

DR. SATANOS



3

JOHN SINCLAIR

BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT 

John Sinclair — A Horror Series

“John Sinclair” is a reboot of Europe’s longest running horror series. Originally conceived in 1973 and still running strong, the “John Sinclair” novellas are firmly rooted in the finest pulp traditions, true page turners with spine-tingling suspense, exquisite gore and a dash of adventure. “John Sinclair” combines the dark visions of Stephen King, Clive Barker and the “X-Files” with the fast-paced action and globe-trotting excitement of James Bond.

About the Book

“No one knew his name. People in these parts simply called him ‘Dr. Satanos’. He had the look of a kindly uncle. He was dressed in a white lab coat ... splattered with specks of blood ...”

A mysterious scientist is working on a groundbreaking medical procedure — with deadly consequences. When an elderly hairdresser finds a severed head in the middle of a coastal road, an extraordinary sequence of events begins ... and a small town in Cornwall is plunged into a terrifying nightmare. This time, Sinclair is in a race against the clock, trying to stop a gruesome killing spree ...

About the Author

Gabriel Conroy was born in Los Angeles, California, in 1967. After high school, he joined the armed forces and was stationed in Germany for several years. He discovered his love for writing while traveling through Europe. When he returned to the States, he studied Journalism at Los Angeles City College and UCLA, and currently works as a freelance journalist, writer and translator. Mr. Conroy is married and has a dog and a cat.

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John Sinclair: Episode 3

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She would never forget the smell of burning flesh.

As a child, Maggie Haberling had many hopes for her future. She saw herself as a doctor or a great scientist.

But a murderer?

It was Gary's fault, of course. If it hadn't been for Gary, the man would still be alive.

She had met Gary at a campus demonstration against animal cruelty. She was young, a mere twenty-two, studying biology at Harvard. That had been one of her dreams, too — going to an Ivy League. Back in high school, she had worked very hard to achieve this dream, she had done everything right. First in her class, honor roll, you name it.

Her parents were middle class; they owned a small house in Pittsburgh, Ohio. Her dad was an electrician, a proud union man — the IBEW Local 5 — and a loyal Steelers fan, of course. Her mom was a nurse at Saint Clair Memorial. They had been so proud when the acceptance letter came in the mail. Their little Maggie was going to Harvard, can you believe it?

But something happened on the way to the Nobel. Somehow, Maggie got distracted. It wasn't drugs, of course not, drugs never held much appeal for someone like Maggie, a type A if ever there was one. No, Maggie wanted to save the world.

There was a small research laboratory off-campus, the Gutman Institute, funded by some dubious Swiss medical company. She had heard about the terrible things that went on there. They were torturing animals, in the name of science. Maggie was a vegan, and she had dedicated herself to saving animals. She sprayed graffiti on the walls of nearby fast-food restaurants, and she even splattered paint on women who were wearing fur. That got her into trouble all right.

But why do anything unless you're willing to go all the way?

That's what Gary used to say.

He was one of the organizers of the demonstration. They were waving placards in front of the Gutman Institute, shouting slogans. Campus police were on stand-by, but they were only a handful of students, and the demonstration was peaceful. No one was causing any trouble. Not yet.

Gary had a megaphone. He was tall and dark and handsome, with a three-day beard and intense eyes, and dark hair that fell in to his chiseled face. The first time she saw him, she was lost to him.

Why do anything unless you're willing to go all the way?

They had spent many nights in bed, glorious, beautiful hours. She was gone to the world, with Gary inside her, taking her, filling something in her she never knew existed, some deep loneliness. How could she have ever lived without him? He talked a mile a minute and he seemed blithely unaware of how goddamn hot he was. His gray eyes made her heart melt. He rolled his own cigarettes and lived in a co-op in an old Victorian outside of Cambridge, Massachusetts, with chickens in the backyard and a communal kitchen.

He was always on the edge: always up at night, not much use during the day, living off coffee and nicotine, playing Lennon on the guitar, quoting Malcolm X and Che Guevara. He considered himself a graffiti artist, always telling people in word, script, and deed to wake up and fight. He stole bicycles because he didn't believe in ownership, and he was constantly organizing boycotts and demonstrations.

And Maggie went along, idiot that she was.

One day, he said: "Let's free the monkeys."

"What monkeys?" Maggie asked.

They had just made love, and she was lying on the mattress in his room, naked, staring at the neon lights outside his window, blinking red and white in the darkness. He was resting his head on her stomach, and she loved the feel of his stubble.

