



**BRIAN MUIRMORIAL: THE REBOOT**  
***A TRIBUTE TO BRIAN DOMONIC MUIR***

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**Compiled by Charles Austin Muir**

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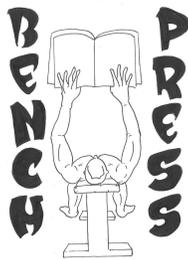
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**BRIAN MUIRMORIAL: THE REBOOT**  
**A TRIBUTE TO BRIAN DOMONIC MUIR**  
*(Originally published on Facebook in September 2020)*



## INTRODUCTION

As some of you know, my cousin Brian Domonic Muir created and wrote the first *Critters*. Ten years ago, around this time, he was going through treatments for a brain tumor. Some will treat his death as a foregone conclusion, but whatever—he did the best he could and died at the tail end of the summer. In August, when I'm not thinking of my dad who was killed by a log truck on the sixth, I think of Brian struggling, doing his thing and above all, writing until he couldn't anymore.

In the coming weeks, through Sept. 20, the day he beamed off this planet, I'll be posting a series of short essays dedicated to Brian as well as to his best known work, *Critters*. For all the fantastic (and largely unpublished) work he wrote after that movie, the fact remains that he continues to connect people from all over the world through a story idea he hit on in high school. Some of these writings will be by friends and industry professionals who knew him personally, some will be by writers who never knew him, but felt his inspiration from as early as childhood.

I'd like this to be a sort of virtual celebration of who Brian was and the gifts he shared. I would also like to recognize him as an artist who didn't live to see the recognition he deserved and, hey—a nod to all the struggling creative individuals out there who share his passion for stories, for entertaining people, for giving us one more bright reason for sticking around as long as we can. I feel that's especially important now when everyone, no matter what their worldview, has been forced to face (or deny) the truth that we are "treading water in a sewer," as Rod Serling put it.

So if you're interested, watch for BRIAN MUIRMORIAL: THE REBOOT on his Facebook fan page in the coming weeks. I was fortunate enough to attend the first BRIAN MUIRMORIAL and I hope this can capture a little of the spirit of that gathering. Also, share this post, check out the Brian Domonic Muir page and show some love there if you're so inclined. And if you have an essay you'd like to be featured, message me. I'd like to spread a few out through each week until Sept. 20.

Many thanks!

## **“YOU'RE NEVER NUMBER TWO”**

By Jacqueline Mitchell

*Editor's Note: Ten years ago at this time of year, Brian "Domonic" Muir, the creator and writer of the first Critters movie, was struggling through treatments for a brain tumor. He did not make it, a "MuirMorial" was given in his honor in Los Angeles, Calif., and life went on. But now that a decade has passed, I feel inspired to honor my cousin and that gathering with MUIRMORIAL: THE REBOOT, a pandemic-style virtual remembrance of the man, the artist, and the movie that gave rise to a franchise that holds a fandom to this day.*

*The first tribute is by Brian's close friend, Jacqueline Mitchell.*

How do I describe my relationship with Brian Muir? Romance? No. We were close, too close to be in a romantic relationship. He preferred cup sizes further up the alphabet and I preferred marriage to dating. We were both always involved with someone else. Only once did he stop and say, “Oh, by the way, everyone thinks we’re dating now,” and we both laughed because we knew better.

More Luke and Leia, kindred spirits, like Superman and Wonder Woman, in the birthday card he sent me once, would be more accurate pairings. It’s a rare gift to be loved as you are and I know Brian loved me for all my imperfections, bad choices, and especially my goofiness. He said one of his favorite things about me was my snaggle tooth. I always liked Batman better than Superman, but Brian would quickly remind me Batman was a bad boyfriend.

We met in the mid-90s when I first moved to Los Angeles. I met many new people in L.A., including Brian, and would soon become the token female in my nerd pack of filmmakers, actors, and writers. We bonded over karaoke at places like Residuals or at Hollywood area bars or diners, arguing about *Planet of the Apes* or *Twilight Zone* episodes late into the night.

I had a promising career in the film promotions business, first working for independent studios and Universal Pictures in Texas and then in Los Angeles. I loved movies and especially horror and science fiction. Brian created *Critters* and I couldn't believe he was nice, funny, and a walking film encyclopedia. His laugh was loud and infectious and he would mimic obnoxious Hollywood types. He wasn't a name-dropper or full of ego like many, many others I would, and do still, encounter.

At the time of my employment at Universal, no one at the studio even liked movies or cared about the Universal studio film history. I was soon dubbed the "Horror/SciFi Goddess" as a joke because I championed the genre film projects. I was almost fired for taking a pre-*Lord of the Rings* director Peter Jackson to the Fangoria and San Diego ComicCons because the studio didn't think cons were important at the time. I didn't ask for permission, but I didn't care. After all, I was the one hanging out at Creature Features in Burbank, going to Forrest J. Ackerman's house on Saturday mornings or attending a Lucio Fulci screening on my off-time.

When I was with my friends, I had the freedom to discuss our mutual love of movies because working for a studio was all about opening day numbers. The city of Burbank itself was a film set during this time. Steven Spielberg's *The Lost World*, the second *Jurassic Park* film production, was in full swing, using Burbank city streets for overnight film shoots. My work days included driving press to the backlot movie sets to meet the ever-charming Jeff Goldblum and right-off *Swingers* Vince Vaughn. It was not unusual for a T-Rex to be flown by helicopter over my office building or to see production assistants securing *Jurassic Park* jeeps hanging from the roof. One of my favorites pictures of Brian is from the invitation only opening for the Jurassic Park ride at Universal Studios Hollywood. He's trying to act cool, like he's not thrilled to be there, but we shared the excitement of being close to the movies we loved.

One day, my ex and I were to meet Brian at the Silver Spoon diner in West Hollywood, but I arrived alone. Bri and I had a very long talk that day that never really ended. We talked and met almost every Saturday for years. We spent hours digging through Acres of Books in Long Beach, the Iliad in North Hollywood, or some thrift store in Santa Monica. We read the other's writing in the form of short stories, novels, and scripts and would give each other honest feedback. He would ask me why there always seemed to be a screwdriver in my stories. I like screwdrivers.

He gave me many gifts, including the nicknames Jackie Husquevarna and Jacks, DVDs of his work like *Dangerous Worry Dolls* complete with an apology Post-it note, *The Legend of Lizzie Borden*, *Rock N Roll High School*, and *American Psycho*. He once sent me a book about female murderers called *Bad Girls Do It* with a note that said, "It seemed to be calling your name. Strange." Emails arrived in my in-box with subject lines such as "Don't stand over a 55-gallon drum in the garage," or "Thank God Quentin Tarantino didn't win an Oscar." Well wishes would arrive with notes like, "If this doesn't work out, there's always porn."

The best gifts he ever gave me were his attention and his time. Brian always had great stories about his Hollywood encounters, some of which I wish I could tell, and he listened to mine. He never chastised me, said I told you so or reminded me I'd told him a story already. He did take me to see a Bruce Cockburn concert once, but I have

forgiven him for that. I could be myself, at all times with him because I knew he cared for me with an all too rare, unconditional love. Every once in a while, I'll find a rare book at a thrift store, a signed first edition or out of print novel and I always say, "Thank you," out loud to Brian. He taught me to hold people tight and tell them I love them while there's still some of that precious time to spend together.

That's a Superman.

## **“BROTHER BRIAN”**

By Bradn Muir

*Editor’s Note: Obviously, things right now are super sh\*\*\*y. Rage, hate, murder, bigotry, and violent division are escalating on many sides over issues that are tearing us apart. That said, I want to continue MUIRMORIAL: THE REBOOT, because I believe in looking backward at those we loved and learned from and my cousin Brian is one such individual. Not only that, his best known creation, Critters, has brought together people from all over the world. If you're one of them, welcome to this tribute to Brian, who was struggling through treatments for a brain tumor in the hot summer months of 2010. He did not survive, and a gathering known as the "MUIRMORIAL" was held by his friends in Los Angeles, Calif. To commemorate the tenth year since his death on Sept. 20, I am hosting a virtual "reboot" of that gathering for anyone who wants to share a memory or appreciation of the man, his art, his pop culture impact, his life.*

*Today, I am thankful to get a view of Brian from a member of his family. Tribute #2 is by his brother, Bradn.*

I was blessed by the Lord to have Brian for an older brother during his much too short of a stay with us. Brian was precious to us and we all loved and love him very much. Family dynamics can be interesting, but I can say without hesitation and without even having to question my parents or siblings, that none of us has a single negative thing to say about Brian.

