearl, this book takes a chainsaw to just about everything sacred in Hollywood.

The story is split between many different points of view. Under a lot of lesser writers, this would bog down the plot. Shirley, on the other hand, is able to use this technique to show different aspects of it. In some ways, he uses this book to slam the entire entertainment industry. If *Wetbones* has one over-riding theme its how corrupt and damning the entire system is to everyone connected with it.

The cast of characters include:

- * Tom Prentice, a screenplay writer who has seen better days.
- * Rev. Gamer, a liberal christian minister who helps addicts.
- * Gamer's teenage daughter Constance.
- * Tom's brother.
- * Ephram Pixie, a college professor turned serial killer.
- * Orpheus, a street kid from the 'hood.
- * Eurydice, his sister.
- * The More Man, a sinister enterainment executive.
- * An immortal German matriarch
- * The Handy Man, a sinister henchman
- * An avenging hippie living in a shack
- * The Akishra, worm-like psychic vampires who live off human desires.

And these are just some of the major characters.

Of course all of these people are going to end up in the same place: a decrepid mansion near Hollywood called "The Keys", where a degenerate entertainment producer and his equally degenerate wife live. The place is falling apart and guarded by a huge black guy who is paid to look the other direction. Because what lurks inside The Keys is hideous beyond belief: people embedded in rose bushes, couples forced to have sex until they drop dead, people who self-mutilate, and worse. The human allies of the Akishra have developed mind control techniques which allow them to force their will on anyone.

There's even reverse astrology consisting of such constellations as The Hangman, The Black Widow, etc. The serial killer Ephram consults the sky constantly trying to find direction in this sinister zodiac. He's also the main focus of the book's title: Wetbones being an evil ritual which turns people inside out, leaving them in a pile of goo and calcium.

Shirley displays his political bent by turning his nose up at another character's NRA dad and making a not-so-subtle reference to Reagan's first Secretary of the Interior as one of the worm creatures best allies. But his depiction of a ghetto is not the sort of thing which would ever pass for PC. Shirley is disgusted at every facet of Los Angeles in general and Hollywood in particular. The overall theme: This is where hedonism leads. One of the best books of the "splatterpunk" movement and not to be read on an empty stomach.

Carl I. says

I will be honest with you all, I don't remember much at all about this book. I remember reading it, kind of liking it, but also being a bit annoyed about some aspect or another. So from my memory, I wasn't crazy about it. But in all fairness to the book, I do intend to crack it open again and at the very least give it another breeze through, unless it grabs me and brings me back into it. So use my "review" and rating hesitantly...but do know I was not "wowed" with the book.

Adam Light says

I read this book because I found it cheap at the used book store. It didn't really call out to me to read it, but I figured I would try something I knew nothing about.

I have read a few of Shirley's short stories, most notably "Cram", which was a masterpiece of short horror in the most gruesome way.

I sure am glad I took a chance on this little baby. Wetbones was a refreshing read for me, taking me back to the feeling I got when I read The Ruins by Scott Smith, or The Descent by Jeff Long. I was not expecting something so grand and apocalyptic in scale. And I was completely blown away!

The book is about several different people dealing with the fallout of a series of killings perpetrated by a group of psychic vampire types that feed on and destroy their victim's souls, while manipulating them like marionette's to achieve their own diabolical ends. These dastardly Hollywood big-shots had, at one time, been associated with a man named Ephram Pixie, who has defected from their ranks to seek his own sick thrills manipulating, torturing and murdering people in hideous fashions, some of the victims turning up as steaming piles of blood soaked bones stewing in pools of liquified organs and blood.

The story is action packed and filled with gruesome and horrific scenes to rival anything ever produced by the splatter-punk genre - in fact, I now understand John Shirley is considered one of the fathers of that movement - and it never relents. It just keeps picking up steam until all the divergent story-lines come crashing together in what is one of the most crushing and visceral depictions of otherworldly horror and gore I have read in a very long time.

For me, this book was transcended my expectations, and mad me a fan of the author right away.

There are strong overtones of Lovecraft throughout, and the theme of addiction is dealt with none too subtly. In fact, Shirley poses a most chilling explanation of the origins of human addictions that will make you think twice before picking up any bad habits.

I recommend this book to anyone who enjoys horror. Unless you think horror is about sparkling vampires. This book is not for the easily offended at all.

Five huge stars.

Allan Dyen-Shapiro says

This is probably the creepiest horror story I've ever read. The characters are very strong and the plot draws you in. Minister, ex-junkie, has his daughter captured by very creepy people. In his quest to free her, he descends back into drugs. The occult horror/Hollywood trope mix was captivating. Not for everyone. If you have a hard time with the idea of a sixteen year old girl drawn into an occult space alien sex cult and enjoying participating in sexual torture, this probably isn't for you. If you have a hard time with a gritty story of drug addiction, it isn't for you. If you can get beyond that, this is a masterpiece.