"At the Gutman Institute."

She sat up. He moved his head.

"Are you serious?"

He was. He told her about the awful experiments they were doing at the Gutman. On rats, on dogs, on monkeys.

But Gary had a plan. They were going to save the animals. There was, he said, no security to speak of. They would break into the lab and free the monkeys.

Of course, there was something else. Something he didn't tell her.

And so, two weeks later, Maggie Haberling — A-student and obedient daughter — found herself dressed all in black, a crowbar in hand, sneaking through a dark corridor on the third floor of the institute. It had all been ridiculously easy. They had simply jumped the

fence and used the crowbar to break open the door at the loading dock. As expected, there were no cameras and no alarm system. Perhaps that's why she was so nervous. Something, she felt, was bound to go wrong.

And it did.

Maggie's heart was racing. There was sweat on her forehead. Her breath was shallow and her hands were shaking, ever so slightly.

What am I doing here? she thought. Oh, Jesus Christ, I could get into so much trouble!

They reached the metal door to the lab. Gary looked at her and reached for the handle.

The door was locked.

"Come on ..." he whispered, rattling it.

"We need to hurry ..." she whispered.

This is a bad idea, her mind was telling her. A bad idea!

"Open the door!" she said, her voice a tad shrill.

"What does it look like I'm doing?" he snapped back.

"Use the crowbar," Maggie said.

She handed it to him. He wedged it between the door and the jamb, then he pushed against it.

She was petrified. Any second, she thought, the alarm would go off and they would be arrested.

Hot and cold shivers ran down her body.

But there was no alarm. The door gave in with a loud cracking noise. It seemed louder than any other noise on the planet. She was certain they would be discovered. It was only a matter of time.

"All right!" Gary said.

The door flew open. And at that moment, the monkeys in the lab started screeching.

They entered the lab and turned on the flashlights.

"Oh my God ..." Maggie said, shining her flashlight through the room. It smelled like a zoo in there.

"There's dozens of them ..." Gary said.

"Poor things."

Maggie stood frozen on the spot. Gary nudged her.

"Come on," he said. "Help me get the cages open."

It was the night of March 23rd.

The police report later stated that two “unknown intruders” entered the lab at night. They were somewhat incorrectly identified as belonging to a radical animal rights group, trying to free monkeys from captivity ... and burn down the lab.

That part Maggie didn't know. She didn't know that Gary had two small canisters of gasoline in his backpack.

They moved quickly, opening one cage after another. Most of the monkeys just sat in their cages, too scared to move. Some of them came out. Gary banged his hand against the cages to get them to move.

He and Maggie had never considered what they would do once all the monkeys were free. They just figured that the animals would get out of the building somehow ... that they would know what to do. That their wild instincts would take over.

Suddenly, Maggie heard a sound.

She turned around.

It was a sort of whimpering. Almost like a small child. It sounded like it was in pain.

What is that? she thought. The sound made her hair stand on end.

She shone her flashlight through the lab.

And then she saw it.

She gasped loudly.

“Oh my God,” she whispered.

She looked at Gary.

“Are you seeing this?” she said. “Over there ...”

The whimpers were louder now.

Gary's gaze followed the beam of her flashlight.

Then he staggered back and held on to a chair for support.

All color had gone from his face, his beautiful face.

“It's a head ...” he whispered.

The severed head of a rhesus monkey, Test Subject Number 48, was lying on an examination table. Tubes and cables were attached to its open neck and throat.

“It's still alive!” Maggie shrieked.

“How is that possible?” Gary asked in a disgusted voice.

Test Subject Number 48 had been kept artificially alive for 19 hours now, a medical record made possible by feeding tubes, plastic

air vents, IV drips with antibiotics and a constant circulation of fresh blood. Its eyes darted around the room with helpless panic.

It was whimpering pitifully.

“I think it’s trying to ... to tell us something,” Maggie whispered.

“That’s impossible ...”

“My God ...” Maggie said. “Who would do something like that?”

The door slammed. The noise made her jump.

Maggie screamed and whirled around.

“Who are you?” said the man.

Maggie stood frozen in place.

A stranger had entered the lab. He was a tall man in his early twenties. At first glance, he looked like another student. But Maggie knew better. He was dressed differently and there was something strange about him. He wasn’t a student.

He was something else.

He had dark eyes and pale skin. She noticed, oddly, how lovely his skin was. Like alabaster. So pure.

He stared at them, breathing heavy. He was as shocked as they were.