Growing up, Brian was very thoughtful, loving, patient, and caring. This did not change as he got older. Thinking back, I can remember how meticulous he was when drawing, writing, model building, (usually superhero models), or pretty much any other endeavor he undertook. He was usually calm and level-headed, and was always there for guidance, or to just offer support. I remember when I was 19 and in Marine Corps boot camp...I somehow got word that Brian had been diagnosed with Hodgkin’s disease at

only 21 years of age. I managed to sneak out of the barracks and stumble around until I found a bank of pay phones. I placed a call to Brian telling him I was going to go AWOL so I could come to be with him and help him through it. Always the voice of reason, even at 21 years of age, Brian talked me down stating he did not want me to screw up my life, and that he would be fine and would beat the F'n thing. And he did, and even drove down to San Diego to attend my graduation. (He then beat another form of cancer a number of years later.)

I, as well as others in the family, always felt very protective of Brian, but we were unable to protect him from that nasty shit.

My brother was also a very good listener. I remember many of our conversations, and how he always sought to listen and seek understanding before jumping to conclusions or reacting or responding. This probably also helped him in his writing, as he did not let too much get by him.

Thoughtful? Indeed! Brian never forgot a birthday or other special event. I am sure that many of you out there who knew him for any length of time, has received a card, letter, or a little gift from him. His notes, cards, and letters were always handwritten, and if you received a card or gift from him, you knew that it was meant just for you. He took the time to find just the right gift. It didn't matter if it only cost a few bucks. It was personal. His notes and letters were even better, and I still have most of them.

Unfortunately, we all suffer loss and have to go through the grieving process, which usually includes blaming ourselves for not doing more for, or with those who have passed. (I still go through it ten years after my beautiful brother's passing.) That said, to all of you who were his California/outside family, and who cared for, supported, protected, and most importantly, loved my brother, words cannot describe the appreciation and love I feel for you all for having done so.

An extra special thank you to Shane and his wife who were so very helpful and supportive of my parents when they were in California working through one of the worst things any parent has to go through. You guys will always have a special place in our hearts.

To Kara for lovingly caring for Brian. I will be forever grateful to you for that. It takes a special kind of person to step up like that, and I will never forget it. (Keep fighting Kara, and we'll keep praying.)

And to Charles. Thank you so very much for keeping Brian's work alive. You are probably the only one who could do it, and you have done an incredible job of it over the past ten years. I appreciate you more than you know.

Thank you all again, and I know Brian loved you all.

## **“HOW THE MOVIE CRITTERS INFLUENCED ME”**

By HR Sealy

*Editor's Note: I've never felt so much contempt for some people in this country as I have struggled with lately. Race is a complicated issue, but white supremacy is straightforward and a huge part of the escalation of violence in our communities.*

*Should I raise this subject in a virtual memorial honoring the tenth year of my cousin's death? Why bring Critters into all the garbage the white supremacist groups and leaders have smeared all over the nation? Because Critters is fun. Through its laughs and scares, it has brought together people from all over the world. And we can cheer for a rural American family protecting its own without propaganda and xenophobia (except when it comes to small toothy creatures from outer space).*

*Sure, the characters are predominantly white, but the story holds space for anyone. I'm not the only one who did not see myself reflected in the characters, but still enjoyed the movie. In his own sneaky way, from the shelves of the cult video store into the mainstream quietly over years and years, my cousin Brian connected people from all backgrounds with his story of the Brown family attacked by murderous aliens (actual freakin' aliens!). Since I announced MUIRMEMORIAL: THE REBOOT, I've received essays from writers around the globe.*

*And so I'm proud to honor Brian Domonic Muir with tribute #3, which offers a Barbadian perspective by author, H R Sealy.*

There are great horror movies, and there are great sci-fi movies. But what happens when you combine the two genres? You get the kick-ass, cult classic movie, *Critters*. In 1986, the first *Critters* movie was released.

The brainchild of screenwriter Brian Domonic Muir, the film found substantial success with both horror and sci-fi lovers. Not bad for an idea I understand Brian conceptualized as a kid in high school. Wow!

I was a young lad of fourteen myself, living on the Caribbean island of Barbados, when the first movie in the franchise came out. Back in those days, it was easier on the pocket to do a VHS rental than to fork out the cash for a movie ticket.

I can still recall my cousins and I sitting in the front part of our house one night, huddled around the television, watching with anxious breath as these furry little creatures from space dished out havoc and mayhem on a terrified family living on a farm.

The movie was thrilling, it was exciting, it was filled with gore, but most importantly, it gave me and my cousins night chills, which was what we were hoping for in the first place. It also opened my eyes to the fact that just because a movie was labeled or classified as horror didn't mean it couldn't be funny as hell!

This has heavily influenced my creative writing up to this day, and almost everything I write—even if the piece is about something serious—is usually laden with humor.

What wasn't so funny was that the next day, during second-period math at my former high school, three of my classmates and I were sent to the headmaster's office for a good old-fashioned flogging for sitting down in the back of the math class and talking excitedly about *Critters*.

In my opinion, Brian Domonic Muir was a visionary and a great talent. His influence on horror and the sci-fi genre will resonate through the movie industry for generations, and the film *Critters* will be the standard to look up to.

## **“WHEREFORE ART THOU, CRITTERS?”**

By Shane Bitterling

*Editor's Note: BRIAN MUIRMORIAL: THE REBOOT continues with the true story of how the Crites were lost to the world and then rescued from extinction 10 years ago. Read on for tribute #4, a locked-room mystery in the spirit of Edgar Allan Poe provided by Brian's close friend, screenwriter Shane Bitterling.*

This particular story starts a few years prior to Brian's death. The Aero Theatre in Santa Monica, Calif., held a sold out, extremely rare showing of *Critters*. Fans, old and new, and friends, older and new, cheered as the lights went down and the film flickered to life. From the first few frames though, something was amiss.

“What the hell?” Brian said. A few moments later, “What the fuck?” He started his low giggle, as the rest of the audience caught wind of what was happening. Or rather, what wasn't. Every single frame of visual or special FX of any kind was excised from that print. Every puppet shot. Every everything. The audience revolted and the theater owners stood at the door, handing out refunds. Brian laughed all the way home.

Over the following days, Brian called everybody he knew involved with the production, intent on catching whoever cut those frames for their own purposes. Most likely for a demo reel. His number one suspects were the Chiodo Brothers, who swore they had no hand in CRITTERLESS, as that event is called to this day.

With no smoking gun, and no found frames, the odds of *Critters* being screened again was considered a total loss. The CRITTERLESS print came directly from Warner Bros, and was the only print of it they had. The only print that could officially be exhibited, should any revival house want to show it. That really bugged him. And then Brian died.

After he left us, I was put in charge of taking care of his effects. Collections of toys, books, photos, and the usual and unusual. All the stuff we gather in our life that we criminally can't take with us. Collecting computer files, file files and works finished and not. They were a daunting and tear-filled few days. I spoke with common friends on the

phone while sifting through the endless piles to keep my mind off of what I was actually doing, and coerced Courtney Joyner to come down and help, which was code for keeping me company.

While waiting for him, I decided to attack Brian's cat-hair-filled closet. With the Hawaiian shirts and nerd T's out of the way, I found that the closet was much deeper than expected. I pulled out some ancient film projectors, editing equipment, and even more boxes of sci-fi books, revealing a very large box in the back corner. I wrestled it onto the office floor. Still sealed, it was addressed to Brian, with a return address from Oscar-winning editor and longtime friend, Bob Murawski. The postmark was 1986.

Courtney arrived and we went to grab a bite. I told him that dessert was waiting back at the house. We were going to open that box. And we did. And it was delicious. Inside, a note from Bob and several film reels in canisters with CRITTERS: REEL 1,2, etc. on each. I immediately called Bob and he had no recollection of sending him this. But we set a rendezvous point and I gave him the reels. After a couple days, he called me and excitedly told me that the reels contained a complete version of *Critters*, with both endings.

