

The House on El Nino Diablo Court, Part 2

by Shawn J. Higgins

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Excerpted from the forthcoming novel "Minion Web"

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Edward Driscoll, who harbored many of the same fears all people possessed, lay with his arm over his eyes, awakened from a horrible dream about his son Michael. He opened his eyes and screamed in terror at the visage of a bull's head burned into the ceiling over his head, until the sound of his wife's scuffling, panicked breathing, and wailing in tears made him realize that he had dreamed the hideous apparition.

He shot bolt upright in bed and looked at the doorway. His wife entered their room with her dyed-red-but-still-emitting-random-gray hair looking disheveled, her bulged wide-open eyes puffy and red from crying, shrieking to him that their son Michael was "trying to raise *Great Anu*."

Driscoll was already distressed by the nightmare, and now this near-hallucinatory vision of his wife caused his heartbeat to race in his chest as he arose. He staggered slightly, pushed his hands down upon the mattress for balance, dizzy and disoriented from the quick rise after lying in bed. "What in God's name are you *talking* about, woman?" he asked in a slurred tongue. He was sober but still reeling from the realistic dream he had just suffered through.

"That thing ..." Michelle Driscoll said hysterically, "that thing from *your* side of the family ... it's in there ... *it's killing Michael!*"

Edward slapped his wife in the face. "Get hold of yourself woman, or I swear to God I'll have you locked up. *Do you hear me?*"

"Then go ahead, strong man!" she sobbed. Her arm pointed crookedly in the direction of the stairway. "Go down to his room and see what he's done! Go see what that thing is *doing* in there!"

"If I've told you once I've told you a thousand times, you stay the hell away from Michael's bedroom! Let *me* handle it!" He shoved her down onto the mattress he had just arisen from.

"Then *go handle it!*" she shrieked at him. "Go undo the work your god-damned grandfather put into our son's head! *Save us all from that thing!*" The rest of what she said was lost in a babble of hysterical howling and sobbing and sniveling.

"Your damn right I will," he said defiantly. "I'll handle *him*, and then by God, I'm going to come right back up here and handle *you too!*" He left his wife where she lay, sobbing on the bed, and started out of their bedroom and down the stairs.

Things were suddenly, ominously quiet all about their house, save for the sound of cartoons playing downstairs and his wife's steady weeping behind him. At times like this, Edward Driscoll felt that he was the *unluckiest* person ever born. Descended from the village idiot, raised by an alcoholic father and a weak-willed, dishrag of a mother who barely spoke above a whisper, he had managed to inherit a small amount of wealth—and the local "haunted house"—when his father died of cirrhosis of the liver at the age of 51. The inheritance was gone within the first year after he had acquired it: he promptly spent all of it in his failed attempts to invent a powder that would double the alcohol content of a glass of beer when mixed into it. The only thing "Double Proof" (composed almost entirely of yeast and sugar) ever actually did was give a few of his guinea pig friends a nearly unbearable stomach ache. To add to his personal humiliation, his work partner on the project sued him and won a settlement of \$20,000 for damage to his liver. Despite his youthful boasting to friends that he would "marry a gal *exactly the opposite* of the one who married dear old dad," he had somehow managed to marry a mirror-image of his mother anyway. Then, of course, there was that twerp of a son of his, Michael.

Edward had no clear idea how such a skinny, pasty-faced, creepy kid could have issued from his loins. All hopes for his son had extinguished themselves after a series of incidents that ranged from the typically adolescent (blasting the neighborhood with death metal music at full volume), to the generally weird (claiming he was "Vernalier Driscoll reincarnated"), to the truly perverse (leaving a dead mouse in a matchbox on the dresser of his room "to see how long it took to rot down to bones").

Michael bore no resemblance to Edward whatsoever, taking his physical appearance from Michelle's side of the family. He spoke almost never and spent all of his time isolated in his room, listening to the most god-awful racket imaginable. Edward refused to intervene when it came to the issue of loud music; his own father had drunkenly burned Edward's Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath records in the fireplace, in the process nearly burning down the family house and filling it with the nauseating stench of burned vinyl.

He saw his daughter look up at him as he approached her on his way to Michael's room. "Everything's going to be all right," he told her. She returned her gaze to the cartoons she was watching and shook her head. "Everything's going to be all wrong."

"What? What the hell do you mean by that?"

Missy shook her head again and asked in a weak voice: "Can't you tell?" Then she merely continued staring vacantly at the television set.

"Well," he said as he headed downstairs, "I'm putting a stop to this right now."

As he descended the stairway and approached his son's room, Edward Driscoll saw the ridiculous sign on the door his son had posted: the crudely etched image of a dragon with the words: *Dragon's Domain: Stay out!* He yanked it down with one good, hard pull. He pounded on the door. "Michael ... open this door. We need to talk. Your mother's upset."

"The door's open, dad," Michael's voice came from the other side. "Come on in."

Now, just what in the hell was his wife so upset about? Michael sounded as if he was doing nothing other than reading the newspaper in there. With a groan of disgust, he shook his head and pushed open the door to Michael's room.

The first thing he saw was Michael's gray cat. The cat made a strangled *glag* sound as it swiftly escaped the room, its hair puffed out and its tail drawn up between its legs. Then, as he entered the room into which his son had recently exiled himself, Edward Driscoll's throat locked up, and he found himself incapable of making any sound whatsoever.