Aaron says

Absolutely foul. This book, more than any other, delves deeper into the sewers of splattery horror than anything I've ever read. Without giving anything away, the writing is surprisingly strong considering the gore quotient, as Shirley maintains a quick pace while giving us a fair bit of character development. Plot developments don't always unfold smoothly, and parts of the book feel rushed (especially the ending), but the good greatly outweighs the bad, and the extremity on display is a wonder to behold. There were several scenes that actually made my physically queasy, which almost never happens. Sometimes I re-read those scenes; other times I couldn't bring myself to do it. I wouldn't recommend this book to most people I know, but if you're reading this, you've probably heard something of the legends surrounding Wetbones and your curiosity led you here. It's probably too late for you anyway. Enjoy the carnage, and don't say you weren't warned. One final heads up: the violence against women is especially harsh. It's not completely unbalanced, but if you're sensitive to these things even a little bit, I would urge you to skip this book. All joking aside, this is perhaps the most extreme book I have ever read, for better or worse.

Spencer Distraction says

This book was as freakish, weird, gross & uncomfortable as a car full of paranoid strangers passing around a crackpipe waiting for some bad magik to melt their faces off.

Robert Beveridge says

John Shirley, Wetbones (Leisure, 1993)

There are certain books that, if you mention their names, will cause the eyes of horror fans in your immediate area to rise in amazement. "You were actually aboe to FIND a copy of that?" The three I've had in my sights

for about two years now are Ketchum's *Girl Next Door*, Caponegro's *The Breeze Horror*, and Shirley's *Wetbones*. The last of the three was the first I was able to track down.

A fun little book it is, but I'm not entirely sure what all the fuss is about. *Wetbones* is comprised of three (branching off occasionally into four) intertwining stories that all center around an isolated desert mansion called the Doublekey Ranch. Along the way, you get all sorts of fun stuff about mind control, various techniques for efficiently disposing of your victims, the Akishra (not going to try and describe them, read to believe), and various other interesting topics.

The various reviews I've read lead me to believe that the reason *Wetbones* is so sought after an item is that it's considered to have pushed the bleeding edge of splatterpunk. One wonders if the authors of said reviews were ever exposed to the early work of Robert Devereaux, whose novel *Deadwight* (released a year before this) has only recently found company in the corner of the envelope thanks to the emergence of Charlee Jacob. (Not to spoil the fun, but the scene I'm guessing is considered the bleeding edge, pardon the pun, is lifted almost verbatim from Iain Banks' chilling novel *The Wasp Factory*, released at roughly the same time as *Wetbones*.)

Now again, let me say that while it may sound like I'm trashing the novel, I'm not. It IS a good read, paced well, with well-drawn characters and enough of a plot to keep the reader interested in what's going to come next. I don't think, however, that when the academics get off their high horses and create a horror canon, that *Wetbones* is going to be one of the top nominees for a slot. *** ½

Bill says

There is all kind of crazy sh@t going on in this one. It starts off quick and does not let go, upping the ante of gore and slowly revealing the terror that is behind *Wetbones*.

Arrangements are made with the Akishra to grant pleasure, power and pain. There are only a select few that have the ability to "see" them and that can utilize their power to influence others. People have started disappearing and it is up to a small group of very interesting characters to try and save them before they become wetbones themselves.

Written well, with well developed characters and appropriate amounts of blood dripped on the pages. My first Shirley, but not my last.

I hear John frequents my favorite bookstore cafe in SF. I look for him every time I go, but unfortunately, don't get out there that often. One of these days I will run across him and buy him a cup o' joe.

Crabby McGrouchpants says

Almost-improbably, John Shirley's entry into the horror genre is an empathy-expanding trip a degree one'd find lacking in more of the mainstream lit. titles that aim to expand your heart and your worldview; broken hearts and lost children is the agenda, here, not blood & guts. And, aside from Shirley's own *Crawlers*, it's hard, too, to think of a genre novel that convinces you, so handily, that the story easily *could* have happened

... you just wouldn't have been *told* about it. Hard to shake, and worth the ride.

Anthony Vacca says

It's not every day that you encounter a book that brings together ectoplasmic worms, interdimensional free-floating gullets, furniture fashioned out of body parts, rape as a nearly gymnastic exercise and coerced serial killers; and all in the service of trying to create a sincere metaphor about the hardships of addiction. Better editing and some patient characterization could have made this an even more perplexing horror novel; as is, this reads more like a script for a quirky but unpleasant gorefest flick.

Ms. Nikki says

2.5 Stars

These vampire-like people are using the power of "aliens" for lack of a better word, to control someone and their pleasure/pain receptors. The V's can make anyone do anything, even kill, and get pleasure from doing so. This read wasn't edge-of-your-seat and kinda moped along at a leisurely pace dropping crumbs of horrific deeds here and there. A little better than alright.