Bob generously set up a screening at the New Beverly Cinema, but there was a caveat. The print had to be donated to Warner Bros. for future screenings. Done deal. I was asked to host the event, a wonderful night filled with friends and fans, and we all watched *Critters*, not CRITTERLESS, on the big screen for the first time in ages.

The irony of all of this, whenever *Critters* is mentioned, is that Brian grouched for years about that Aero screening. He couldn't get over the mystery of who cut those scenes. And he hated knowing that the only known print was unusable. If he'd only looked in his closet at some point in the past twenty years. To end with one of his favorite quotes, "F\*\*\*ing iiiidiot."

*Editor's Note: Correction by Jeff Burr:*

*I was at the Critterless screening and it was the damndest thing you ever saw. Every and I mean every shot with any special effect or puppetry was gone!!! Didn't know about the next screening, but I will say the postmark on the box was from 1996, not 1986, as Bob was working on a film that was co-written by Brian. Bob got a list of 35mm prints from some dealer, and it had a print of Critters available and one for Stepfather 2. He ordered both and Stepfather 2 never came but Critters did!! That was the box in the closet!*

## BRIAN MUIR: FILM CRITICISM

*Editor's Note: Today, BRIAN MUIR MORIAL: THE REBOOT serves up words by the man himself. A short selection from his film reviews, which he accumulated to such an extent that they could fill a Roger Ebert-size tome.*

*Anyone who knew Brian knew he was a walking film encyclopedia. Not only that, he was extremely organized. The reviews are alphabetized, indexed, and appended with alternative recommendations when Brian thought that a film stank (which he did, fairly often). It seems possible he had hoped to publish them someday.*

*Disclaimer: The selection is meant to be representative, and it reflects Brian's point of view 15-20 years ago.*

03-08-03

*C.H.U.D.*

(1984) 88 mins.

Everybody remembers this title and half can tell you what it stands for: Cannibalistic Humanoid Underground Dwellers. But no one remembers the flick and for good reason.

The story involves New York homeless who live underground turning into mutants because of exposure to buried toxic waste. The lame proceedings are notable only because of an above-average cast.

In a natural, engaging performance, Daniel Stern steals the show as the guy who runs the soup kitchen, the only one truly concerned about the plight of the homeless. The scene where he blows up at a meeting of city politicians is a lot of fun. John Heard as a photographer lends some weight to the cast, but doesn't have a lot to do. Kim Greist as his model girlfriend shows up before she gained some fame working for Michael Mann (*Manhunter*, *Miami Vice*). Also in the cast are Christopher Curry and George Martin as

the evil politician. If you make it to the end, don't miss cameos by John Goodman and Jay Thomas as beat cops in the bogus tag scene.

As written by Parnell Hall (story by Shepard Abbott) and directed by Douglas Cheek, the movie never takes off. Filmed on location in New York by Peter Stein, the movie has a flat look and no sense of pace or energy. Scenes are never allowed to build tension, as when the C.H.U.D. are chasing Stern through the sewers, the filmmakers inexplicably cut away to Greist encountering a dead dog and taking a shower. Huh? The fights are tired and the action lame.

Although the movie is a dud, there are a few moments of humor that peek through. There's a weird bit where a goon tries to intimidate Stern by eating change from a pay phone. There's a fun moment where Stern and Heard recover a headset from a bodiless noggin. I like the bit of dialogue where the evil George Martin suggests filling the sewers with gas and somebody else says, "Are you crazy? You'll blow up the whole city!" Martin: "...Not the whole city. Just a section of SoHo." It's a bit of obscure trivia to note that the C.H.U.D. acronym also stands for Contamination Hazard Urban Disposal. Also, I love the fact that the cannibalistic mutants are serving as a cover-up for toxic waste dumping.

I wouldn't doubt that James Cameron saw this movie. There are two scenes that recall what he would do in *Aliens* a couple of years later. One has a hand-held Geiger counter with beeping lights that announce the approaching C.H.U.D., much like the hand-held radar detectors that tell Sigourney the aliens are coming. There is also a scene of cops down in the tunnels with flamethrowers while their commander watches their progress on a video monitor as they get wiped out; it's very similar to a scene in Cameron's flick.

The movie includes references to disco, 'droids, an '80s phone message beeper, and a C.H.U.D. stretching his neck for no reason whatsoever. To my knowledge, Cheek never directed another flick. Sometimes a change in careers is a good thing.

07-04-10

### *DEMON SEED*

(1977) 94 min.

Fritz Weaver creates super-computer Proteus IV (voiced by an uncredited Robert Vaughn). Proteus quickly grows weary of the tasks he's been given and goes against Weaver's orders. Soon, Proteus wants to be "let out of the box" and plots a devious way to achieve that goal: By procreating with Weaver's estranged wife Julie Christie.

From the novel by Dean Koontz, the screenplay by Robert Jaffe and Roger O. Hirson gives us another take on the uber-computer sub-genre, this one with the added twist of a "biological" imperative.

Director Donald Cammell doesn't waste time with stylistic nonsense, instead treating the story as real rather than going over-the-top with it. He's assisted by his able cast, most notably Christie. She is appealing, intelligent, sympathetic. A lesser actress might have made the whole thing seem like an exploitative exercise, but Christie draws us in with her grounded performance. And let's be clear, Proteus is not a nice machine; he traps Christie in her own house using nasty methods and Vaughn's vocals make the machine

frightening with that insidious lisp of his. Gerrit Graham is a technician who meets a tragic end inside a weird geometric robot of Proteus's design. The key sequence—that of Christie's rape by Proteus—will divide viewers. Some will find it sleazy, but I thought it was well-done if a bit uncomfortable in its strangeness.

The strange ending opens the door to what could have been a truly creepy sequel.

This would make an interesting double-bill with *Colossus: The Forbin Project*.

06-03-06

### *LIFEFORCE*

(1985) 101 min. (unedited version 116 min.)

Steve Railsback leads a team of astronauts into the tail of Haley's Comet, where they discover a 150-mile long spaceship, inside which are three nude (apparently) humans. Later, Railsback's ship is discovered, burned to a crisp, but the three nude vampires are good as new and transported back to London, where they—the space vampires—proceed to lay waste to everything in sight.

Railsback is terrible in the role, but it doesn't matter—he disappears for over 30 minutes and the capable Brits take over, including Frank Finlay, Peter Firth, Michael Gothard and Patrick Stewart. But when Railsback is around, it's kind of fun having Charles Manson as the hero, twitching through the role. His scene with Stewart is hilarious. Mathilda May is the leader of the vampires, nude for 90% of her role. She got the part when director Tobe Hooper could find no British actress willing to shed her clothes; after an exhaustive search he finally discovered May in France. And it's no wonder she got the part. Simply put, she is one of the most spectacular creatures ever put on film, perhaps one of the finest to ever walk the earth (she was only 18 years old at the time, 17 when cast).

Written by Dan O'Bannon and Dan Jakoby (based on Colin Wilson's novel "Space Vampires"), this kitchen sink movie has everything: Sex, gore, huge sets, special FX, nudity, shuttle Columbia, London burning, big bats, zombies, exploding double-decker buses, exploding space vampires, outrageous ideas and much bizarreness—it's like Quatermass on 'shrooms.

I'm not sure Hooper was quite sure what he was doing, but he keeps the camera moving and certainly keeps things interesting; shooting a huge-budget pulp movie (in keeping with the movie's original title, that of the novel) with the world's biggest toy train set.

Surprisingly good score by Henry Mancini (not the first guy you'd think of for this sort of thing), with sweetening by Michael Kamen for the longer European cut.

There's no other movie like this, recommended if you're looking for a fun time.

08-12-06

### *DANGER: DIABOLIK*

(1968) 100 min.

John Phillip Law is super-thief Diabolik, straight out of the Italian comic books, being chased by obsessed cops and angry mafiosos as he goes after the next heist, each score bigger than the last.

Law is perfect in the role, a man of few words and full of sexual prowess; that arching eyebrow, that insidious laugh. Marisa Mell is his sexy partner and plaything. Also with Michel Piccoli, Adolfo Celi and a funny cameo by Terry-Thomas.