“Who are you?” he asked again. “You’re not supposed to be here.”

Gary leapt at him. The crowbar was in his right hand.

The man took a step back, but the monkeys, the damn monkeys, were everywhere. The man tripped over one of the animals and fell onto an office chair.

With two quick bounds, Gary was on him. He raised his crowbar.

“Gary, don’t!” Maggie yelled out, but it was too late.

The crowbar came down.

With a sickening sound, the man’s head burst open, and Maggie could see a thick trickle of blood. The man made a strange, muffled moaning sound, more in shock than pain. The pain would come later. The man looked stunned. He stared at them in disbelief. His mouth opened, then closed, as if he was trying to say something he had forgotten.

Gary hit him again, and again.

The man screamed. Maggie heard what she assumed were bones breaking, a loud, penetrating cracking noise, followed by a piercing, womanlike scream.

Maggie looked on in horror as Gary kept beating him.

She stared at his eyes. There was something in his eyes she couldn't explain. She had seen it before, in bed, when they were making love.

It was pleasure. Gary was enjoying it.

And this was the moment that any feelings Maggie might have had for Gary Oderkirk evaporated. Her love, in an instant, turned to contempt.

He was enjoying this.

Why do anything unless you're willing to go all the way?

Gary put the crowbar down. The man was on the floor, his body in spasms of pain. He kept flinching for a few more seconds, then stopped.

"Is he dead?" Maggie asked in a trembling voice.

"Who cares?" Gary snarled. "Get the gasoline."

Maggie nodded, but then she thought: What is he talking about? What gasoline?

Gary saw that she wasn't moving. He cursed under his breath and opened his backpack. He took out two small metal canisters of gasoline.

Gary unscrewed them and started pouring the liquid around the room.

"What are you doing?" she asked, rising panic in her voice.

"What does it look like I'm doing?" he said. "Why did you think we came here?"

"You can't!" she said.

But he just shot her a contemptuous glance.

She lowered her head. Obediently. "What about ... the head?" Maggie asked in a hushed voice.

"We can't do anything for it anymore."

Maggie was afraid. The man she had loved had suddenly turned out to be ... something else. She felt as if the rug had been torn out from under her feet. She thought things were a certain way, and that had been a mistake.

Gary was pouring the gasoline all over the man.

And she was letting it happen.

"You can't do this ..." she whispered, as if that made any difference.

“Shut up,” Gary said. “He’s probably dead already.” His voice was hard and cold, the voice of a stranger.

He lit a match. Maggie stared at the tiny flame, transfixed.

Then he dropped it. The fire sounded like someone coughing. Suddenly, the room was bright red and yellow and orange.

The heat singed her hair.

“Let’s go!” he said.

They turned around and ran.

He’s probably already dead, Maggie thought with a lump in her throat.

But he wasn’t.

He awoke as the flames started to engulf him. He panicked as he felt the fire eating into his clothes, his skin, his arms and legs.

From the doorway, Maggie Haberling looked back one last time, and she saw him. His eyes were staring straight at her. She saw the flames eating into the skin of his face, as if it was paper, and a thick white smoke rose from the burning body. It entered her mouth and her nose. She could barely breathe.

She stood there, frozen. Like Lot’s wife, who turned into a pillar of salt when she dared to glance behind her. Never look back, isn’t that the moral of the story? Maggie thought.

Then Gary grabbed her, tearing her out of her stupor.

“We’ve got to go!” he yelled.

The monkeys were all around them, screeching and running from the fire.

And so was she. So was she.

She didn’t quite remember how they made it outside, but they did. They managed to climb the fence and vanish in the darkness, just as they heard the sirens.

That night, she packed her things and left Gary forever.

He didn’t even ask her why.

Something inside her had died that night.

She had wanted to be a doctor. Or a scientist. Instead, she had stood by as a man was burnt alive.

What did that make her?

She knew one thing for certain — whatever else she did in life, she would never forget the man’s screams. She would never forget the way he looked at her.

Two days later, a few hours before the police knocked at her door, Maggie Haberling put a rope around her neck and stepped on a chair. There were no more tears in her eyes — she had cried them all over the previous days and nights. There was nothing left inside her. She saw no other way out. She hadn't slept since the incident. The man's screams were haunting her.

Her farewell note simply said: "I am so sorry."

And she was. She truly was.

