

## Joe R. Lansdale Keeps the Mojo

Written by John Porter  
Sunday, 02 May 2010 09:19

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If, for some strange reason, you're reading this article and don't know who Joe R. Lansdale is, allow me to invoke the phrase that will make it all crystal clear: BUBBA HO-TEP. Long before Don Coscarelli's great movie, starring Bruce Campbell and Ossie Davis as Elvis and "JFK" taking on a soul-sucking mummy in a Texas retirement home, it was a Lansdale novella featured in the collection *NEW WRITERS OF THE PURPLE RAGE*.

Champion Joe, as he is affectionately known, is a world-champion Mojo storyteller who has hundreds of novels, short stories and non-fiction pieces in print, as well as having served as the editor of a number of anthologies. Beyond BUBBA HO-TEP, Coscarelli turned Lansdale's short story "Incident On and Off a Mountain Road" into the debut entry of Showtime's *MASTERS OF HORROR* series (both are available on DVD and come highly recommended). Lansdale also recently updated Robert E. Howard's "Pigeons from Hell" as a graphic novel, and has found mainstream success with his Hap and Leonard series—stories of a couple of big hearted good old boys who just happen to right certain wrongs while staying just on the other side of law-abiding methods.

Lansdale is one of those authors who can be infuriating to other writers, because he is just so damn good. His style is fun and easy to read, and often, when you put down one of his books, you want to punch something because you didn't think of it first. You don't want to throw that haymaker in Champion Joe's general direction, however, as he has a collection of black belts—and not the kind that go with his suits. Lansdale is a member of two martial arts halls of fame and has developed his own style of fighting, Shen Chuan.

Despite his busy life, Lansdale sat down with Fango to talk about life, writing, fighting and the lure of East Texas.

**FANGORIA:** Just what the heck is Mojo anyway?

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**JOE R. LANSDALE:** Mojo is a word of African source that means magic. It can be bad magic, or white magic. It is often sexual.



**FANG:** You recently came out with a new book, THE BEST OF JOE R. LANSDALE, which features 16 short stories and the BUBBA HO-TEP novella. How difficult a task was it to narrow down the selection?

**LANSDALE:** The stories weren't narrowed down by me, but by the publisher, Jacob Weisman. I sent him the stories I liked, and he thinned them out and came up with the current combination.

**FANG:** Will there be a collection of your non-fiction?

**LANSDALE:** There does look to be a book of that in the future. I've had a lot of non-fiction published, and in some of my collections, I've presented non-fiction articles. I've done quite a bit of it, and the plan is to pick the best of it for a volume to be released in the next year or two.

**FANG:** Is there a typical method to your writing?

**LANSDALE:** Outside of working regular hours at least five days a week, sometimes six or seven? No. I normally write about three hours a day, sometimes less, sometimes a little more. But the mornings are when I do most of my work; usually, after three hours of that, I'm done until the next day.

**FANG:** I heard you sometimes eat popcorn when you want to get a new idea. What's the story

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behind that?

**LANSDALE:** I used to eat popcorn, but as I got older I cut back, because the way my wife made it, with cheap cooking oil, was not healthy. I do now and then have non-greasy popcorn, and it can still give me weird dreams. But it's no longer something I do as a matter of course.

**FANG:** Who were the writers who influenced you the most?

**LANSDALE:** There have been so many, and they influenced me at different times in my career. Edgar Rice Burroughs is a sentimental favorite, and I grew up on Mark Twain, Jack London, Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson and Poe. But once I began to write, it was Robert Bloch, Richard Matheson, Charles Beaumont, Ray Bradbury, Bill Nolan, Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett and James M. Cain. Later on, Philip Jose Farmer, Fredric Brown, Neal Barrett Jr., Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck, especially Flannery O'Connor, William Goldman of MARATHON MAN fame, as well as a great screenwriter; he wrote BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID. There are lots of other writers, like Harlan Ellison, Gerald Kersh and even some of the Beat writers. The list of people who have influenced me at one period or another is a mile long.

**FANG:** Who are the writers working today who you think people should look for in their bookstores as the future of the genre?

**LANSDALE:** Andrew Vachss, James Lee Burke, Neal Barrett Jr., Victor Gischler, Brian Keene, Norman Partridge, Chet Williamson. Some are very available, some you have to look for—like Barrett, who writes novels and short stories, the latter being my favorite.

**FANG:** Will we see more Hap and Leonard anytime soon?

**LANSDALE:** Next year, DEVIL RED should be coming out.

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**FANG:** Occasionally, you have gone off into uncharted territory, mixing real-life characters with fictional ones in unusual circumstances. I'm thinking of ZEPPELIN'S WEST and FLAMING LONDON specifically. Do you approach these works any differently than your more straightforward novels?



**LANSDALE:** I change moods as a writer a lot, which is interesting, because I'm not known as a moody person. Maybe I get the moods out through the work. All I know is my moods change as a writer, and so do the stories, but I approach them pretty much the same way. Some go easily, some less so. Both of the NED THE SEAL books really flew. They were sort of my cartoons between other novels.