Written by Mario Bava, Brian DeGas, Tudor Gates (story by Adriano Baracco, and directed by Bava, the film has a sense of humor (touches like “Exhilarating Pills” and “Anti-Exhilarating Pills” have the feel of the *Batman* TV series). It has great energy, accomplishing a lot on a minimal budget through creative camerawork and editing. Bava uses many low-budget special effects tricks, including forced perspective, hanging miniatures, glass paintings, etc.(his in-camera FX fare better than his opticals). Most of his cinematic sleight-of-hand is extremely effective, even up against today’s overblown CGI standards.

Bava’s ingenious camerawork often breaks up the frame—images within images—to successfully mimic comic book panels, and the overall feel of the movie, with its clever art direction (dig Diabolik’s ENORMOUS bed) works within that same world of exaggerated reality. (Many touches were later ripped-off—poorly—by the *Austin Powers* films).

The final outrageous heist may not be essential to the plot, but it is essential to the fun, leading to a cool comic book-style finale (sort of) for Diabolik.

The funky score is by Ennio Morricone. Assistant Director was Lamberto Bava.

This movie is a lot of fun and a great lesson to filmmakers who want to see what can be achieved on a tight budget.

## **“ETERNAL LIVES”**

By Octavio López Sanjuán

*Editor's Note: Days like today I wonder why I keep up this memorial tribute to my cousin, the creator of Critters. What with white supremacists, paramilitary actions, agitators, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny (I know I'm missing something and I'm sorry), institutionalized racism, soaring unemployment, COVID-19, and now wildfires turning the sky orange, it's as if Brian is transmitting to me from his Captain's chair on the Enterprise: "Dude, nobody cares about this right now! Stop!"*

*But I believe in finishing things whenever possible, and I have this wonderful essay, part analysis, part personal reflection, by Spanish film writer Octavio López Sanjuán, to share, and it's all about breaking barriers and forming connections. So here is tribute #3...*

I find it strange. The first *Critters* movie is about an ordinary family on a farm in the middle of the American country, attacked by an external menace represented by little anthropophagous creatures. It seems like a movie linked to the core of the Americana style, with some key elements like the Western flavor that envelopes all the narration.

Because of this, I find it very strange that such a movie worked so well in other places and countries, like for example, in Spain. Here, the audience felt a special attraction to this movie...I would dare to say that it is more loved than other iconic movies from the Eighties. Trying to explore that connection, I think that maybe one of the links might be the parallelism with the rural environment of the movie. A lot of people of Spain feel a special connection to this country. Everybody has a grandfather, grandmother, uncle or familiar with a house on the outside, and can feel the menace represented by the Crites, in that nature ambient, like something very close. Also I think that the Crites behavior, with that acid sense of humor, connects very well with the tastes of the Spanish fans.

But delving beyond the explanations, I think there is something more basic, and more elementary, that connects these distant territories. This is the characters and the

warmth that holds together every member of the Brown family. Their innocence, love for each other and artlessness create a magnetic aura around them. And no matter where you are from, you feel an irresistible care for these characters, empathizing very deeply with them, and pushes you to enjoy that funny nightmare, and avoid being food for the Crites.

And there is also a quality that breaks the rules of time. The younger members around me react the same way I did when I was a child, and I lived that incredible story, in the middle of summer nights, leaving me a deep imprint of sensations, feelings and indelible memories.

I never met Brian, only I've talked a little with a few friends of his. But the thing that surprises me with every new person I meet from the circle around Brian, is discovering the warmth that always was in his personality, linked with a very special sense of humor. All of them talk about how loyal he was, and how, no matter the circumstances, if he promised you that he would be there, he always was that way.

That drove to think that apart from creating a super entertaining tale of bounty hunters, an irresistible cocktail of pop culture, science fiction and fantasy, Brian had another invaluable gift. He was able to inoculate the purity of his soul into his writings, and his characters breathed in a credible way, like real people, that broke the screen and took the audience into their world. For me, it is astounding that a writer was able not only to do this, but also to write with enough force to break frontiers so that people from around the globe felt the way he was trying to achieve.

A friend of mine told me his standard for a good movie, and it is the one that evokes the same response from the biggest number of people. I think *Critters* is a triumph in that sense, due to those irresistible and credible characters that Brian wrote. For me, it represents the total triumph for an artist. If you are capable of building your stories, your characters, with the best of yours, and people feel that, enjoying that path, that ride, is something unique, pure and unforgettable.

There is another thing that friends and familiars have in common around their memories about Brian, and it's how much they miss it. It's incredible the power, the strength, that he should have, so that they long for him in this way. I wish I could have met him, and talked not only about *Critters*, but about those many other films that seemed to excite him, as Westerns or James Bond. They would have been unforgettable talks, I'm sure, but above all I would ask him what the trick was to create imperishable stories, memorable characters and eternal lives.

## **“FROM ONE SMALL CREATURE TO ANOTHER”**

By Sam Richard

*Editor's Note: Brian once told me as far as Critters went that he basically ripped off "The Zanti Misfits" episode of The Outer Limits. Critters has a lot more to offer than that episode, in my opinion, but the influence is pretty obvious.*

*That influence is still going strong, as evidenced by the Critters revivals, but also in contemporary horror fiction. In tribute #6 of BRIAN MUIRMORIAL: THE REBOOT, we see how Brian, Critters, and the age of VHS influenced Sam Richard, a writer/publisher who could probably rival Brian's appreciation of the horror genre and respect for the craft, not to mention pit his collection of horror T-shirts against Brian's nerd T-shirts.*

I write about grief. A lot. As a horror writer and young widower, I can't help but insert my own tragic experiences and emotions into the genre that has been a passion for me since as far back as I can remember. Growing up, my mom had things pretty locked down in our overly-religious household, but at my dad's house, anything went. Like a lot of young Gen-X/elder millennials, the neighborhood video store was my portal to the worlds of cannibal killers, tormented psychopaths, feral ghouls, and horrific practical effects.

Most types of horror resonated with me then, as they have continued to while I grew into adulthood. I'm a massive fan of tons of sub-genres: Folk-horror, body-horror, surreal-horror, cosmic-horror, schlocky '80s slashers, possession stories, literally anything with Linnea Quigley, literally all of Italian '70s horror, and beyond. But there's one sub-genre, one oft-neglected and ignored sub-genre that more than any other, makes me feel like a kid again: the world of small-creature horror.

*The Gate, Gremlins, Ghoulies, Sorority Babes in the Slimeball Bowl-O-Rama (ahh yes, Linnea Quigley...), The Boogens, Spookies, and, of course, Critters, to name a few classics.*

These VHS covers popped off the shelves promising mayhem and carnage, chaos and blood, fun, and terror. Instead of one or two killers, these films were often populated with hordes of murderous, blood-thirsty monsters. They upped the ante from the get-go, and I loved them for it.

Truly, my love of small-creature horror has never gone away. In early 2020, through my small-press Weirdpunk Books I published my debut novella, *Sabbath of the Fox-Devils*, which is my attempt at paying homage to the genre while contributing to it through a story that explores my childhood growing up in an extreme religious environment; the sort of environment where horror became an outlet and sanctuary. Populated with two-foot-tall devilish foxes, it's the kind of story that I could only tell through the lens of someone who has rewatched *Ghoulies*, *The Gate*, and *Critters* hundreds of times.

And while *Ghoulies* is the one that has gotten the most views as an adult (sorry, it's my absolute favorite), *Critters* remains one of the films I have probably seen the most throughout my childhood; and likely one of the most-watched films of my whole life. On top of forcing my dad to rent it many, many times as a child, it was also one of those movies that was just always on cable. Much like *Beastmaster* and *Kingdom of the Spiders*, *Critters* seemed to be on TV anytime I turned it on; and I watched it whenever that happened.

Despite not having the pleasure of ever knowing Brian Domonic Muir, his art—his creation—had a very large impact on me. Large enough that I created my own small-creature story. I highly doubt I would have written that book if I hadn't seen *Critters* so many goddamn times.

But that's not the most important impact I've seen Brian having made. I'm lucky enough to call his cousin, Charles Austin Muir, a friend; I'm also lucky enough to call Brian's friend, Jackie Mitchell, a friend. And through these two, mostly sitting in bars and hotel hallways at horror conventions with stiff drinks in our hands, I've heard a good deal of stories about Brian. I've heard the way they speak about him, about not just the art he created, but the life he lived, the friends he loved, and the deep and lasting impact he had on them. I've heard about issues he faced with certain producers and his strip-club adventures. I heard a lot of laughter and a few tears.