She kicked the chair away and felt a sudden surge of panic as her body dropped and all air was pressed out of her throat. Her feet were suddenly kicking, looking for the chair or anything to step on, anything at all. Her heart was racing as if it was about to burst. Her eyes started to bulge out of her head. She heard a rushing in her ears.

No, she thought. God, no!

She had made a mistake. She had overreacted. She wanted to live! Her toes found the edge of the chair. She frantically tried to move it closer. Her body felt as if it was on fire. Every fiber of her being screamed out for air.

Her toes slipped. She couldn't grasp it.

The chair! she thought. Oh, God, please!

By now, her face was turning blue. She felt her tongue swelling up and filling her mouth.

Her bladder gave in and she soiled herself. Hot urine ran down her legs.

The chair ...

Her body began to jerk frantically, convulsing with powerful spasms.

Once more, the big toe on her right foot touched the edge of the chair, useless, tantalizing.

The pain in her throat was like a knife. Her heart was like a hammer.

And then she felt the darkness coming. Small white spots were dancing in front of her eyes.

No, please, she thought.

A few moments later, it was all over.

The only sound was the rhythmic creaking of the rope, as her corpse swayed gently back and forth, her face blue and purple and her

tongue hanging out of her limp mouth like some kind of grotesque fish.

A short while later, the police knocked at her door. They found her body. Flies were already beginning to settle on it.

Maggie Haberling would never be a doctor. She would never buy a house or start a family. Dying was the hardest thing she'd ever done.

But why do anything at all unless you're willing to go all the way?

London, 8:32 p.m., ten years later.

Five years ago, something happened in a graveyard in Afghanistan, something that I cannot explain. I stepped over a threshold into a world of shadows. And there's no going back.

My name is John Sinclair.

I work for Scotland Yard, Special Division.

It was the day before Christmas. Other people were decorating their trees, wrapping gifts, getting ready to celebrate with their families. It's really a lovely holiday, isn't it?

Me?

I was practicing at the target range in the basement of New Scotland Yard.

The last few months had been a little rough. First, there was the incident in Middlesbury, then my experiences in Mexico ... I felt as if I was losing my mind. Dr. Sawyer, the psychiatrist assigned to me, had prescribed me some kind of medication, but I stopped taking it. Sure, it made me feel better, but the price was too high. When I was still on those pills, I didn't feel anything at all. No hunger, no exhaustion, nothing. I didn't even notice women anymore. I felt as if some part of me had been replaced by something else. So I simply stopped. Instead, I medicated myself with whiskey. After work, I stopped by the Ball & Chain, a pub owned by an old friend of mine, but I never felt as if I was part of the crowd. I had seen things no one should see. It took a toll. I barely slept. I was quick to anger. My apartment was a mess. I lived off frozen pizzas and pints of beer. I knew, of course, that I couldn't go on like this, but I saw no way out.

One of my few releases was this: the shooting range.

I was wearing earmuffs and safety glasses as I aimed my Beretta 92F at a cardboard target, cut into the shape of a person.

I peered at the target and pulled the trigger. Once, twice ... I lost count.

After a few seconds, the smell of burnt gunpowder wafted up to me.

I lowered my gun and looked at the target.

One hit. Only one.

I cursed under my breath, then I heard a clapping behind me. I turned around and saw our department head, Sir James Powell, standing in the doorframe of our targeting range. He grinned at me and applauded, mockingly. He stepped inside and pulled the bulletproof door closed.

“Well done,” he said sarcastically. “How many shots was that, Sinclair? Five?”

My jaw tightened. I had been on edge for weeks now, ever since my return from Mexico. I was in no mood for another reprimand.

“Happy Christmas,” I said, my voice flat and toneless. “Why aren’t you celebrating?”

“Why aren’t you?”

“I’m working on my aim.”

“You should start by looking at the target,” Sir James said. He walked up to me. “What happened to you, John?” His voice was gentler now. He sounded concerned. I liked that even less than his sarcasm.

“I said I’m working on it,” I said, sounding perhaps a tad harsher than I had meant to.

Sir James only grinned. Another man might have taken umbrage at this kind of backchat. He was, I had to admit, a rather thick-skinned fellow.

Sir James was a heavy-set gentleman of a certain age, wearing thick glasses, but he was always well-groomed and had a penchant for hand-tailored suits. Savile Row, no doubt.

“It’s not your aim that’s the trouble, Sinclair,” he said. “You know that. Here ... give me your gun.”

I pointed the weapon at the floor, secured it and handed it over to him, handle first. Sir James took it and unlatched the safety with a single, swift motion.