**FANG:** What was it like adapting Howard's "Pigeons from Hell" into a graphic novel?

**LANSDALE:** That story is a favorite of mine, but the idea was to update it, and really write a kind of sequel, following something of the original pattern. So it's less an adaptation than a follow-up that bears elements of Howard's tale. It was fun, and Nathan Fox's artwork looks great.

**FANG:** While much of your work is very much in the dark fantasy/horror vein, you have written in a number of different genres. Do you see much of a difference in approaching a Western as opposed to a horror tale?

**LANSDALE:** A story is a story. If I'm excited about it, it'll find its path. I just try to show up and be consistent.

**FANG:** What is it about East Texas that draws you to explore it so thoroughly?

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**LANSDALE:** East Texas is a different kind of place. It's a mixture of cultures, and a lot of independent thinkers—though these days, with all this Tea Party crap going on, there seems to be a kind of anti-intellectual thing that scares me. But then again, on an individual basis, I love the people of Texas, especially East Texas. I like the stew of black, white, Hispanic, American Indian and, most recently, Asian and Middle Eastern and others. The region is unlike the rest of Texas, in that it's a cross between Western and Southern culture, with the latter being more predominant.

It's also different from the rest of Texas because there's a lot of water and big trees here. Lumber is one of our major industries. That and chickens, and to some degree, oil. Back in the '30s, this was oil boom country. I do believe we are a little short on education, however, and it seems to me that the Happily Stupid are trying to take over, but I love the place nonetheless.

**FANG:** Can you describe Shen Chuan? And how has your involvement with the martial arts affected your writing?

**LANSDALE:** Shen Chuan is the culmination of all the martial-arts training I've had over the years. It's self-defense-oriented and was influenced by arts like kenpo, ju-jitsu, hapkido, daito ryu—also a ju-jitsu art, but distinct in ways—boxing, wrestling, kickboxing and, on a smaller scale, many other arts. It's not a fruit salad of those techniques; however, it's a blending of them. We continue to advance the system. I'm having some of the younger guys study other systems, and we're taking elements of those and trying to find how they fit within our concepts and principles. This year, I'll have been doing self-defense and traditional martial arts for 48 years. My father was my first instructor. He taught me boxing and wrestling, street style. I went on to more traditional and then non-traditional arts from there.

**FANG:** BUBBA HO-TEP became a worldwide cult phenomenon. Were you pleased with the movie version, and can you address any of the rumors concerning a follow-up film?

**LANSDALE:** I loved BUBBA, the movie. As for a sequel, all I know is Don is trying to get it off the ground, and Bruce is out. That's the extent of my knowledge.

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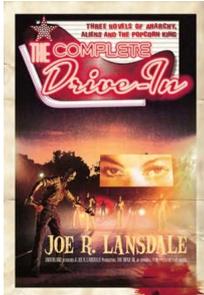
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**FANG:** Why do you reprint so many of your best stories for free on your website? Many authors seem like they would guard their stories and not let them circulate for free.

**LANSDALE:** The stories are my best advertisement, and I collect them in books where people can have them constantly at their fingertips. One seems to enhance the other. I suppose if I only had a dozen of them or so, that might not be the case, but I have many, and I continue to write them.

**FANG:** How is your daughter's singing career doing these days?

**LANSDALE:** My daughter Kasey has a songwriting contract in Nashville, and does gigs around the world, but she's still looking for that performance contract. I think she's near. My son Keith writes for the newspaper here, so in a way, bless their hearts, they're both into writing in one form or another. I'm proud of them both.



**FANG:** I'd like to thank you for so many of my favorite books and series—NED THE SEAL, the DRIVE-IN series, THE NIGHTRUNNERS, the Hap and Leonard stories and all those great East Texas Titles. I hope you aren't planning on slowing down anytime soon. What's in the works?

**LANSDALE:** Actually, I seem to be gearing up. Forthcoming, next year, is the new DEVIL RED, but this year, besides BEST OF, there's THE COMPLETE DRIVE-IN, which contains all three books. I'm also finishing up editing a book on noir-horror with Tacyhon Press, and DEADMAN'S ROAD, a collection of tales about my Reverend Mercer character, is forthcoming either this year or next. It contains the short novel DEAD IN THE WEST and four short pieces about the Reverend, including one that has never before been published. In the future, more collections, novels and comics. In fact, coming out this May from IDW is an updated adaptation of Robert Bloch's "Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper." It was scripted by me and my brother, John L. Lansdale, who wrote comics for the now-defunct revival of TALES FROM THE CRYPT. Our adaptation is

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somewhat like PIGEONS FROM HELL, in that it's a kind of a rethinking of the original story. We've seen the art for it, and it's going to be terrific.

**FANG:** How often do you get out to meet your fans at signings or conventions?

**LANSDALE:** I get out fairly often, go to two or three conventions a year—and Italy, where I have a very large following. I enjoy it. I enjoy meeting my readers.

**FANG:** Thank you for all the hours of great reading pleasure you've given us over the years.

**LANSDALE:** I appreciate you taking time to interview me. And happy reading.

If you want to know more, you can keep up with all of Lansdale's comings and goings and get a free story every week at his website, [www.joerlansdale.com](http://www.joerlansdale.com) .

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