So I didn't know Brian, but I do know about the impact he made on me. More importantly, I know about the impact he made on his friends and family.

## **“THE POWER OF THE CRITE”**

By Justine Ryan

*Editor’s Note: The BRIAN MUIRMORIAL TRIBUTE has just a few days left to go before the anniversary of my cousin’s death 10 years ago. Today we serve up tribute #7, a wonderful appreciation of the film’s cultural impact and nostalgic appeal by cinephile and professional transcriber, Justine Ryan.*

*Critters* has always been a film that has remained close to my film-loving heart. I grew up during the video age and *Critters* was one of the movies I cherished renting on VHS and gathering around the lounge room to watch it on weekends with my siblings and dad. These furballs with teeth were always the “other” extraterrestrial life form that rolled at the speed of lightning to terrorize and put under attack the Brown family in their quaint little town of Kansas, as opposed to the other much loved and benevolent extraterrestrial depicted in Steven Spielberg’s popular *E.T.*, which also starred, in my estimation, a lot of kids of the ‘80s and ‘90s favorite movie mum, the always versatile and great Dee Wallace.

I’m sure many of us have movies we watched as children and viewed them through the lens of our young eyes only to revisit the film later on into adulthood and have the rude awakening that some films don’t capture the imagination and fun as well as they did in childhood. This has never been the case with *Critters*, for each viewing of the film is jam-packed with pure energy, joy, and pulse-racing excitement as the Browns battle against the Crites.

To this day, I still find a delight and fondness for the barn make out scene between April Brown (Nadine Van der Velde) and Steve Elliot (Billy Zane), which ends in poor Steve having his finger bitten off as he reaches out to change cassette tapes (remember them?) on the cassette player, and then being attacked and eaten by the Crites in a grisly death scene (a roll in the hay gone wrong, I’ll say). For me, it was and still is a standout moment in a horror/sci-fi film, delivering the same intended effect each time.

In present time in 2020 when the world is internationally plagued by many political tensions and most prominently COVID-19, I feel a film like *Critters* has its place in being a comfort film and can also remind the viewer of being back in a much less stressful time in our lives, one where we could sit in a darkened room/theater with friends and feel like we had overcome something by the film's credits.

Some trends come and go, but I feel that *Critters* holds its place and has left its mark in pop culture as that perfect time capsule of nostalgia, fun, humor, thrills, and most importantly the terrific cast who play the Browns. This is not a mean-spirited film at all, but one that holds a warm place in my heart, always.

## **“HELLO, BRIAN, GOODBYE”**

By Kara "Picante" Muir

*Editor's Note: Today's contribution to BRIAN MUIRMORIAL: THE REBOOT ventures into tough territory. Cancer.*

*My wife, Kara "Picante" Muir, took care of Brian for a week at his home in Venice, Calif., while he struggled to get through treatments for a brain tumor. Ten years later, she is going through her own ordeal with cancer. As someone who had dealt with the disease two times previously, Brian surely would have hated to find out this would happen to her.*

*At any rate, in tribute #8 Kara looks back at her relationship with Brian and the times they shared in the last weeks he was alive.*

I first met Brian in the early '90s at a restaurant called The Pizza Caboose. I hadn't been dating his cousin Charles that long at the time, maybe six months or a year, I wasn't family yet but I was a girlfriend and got to tag along to this family gathering PLUS...pizza. When I was introduced to the lithe, blond ponytailed cousin I was a bit...this is embarrassing...star-struck.

I had seen *Critters* and even had a copy that had been copied onto a Beta tape, I frickin' loved that movie and here I was meeting the person who had written it and he was my boyfriend's cousin! "Oh my gawd! I LOVED *Critters*!" I exclaimed, awkwardness immediately ensued, the air seemed to thin and Brian said, "Ummm, thanks." Turning away and talking to someone else. I didn't know it at that moment, but he was kind of sour about the deal he got from the studios and here I was being a dorky super fan, a reminder of said sourness.

In 2001, when Charles' dad was killed in a tragic log truck accident, the family was brought closer together and in 2004 when a bunch of us went to Hawaii together Brian came too and this was when Charles, Brian, and I really bonded. We had so much fun, just thinking about it now brings a smile to my face. Brian couldn't swim but he would

get a boogie board and snorkel gear from the house and just float in the cove our beach house was across from and look at fish while some of us would lie on the beach reading, we called him Aqua Man, for such a naturally curmudgeonly nerd he was quite blissful.

After Hawaii, Brian would often message me through AOL Messenger. "Hey! Whatcha doin'?" We would joke, talk about dumb stuff, argue about boob jobs and how much was too much...FYI I don't think he believed that too much boob was possible. Our family would draw names for Christmas every year, one year he had drawn my name and wasn't able to come home, so with no context as he did not share with a lot of people including close family that his alter ego August White, who wrote some really...Well not great in the Academy Award kind of way movies but they paid some bills or maybe one bill, sent me an actual Evil Bong from the movie *Evil Bong*, everyone thought I was a big stoner (which I was not at that time) and I couldn't tell them what it was from without betraying his secret, he could be a hilarious butthead.

Brian told me that when he had gone through cancer the first time the doctors had told him the treatment would cause him to have a recurrence of cancer 20 years later. He looked at this as a done deal and he did have cancer come back in that timeline. I am a massage therapist and have been into alternative treatments for a long time, Brian would confide in me about his health and we would talk options, he found acupuncture that was affordable and helpful, he had a girlfriend that I only heard about once when in the middle of a chat he wrote, "Gotta go, my girl's here" (talk about burying the lead, ha!). He was able to achieve remission for a time, things looked hopeful.

In June of 2010, I was turning 40 and Charles and I were planning on going to Vegas. I asked Brian if he could dog sit. In true Brian fashion he confirmed at the last minute and drove up to help us out. He looked good but he was worried, he had been having headaches and had made a doctor appointment for when he got home.

On August 17th Brian sent me an email asking if I could fly to L.A. to help him out as he was having some difficulty due to the radiation that was being applied to the brain tumor that had been discovered. When I got this request it instantly worried me, this felt serious. I told Brian I would try to score a buddy pass through a client I had who worked for Alaska Airlines. I couldn't so Brian gave me his MasterCard number and told me to "Buy a fucking ticket"... I bought a one-way ticket and planned to stay at least five days.

Brian's neighbor Jane picked me up from LAX, when we got to the duplex he lived in I walked up to the screen door, Brian was sitting on a rolling office chair due to (IMO) a pinched nerve in his back, he was wearing glasses from the '80s (he had broken his newer glasses but who keeps their super old-ass glasses?! Brian, ha). One of his eyes was a little droopy but accentuated due to the terrible spectacles... Basically his appearance was markedly different than when I had seen him a month and a half before which panicked me but I kept that response on the inside and said, "Okay, I am here, what do you need me to do?"

Basically my mission with Brian was to keep him working, I cleaned his house, made him food, massaged him and probably annoyed the crap out of him but he was able to write for a couple hours in the mornings. He had a ton of alphabetized books on his shelves, every book he read he would insert it on its side, spine facing up. I asked about

this habit, he liked to keep track of what he read in this way, I told him I was going to start straightening out the books just to mess with him... He did not find this amusing. I encouraged him to get a walker and a wheelchair, when the items were delivered I noticed in the place on the paperwork where you list an emergency contact, Brian had listed his own name and number... He could really be a stubborn ass sometimes but I got it, he was planning on not needing an emergency contact, it was a big deal that he reached out to me for help but ideally I would only be needed for a few days to give him an edge up and then he would be good...I really think that was what he was thinking.

Brian had a few really good friends helping him, either physically by taking him to appointments, grocery shopping, nerd talk or kicking him a few dollars here or there. These people were integral to Brian being able to keep his independence for as long as he did while he was dealing with his diagnosis. One of the best days we had in the six days I spent with him was when a friend had given him \$100 bucks, he said, "Hey! Do you like sushi?" Indeed I did, he ordered quite a bit of food and it was pretty decadent, especially considering Brian's usual shopping list consisted of whatever soup was on sale, a coupon and five bucks.

