

Prior...More

by Michael D. Brown

After his triumphant return to form there was an impression that he was back on top and would remain so. However, it was not more than a week and a half later that he was drinking heavily again and complaining that there was nothing fresh worth writing about. It chased people away, to be sure—including those who might have been considered die-hard fans of his prior impeccable style.

Within the circumscribed world of his fiction some of his rounder characters, too, became anxious as they knew their own memorability rested on his reputation, and there were times in his most inebriated state when they were able to haunt him, but he knew even then they could do nothing without him—nothing worthy of the stature with which he had originally invested them.

There were fans who were more than willing to write them new paths, but the characters themselves, in unparalleled fidelity to their creator resisted being misplaced in sycophantic, not to say sophomoric, fan fiction, like some kind of parody or cartoon of faintly related glory.

"I was once on the cutting edge," he cried, "but I couldn't stop the bleeding."

"Da, da," said the Russian woman from the chapter expressing metaphors on motherhood, while the wiseguy making appearances in three of his darker novels clipped his nails and snorted, "Yeah, and where the hell does that leave me?"

There was a St Bernard much like Neil from *Topper* who was able to read both sides of the same story, being based on reality as he was, but even when he was being his most insightful, he disdained Tom the author who had given word to his thoughts. It is often said that those who hear others talking about them seldom hear anything good, but then it is hard to measure goodness in an objective way, is it not?

"Da, da," from the Russian again (he did not know much in the language, and thus she was unable to express herself more

comprehensively). She seemed to agree with everything. The geeks put the wiseguy through myriad situations which had none of the nuances or finesse Tom had once been capable of employing. More than once he had been made to perform sex scenes with Tommy Udo and Hannibal Lecter which left him with such a bad taste in his mouth, he hoped never again to come out of retirement. All the disclaimers did nothing to assuage his awkward embarrassment around other fictions. And party girl Vespa, a little too buxom to be called lovely, the basis for so many of Tom's storied women, was no help at all, always inviting him to places he knew he had no business being. Every so often, he just lay back and pulled the covers up to his chin and dreamed of the next big novel he would write if he could just get past the hangover.