Early on in my stay Brian had told me that the next day at noon he had a surprise for me...I loved his Hollywood stories and I am a total dreamer! Did he have Jensen Ackles's phone number? Was I going to meet someone famous?! The day in question he turned on the TV at noon...Surprise! *Perry Mason*! Seriously? It tickled him to mess with me in this way, ha! Not cool, man.

I finally convinced him that he needed longer-term help, he had to call his mom. I couldn't stay, I had to go home and go back to work as shitty as that sounded and made me feel. Brian arranged for his mom to come out the evening that I was leaving.

The last I saw of Brian in person I was saying goodbye, he was in his wheelchair, I leaned over to hug him and fat tears squeezed out of my face and onto his bald pate, I was so mad at myself because of that, I didn't want him to think I didn't believe he could get through this, I couldn't look at his face, I didn't want him to see me cry.

He finished the screenplay he had been working on. I did my job for what it's worth. Every now and then I cry fat tears for him again, not as much as memories of him that make me laugh but sometimes I can't help feeling the loss of him. As I am now going through my own bout with cancer I think of Brian often, I wish I had known more at that time that could have helped him, I imagine what he would be like if he was still here in full remission giving me advice and commiserating about neuropathy and thoughtless words that people can say...AND the Hollywood stories, I miss hearing those, too.

## **“BRIAN’S COUCH”**

By C. Courtney Joyner

*Editor’s Note: Today I am thrilled to present writer/screenwriter/film historian C. Courtney Joyner for the penultimate contribution to BRIAN MUIRMORIAL: THE REBOOT!*

*As friends and family knew, Brian was a huge nerd. One of my favorite times with my cousin was watching Star Trek: The Original Series reruns in my living room and singling out all the nuances we’d somehow missed despite a lifetime of obsessive TOS viewing.*

*So in that spirit, let tribute #9 beam you into Brian’s apartment to speak of comics, writing, and the entertainment industry from the vantage point of...*

Brian’s couch.

Stepping into Brian’s Venice cottage from his tiny porch, light just sneaking through the Venetian blinds, it always took my eyes a few moments to adjust. I’ve worn glasses for more than fifty years of Coke-bottle jokes and constant jabbing them up my nose, so my vision had to find the spots of light, and my destination. To the left was the dining area, with a table stacked with mail and magazines, and four chairs around it if Brian was ever going to throw a dinner party.

But directly in front of anyone as they entered, its back to the door, was Brian’s couch.

It was a shorter model, what my mom would have called a “love seat.” Brian certainly wouldn’t call it that but it had overstuffed cushions, and a velour-like upholstery that allowed you to roll onto it, then sink. That couch was my spot, on the right side, with arm dangling while Brian perched on the other sofa before the coffee table, littered with TV guides and random comics from the Silver Age.

Usually what was on the table was a back-issue Brian had finally nabbed at Hi-De-Ho on Broadway, completing a run of *Tales to Astonish* or a special issue of *House of Mystery* with a Bernie Wrightson cover. Brian knew and loved his comics, and the single issue could start us on a conversation for hours, both of us in our respected couches in his living room; both of us comfortable, the furniture helping us lean forward to make a point about Russ Heath (mine) or John Buscema (Brian's). We had few debates about comics, lots of talk but no arguments, because we agreed on so much: which inkers best complimented Jack Kirby or Neal Adams; how Marvel and DC flaunted the comics code with their drug stories in the early '70's; and how the new structure of comics often left us scratching our heads because without reading the previous fifty issues of our once-favorites, we had no idea what the hell was going on.

From the couches we also talked about screenwriting.

This was lean-back time. Reflections, and dim hopes, ending with mutual encouragement or the need for a beer. These were the talks that were filled with been-there industry horror stories, and cool anecdotes about folks, including heroes, we'd met along the way. Brian, of course, had *Critters* behind him and a spurt of big-studio attention on another project that got stuck in development hell. He'd cashed some checks, but the next breaks for the spec scripts were far between, and he dove into the world of writing English dialogue for Japanese films with a vengeance. He also worked on animated projects, started grinding through scripts for an indie producer, making a little bit of dough. But during all of this, he also worked on Tom Calloway's stunning directorial debut, *Broke Sky*. Brian's work on the film was razor-focused, eccentric, and emotional. Just terrific, and more admirable that he wrote it while up to his eyes in monsters and vampire strippers.

From the couch, I'd try to give Brian compliments about this feat, which he truly appreciated in his Muir-way, accompanied by a roll of the eyes and a throw-away laugh of, "C'mon, Court." Brian wasn't comfortable with praise I think because he was always surprised someone was paying attention to the work. But it always struck a good chord. Even deep in complaint mode, working on something ridiculous, as we all have, he took his work seriously and threw himself into it with a fever. The most impossible deadlines with the silliest story contrivance wasn't going to get off easy running through Brian's computer. He had to go for the best he could manage; even when battling illness, he was battling through a screenplay.

One night, long before the hospital days, we walked into a Venice bookstore to browse and talk about our mutual goals of novel writing. I was focusing on Westerns, another shared passion, and trying my hand at short stories I hoped to see anthologized. Brian had been there already, working on short fiction but had specific targets in mind: *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* or *Alfred Hitchcock*, neither market he'd yet cracked.

That's when the short couch became a creative launch pad.

It was a Friday afternoon, and I was sinking into the velour, and telling Brian about a mutual friend who was starring in some fetish videos. We considered ourselves pretty sophisticated, at least seasoned, in this world and had heard some wild stuff, but I was slack-jawed when our friend told me about the quicksand videos she was making. This was something I'd never heard of—being driven over the top by the sight of a girl

drowning in quicksand, and all of it timed very specifically for the male viewer's ultimate enjoyment. "Wow" and "Jesus" were our reactions, along with a shake of the head. Brian sat staring for a moment, then asked if I was going to do anything with the quicksand info.

I had no plans, and Brian ran with the gossipy tid-bit, turning it into the background for a mystery story featuring a tough-as-hell female detective, and written from her point of view. It was a grand job, and Brian's first sale of several to *Ellery Queen*.

Later, the couch became home after my divorce and a move out-of-state. I'd come back to L.A. to check on some writing jobs and needed a place to crash. Brian's answer when I shared my woes was right to the point, "Hey, you know where the couch is."

I sure did. A few steps from the front door, facing the other couch, the TV, and a coffee table piled with comics.

## **“HELL, JUST WRITE THE THING”**

By Charles Austin Muir

Brian Muir died 10 years ago today. I remember the exact moment I found out.

I was finishing up a workout with some jump rope in the driveway. I could see Kara, my wife, doing dishes through the kitchen window. I tried to impress her with my high knees and criss-crosses. She would shake her head and smile...but when I came back into the house, she wasn't smiling anymore.

We knew Brian wasn't doing well. Earlier that afternoon, on his (now my) friend Shane's advice, Kara booked a ticket for me to visit Brian the next day in Los Angeles, Calif. Not knowing anything specific about his situation—and therefore what was possible or advisable—I had planned to camp out in his hospital room and read him Robert E. Howard's boxing stories.

Silly as it sounds, I believed the gesture—and its underlying message—aligned with Brian's goal to survive his third bout with cancer. I also knew we were both geeks about old pulpy fiction (to be fair he called Howard “a real mixed barometer”), and felt it certainly wouldn't hurt even if he was unconscious the whole time. I had meant to tell him I stood by him no matter how things turned out, even if he showed no signs of hearing me. Yeah, that was the way I thought I could help from my position. But not after what Kara told me when I came back into the house.

If you've seen *Creed*, when Adonis Johnson is urging cancer-afflicted Rocky Balboa up the Rocky Steps in Philadelphia, you'd get an idea of my mindset five years before that movie came out.

In the end, Brian did the best he could, and he didn't make it. I have mixed feelings about the "Fuck cancer" meme, but I let his death tear me up inside for years with that attitude, maybe more than I should have.

How I knew Brian...

Brian was the only older kid cousin who let me beat him at arm wrestling. When we played cowboys and Indians (this WAS the '70s), he told me where to give chase with my imaginary bow-and-arrow. When my dad died in 2001, he came back into the empty church after the funeral and asked how I was, a move that started a friendship full of bookstore trips, nerd references, *Star Trek* viewings, and several drunken nights in Hawaii when we chased a gecko under a couch, screamed at a spider as big as our fists and Brian did an impersonation of Lynda Carter spinning into Wonder Woman that ended with him knocking over a lamp and nearly falling on his butt.

Brian and I also used to give feedback on each other's short stories. I didn't realize at the time how easy he went on me in our broey, geek-driven correspondence. And thank God. He patiently slogged through my angsty bodybuilder story ("I suppose each of us at one point needs to work Holden Caulfield out of our systems"), my artist-haunted-to-insanity story ("as always, I'd be very curious to read future endeavors"), and at least 10 drafts of my 30+draft, never-completed story-within-a-story about an old woman, her parrot, and a premature burial ("this story really has a grip on you, doesn't it?"). I won't even mention my 50-page epic about a homeless man battling evil alien crab-people in Portland's Shanghai tunnels (whoops, I just did). Brian would say what he liked and what he thought could use tweaking in my stuff, but he gave me the sense that I really just needed to figure things out on my own and to keep the faith.

In one of his last emails to me, responding to some petty concern I had about a project, he said, "Hell, just write the thing." Even with a brain tumor he was taking it easy on me. He even let me believe he named Charlie in *Critters* after me, right up until the day he died.

It haunted me for years that I never got to tell Brian I stood by him, no matter how things turned out for him in that hospital bed. This is the closest I'll get, I suppose. With that in mind, I want to thank everyone who contributed to or participated in BRIAN MUIRMORIAL: THE REBOOT, keeping his memory alive from around the globe. We've had stories from Barbados, Australia, Spain, Minneapolis, just to name a few places, not to mention Brian's blue couch and cat-hair-filled closet. In the next week or two, we'll probably see a few more stories which I'll post here.

I'd like to end here with an essay by Brian himself. I love it.

□ □ □

## FIRST PERSON

By Brian Muir

Wearing my hospital gown, I sit in a wheelchair across from a door marked Caution: Radiation Area. From the other side of the door a frightened little girl cries out for her mommy. From the sound of the agitated utterances inside, it sounds as if techs are attempting to sedate the girl for a CT scan.

The hallway is noisy, busy with foot traffic. The nurse wheeled me down here and left me, knowing it would be a long wait. On the other side of the hall across from the scanning room, double doors lead to the busy, overcrowded E.R. Suddenly the

automatic doors blast open and two paramedics wheel a sheet-covered corpse past me and down the hall. I don't turn to watch them. Behind me, I hear a young lady approach the paramedics and ask, "Oooo. Can I go with down to the morgue? I've never been." Clearly, the highlight of her day. I presume the paramedics agree, for once the elevator doors open then close, all their voices are gone, down to the basement level with the deceased.

Though I've heard terrifying tales about county facilities, as a screenwriter with a handful of weird horror movies to my credit, I hadn't envisioned this particular scenario.

The short version of my case is this: After having breathing problems for some time, I am admitted to the ER and spend two weeks in the hospital (with a collective scratching of doctors' baffled heads) until I am finally diagnosed with lung cancer. I have never smoked. Finally, an elderly doctor at the county facility where I am transferred takes one look at my CT scan and tells everyone exactly what's going on: Adeno carcinoma caused by radiation therapy I received twenty-five years ago for Hodgkin's disease. (I've been asked many times, "Doesn't that make you mad?" The simple answer is no. It's no one's fault. Back then, I was getting top-of-the-line treatment; that's just the way it was done back in the day. They've since learned from mistakes and improved upon the treatment, reducing the number of subsequent cases like mine. No reason to waste anger on it. You're dealt the hand and you've got to play your cards.)

After receiving my current diagnosis I tell every doctor I meet that I don't want anyone to tell me what stage my cancer is in. The oncologist assigned my case is especially baffled upon hearing this; I am sure I can see his head actually spin around. He has to stop himself twice during our appointment to ask me, "You really don't want to know?" My feeling is this: whether there's a 100% cure rate or a 1% cure rate, my fight is the same, mentally that is. I don't want to slack off in my resolve because they tell me I'm Stage One (which I know can't be the case), and on the reverse of that coin I don't want to give up because they tell me I'm Stage Four. This approach might not work for most patients because their curiosity would eat them alive as painfully as the disease itself. But no matter how large our personal support team might be (and thankfully mine is a veritable army), we still have to fight the disease alone. And this is the way I choose to do it.

This current trip to the CT scan has come about because I've requested a brain scan. My cancer has been known to travel to that delicate area and I ask the doctors if it's possible mine has done so. They tell me it's possible, "But we don't think it has."

I counter, "But you don't know." I may not want to know the Stage of my disease, but this is something I do want to know. So they're nice enough to schedule the scan.

If this can be called nice; waiting in a chilly, noisy, dreary hallway listening to a scared little girl scream and watching a corpse wheeled past me on its way to the morgue. I'm beginning to think maybe there's a script here somewhere, but not a horror movie; a comeback story.

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That's a wrap. Rest in peace, cousin.

## BONUS FEATURES

*Editor's Note: BRIAN MUIRMORIAL: THE REBOOT has ended and we are back on the main menu. But hold up! There are bonus features? Indeed. Click on the latest contribution by Mark Helfrich, editor of such films as Predator, Showgirls, and X-Men: The Last Stand and film/television director.*

*In recent essays, we have learned about Brian's cat-hair-filled closet and blue, velour-like couch. In tribute #11, we get an eyeful of...*

### **"BRIAN'S MEAT"**

By Mark Helfrich

I met Brian Muir when I was directing 2nd unit on *Critters*. Immediately we struck up a friendship based on B-movies, odd movies, even good movies. Since he had written the screenplay, I knew he was a clever writer. I soon found out he was also a very fun and funny guy to talk to. We both were very sarcastic and enjoyed nothing more than making each other burst out laughing with our wisecracks. Unlike most people you meet on a movie, after the filming was through, we actually stayed in touch. He called me Hel and I called him Bri.

I wanted to direct, and Brian wanted to continue to get his screenplays produced. Brian seemed like the ideal guy to write the scripts for a couple of ideas I had. Whenever we went out to lunch, we'd spend hours laughing at the absurd and obscene script ideas we'd come up with. That's what I remember most—the laughter.

Speaking of which, he had a wonderful tradition of giving me the weirdest cheap Christmas presents. Like one time he gave me a Tony the Tiger crossword puzzle from some cereal box from the '70s—stupid stuff like that. He'd crack himself up as I opened them. Then it'd crack me up.

Over the years I commissioned some scripts from him (which have yet to be made!). But for the rest of his life, whenever I was editing a feature, and a scene I was working on needed a dialogue “punch-up,” or some extra dialogue added, I would call him. His off screen one liners are in *Stone Cold*, *Action Jackson*, and *I Come in Peace*, to name a few.

There was a particular line Brian came up with for *I Come in Peace* which became a running joke for us—The FBI honcho asks to speak to Caine (Dolph Lundgren) in private. They go into a restroom where a police officer is at the urinal. Caine taps the officer’s shoulder and gestures for him to leave. Brian suggested that Caine simultaneously say, “Put the meat back in the fridge” as the officer tucks in his junk and zips up. It worked perfectly, but the director nixed it, and it was never mixed in the movie. But both Brian and I thought it was hilarious, and whenever he was stuck for a line on any project thereafter, he suggested, “Put the meat back in the fridge.” We’d also manage to work that sentence into the body of our letters and emails to each other. And during our phone conversations (which were always punctuated by his annoying squawking bird in the background) one of us would invariably end up saying, “Put the meat back in the fridge.”

One day at a Salvation Army store I found an original work of art called “Put The Meat Back In The Fridge.” Kismet! I bought it and gave it to Brian for Christmas. I love the laugh it elicited from him. We gave it back and forth to each other at Christmas from then on. It cracked us up. I miss him. Wherever Bri is I hope he put the meat back in the fridge.

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*Editor’s Note: Now more than ever, it seems like many of us need an antidote to depression or ill feelings. For filmmaker Jeff Burr (LEATHERFACE: TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE 3), one such remedy comes from Brian, who got it as a gift from my wife, Kara Muir, many years ago. A one-of-a-kind Muirabilia you can read about in...*

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### **“A BURRMORIAL FOR THE MUIRMORIAL”**

By Jeff Burr

Knowing the inimitable, irascible, supremely talented, and hilariously crotchety Muir is a gift that keeps on giving. Over the years we had a lot of laughs, wrote five scripts together, had pitch meetings and even finally got a film made together...kinda!

I first met Brian at New World Pictures...he was working in the mailroom and I was in the advertising department. We started talking and found out we were both aspiring filmmakers (what a surprise) and had both made some super 8 films. I went over to Penmar Ave. and we had a mini-film festival. But we lost touch in those pre-social media days...each carving out different paths.

About ten years later, in 1993, I was hired to direct an action movie starring Oliver Gruner for Imperial Pictures, Ash Shah was the producer. We had a script meeting, and

there was Brian Muir! We looked at each other like..."don't I know you from somewhere?" We ended up co-writing the final draft of the script, entitled *Zero Hour*. It was a "go" picture, shooting in Arizona, until Ash and Gruner realized they hated each other and the third pic in a 3-picture deal wouldn't be worth doing for either of them. We were victims of internecine warfare! But the good news was that we were friends again and this time it stuck.

He let me read a spec script of his called *The Block* around this time, and I was really impressed. We ended up working on a spec script together that came close at a few companies, and then afterwards, we worked on several more. We ended up doing a feature version of an interactive movie for Atari called *American Hero*, starring Timothy Bottoms, and that was made. It is a truly goofy action comedy, and to this day I am proud of what we did with it. But we were snakebit again, and the negative cutting was botched and the producers took an insurance claim on the film, never to be released. Brian was snakebit too many fucking times in his career, and especially his life. He is one of the poster children for the phrase "What might have been." But that doesn't eradicate all the joy that he gave a lot of people in his life, me most definitely included. One of the things I used to do was whenever someone on a crew of a film I was making said something about *Critters* (which happened more often than you would think) I would immediately put them on the phone with Brian to get some stories about the writing and production. Brian always acted annoyed but he was not so secretly thrilled.

I missed Brian by a few days at the end, just like I missed the Muirmorial by a few days as well. So I didn't get that Hollywood end scene with him, but I had great conversations with him before that. When he passed, one of the things he wanted was to have his friends come over to Penmar Ave. and take some things that reminded them of him. I have one thing that I treasure, and it is a sure antidote to depression or ill feelings. All I have to do is press a button and I can imagine Brian surfing through the universe, spreading great stories and irascible warmth through the galaxies.

I love you Brian and you'll always be with me and with so many other people you've touched.



## BIOS

**H R Sealy** spent his misspent youth getting into trouble, causing mischief whenever he could and frolicking in the blue Caribbean waters surrounding his island home. He is the author of the hilariously funny, action-packed children's book, *Miss Benjamin Had a Donkey* available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and other online retailers. He is hard at work on his next book.

**Shane Bitterling** is a screenwriter and writer of horror short stories as well as the author of a children's book, *The Year without Halloween*.

**Octavio López Sanjuán** was born in Spain, and always felt a special love for fantasy and science fiction. Because of that, he recently decided to write books about his favorite movies. At this moment, he has published books in Spain about *Ghostbusters*, dinosaur movies, *Halloween*, and *It's Alive*. He's currently working on more related projects—including a book about the *Critters* franchise for Spanish-speaking readers.

The owner of Weirdpunk Books, **Sam Richard** is also co-editor of the Splatterpunk Award-nominated *The New Flesh: A Literary Tribute to David Cronenberg* and editor of *Zombie Punks Fuck Off*. He is the author of the short-story collection, *To Wallow in Ash & Other Sorrows*, the novella, *Sabbath of the Fox-Devils*, and his short fiction has appeared in *Oculus Sinister*, *Lazermall*, *Breaking Bizarro*, and many other anthologies and magazines. Widowed in 2017, he slowly rots in Minneapolis, Minn., with his dog, Nero.

**Justine Ryan** is from Melbourne, Australia, and is a founding member of Cinemaniacs Film Collective and previously part of Fake [Shemp.Net](#). She also transcribes for author Octavio Lopez Sanjuan and is currently working on his upcoming book on the *Critters* franchise.

Justine is a life-long film lover and has a passion for all genres, especially horror.

**Kara “Picante” Muir:** Author/artist of children’s book *Fiona Plays With Her Beaver*, massage therapist of 20 years, competitive air guitarist (there is such a thing), pug and pit lab wrangler. Kara lives with her husband, Charles, and their three dogs in Portland, Oregon, and is currently dealing with stage 4 colorectal cancer. You can follow her blog [www.theadventuresofkarapicante.com](http://www.theadventuresofkarapicante.com) if you would like to know more.

After more than 25 produced movies, a novel series, articles, and even a board game, **C. Courtney Joyner** is still banging away at the keyboards. Both his *Shotgun Westerns* series and his novel *Nemo Rising* have been optioned for television and he continues writing about the history of movies and appearing in documentaries about the making-of his favorite films. His latest book is *Western Portraits: Unsung Heroes and Villains of the Silver Screen* co-authored with filmmaker Steve Carver.

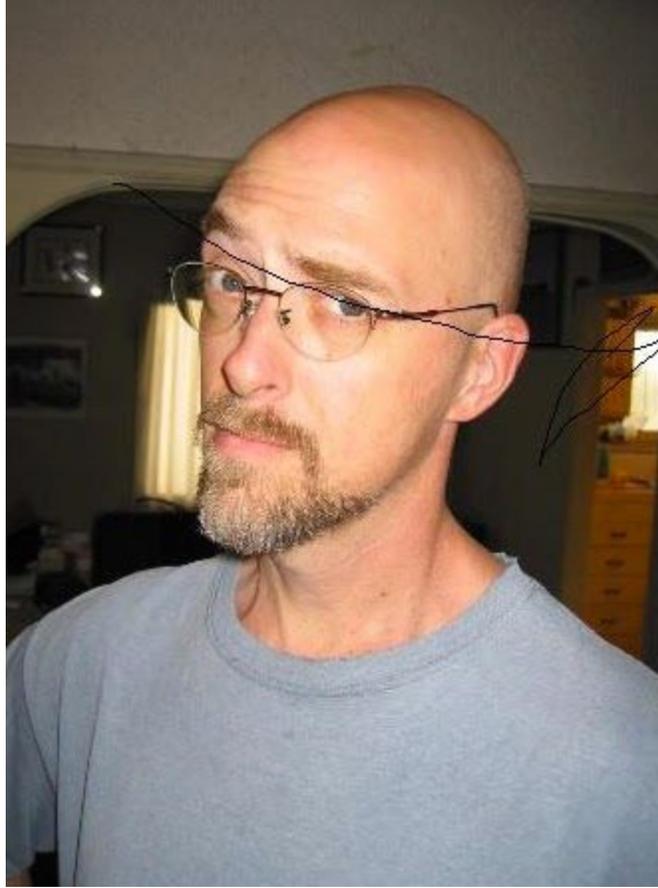
**Charles Austin Muir** is the author of *Slippery When Metastasized* and *Bodybuilding Spider Rangers* as well as the Splatterpunk Award-nominated *This Is a Horror Book*. His short fiction has appeared in *Peel Back the Skin*, *Year’s Best Hardcore Horror: Volume One*, *18 Wheels of Horror*, and many other magazines and anthologies. He lives with his wife, Kara “Picante” Muir, pugs, and pit lab in Portland, Oregon.

**Mark Helfrich** has edited a bunch of hit films including *X-Men: The Last Stand*, *Scary Movie*, *Four Christmases*, the *Rush Hour* movies, *Red Dragon*, *Showgirls*, AND *Predator*. He’s also directed episodes of *Prison Break* and *Bones*.

**Jeff Burr** grew up in Dalton, Georgia, and directed his first feature film in 1985. He is best known for his film *Leatherface: Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3* and has made independent films such as *Eddie Presley* and *Straight into Darkness*.

## **THE PICTORIAL MUIRMORIAL: A HODGE-PODGE**

A meager selection of photos of Brian as well as of proceedings during the original Muirmorial, held in 2010 at Residuals Tavern in Studio City, Calif.







A WORD  
OF  
ADVICE:  
IF YOU  
THINK  
SHE'S  
SPUNKY,  
COVER  
YOUR  
MONKEY.

LAR -  
YOU  
APPROACH  
GREATNESS!  
-BRI