There was, from his perspective, no longer any "room" on the other side of the door; the expanse about him looked out into an infinite dense darkness, with the strangely eerie sight of a full moon overhead. Beneath the pale silver glow of the moon, a massive stone structure soared to a staggering height over his head. The enormous temple was composed of seven ascending levels, each smaller than the one below it, each painted a different brilliant color. A black wrought-iron fence surrounded the entire colossal edifice; a gate composed of the same metal stood sentry at the front and center of the temple.

Edward stood with his arms hanging limply at his sides, staring vacantly at the vision before him, trying to take in everything he saw there. The enormous massive base level of the temple was composed of bricks painted as densely black as the endless expanse that surrounded him, its mammoth gate was embellished with the image of a spider dangling within its web. As Edward's astonished eyes beheld the staggering vision, the gate split down the middle and opened up outwardly. Inside the walls of the structure that formed within the gloomy void his son's room had become, a host of insect-like creatures crawled, slithered, and snaked their way towards him. Dark earth tones of cobalt, blood red, and dirt brown emanated from small windows cut into its stone edifice, but the light that came out of them seemed to float about in the expanse like smoke. Within the structure before him, Edward envisioned dark gray tombstones protruding from a darkened cemetery field. Inside this level was a

sanctuary dedicated to death and the ceremonies of the grave, a charnel house that reeked of sulfur and decay. Entombed within were the remains of the entire human race that had passed from life to death.

Unable to gaze upon the horrors of this chamber of death any longer, his eyes rose to behold the second level, slightly smaller, which rested atop it. Emblazoned upon a gate at the center of this gray level was the image of a wolf howling at a crescent moon over its head. When this gate parted and opened, a thick gray fog engulfed the expanse, illuminated by the full moon that shone overhead. His ears perceived the sound of a deep growl that trembled throughout the environment he found himself in, followed by a loud and deafening howl. Shortly the terrifying image of an enormous gray wolf leaped out at him from within its compound, its mouth wide open, its razor sharp teeth bared at him, ready to swallow him whole, for its eyes possessed an unfathomable hatred of mankind. Edward screamed aloud, but the din of a hurricane force wind that arose above him swallowed up its sound. His eyes rose again as he beheld the pale white level which sat atop the gray one.

The outstretched wings of a jet-black raven-like image spread out over the gate to this third level, in direct contrast to the general pallor of the shrine itself. Within the brilliant white clouds inside this third shrine, a howling wind rose to a shriek. Edward imagined himself positioned at a dizzying height above the clouds, looking down from a view he could not possibly imagine: not a picture of the earth as seen from the heavens, but a vision of a world under the dominion of the fowl-like entity which possessed him here. Within the gale-force wind and tempestuous fury of noise that encompassed his surroundings, he could hear screams of torture; helpless victims held in the tenacious grip of a mammoth bird of prey that refused to surrender the control it held over its underlings. As Edward's scream dissolved into the noise that continued to rise in volume, he fell backward in a wave of fright and dizziness that overwhelmed him in a miasma of vertigo.

The fourth level, colored a deep and rich emerald green, appeared to his bewildered eyes then, and upon this gate an image of a fish-like creature was fashioned. It opened up into a seascape within which Edward heard the roar of the surf and imagined he could smell the tangy air of the ocean. He felt the awesome force of its current; a wellspring of tide pulling him in and pushing him back out again, and within its watery depths Edward envisioned a panorama of living organisms: fishes, shellfish, tentacle-bearing monstrosities, and all manner of aquatic life. Edward felt himself transformed by the incredible power of the sea, a mystifying underworld that opened up into legion of mysterious life-forms held within its grasp.

On top of this level, a single sheaf of wheat was embellished upon the gate at the entrance to yet another shine, this one painted dark blue. The gate opened up into a much smaller interior, its cobalt walls played host to countless pictures, paintings, sculptures and other assorted relics and images of a woman cradling her infant son. A small walkway led to a sapphire throne, upon which sat an absurdly muscular-looking child with curly blond hair, strumming absently upon a harp. Although the likeness on this child's face belonged to that of his own son Michael, it was clear from the look of intense rebellion in its glaring eyes this child had no desire to see Edward as its father, instead transferring the honor to another, vastly more powerful source of origin.

Edward's eyes were drawn upward further still, and the deep aqua blue of this level faded away into a rich garnet flame. Within the red walls of the smaller level sitting atop it, dazzling maidens dressed in purple, scarlet, and pink sang and danced joyously, throwing flowers and singing praises toward a ruby throne, upon which sat a graceful female figure, joyously receiving the worship of its subjects. The deified woman held a quiver full of arrows draped around its shoulder; a golden bow graced its right hand. Edward longed to gaze upon the image of beauty he saw there, but the fire in the woman's eyes was beyond his ability to endure it, and Edward drew in another breath to scream aloud, and as he did so, a bright

pin-point of light shone out from the eyes of this “goddess.” Shortly, the entire expanse about him was bathed in a warm, golden ethereal light.

The light shone about him like the beacon of a lighthouse on a stormy, wind-driven sea and enveloped him in its radiance. The pinnacle of the temple that had formed in this wilderness shone more brightly than the sun, and upon the gate of the entrance to the shrine was a black silhouette image of a bull's head. As the gate swung upon, a figure stepped out from the inside of the tiny chapel at the top of the massive temple, dressed in a golden robe festooned with symbols he did not recognize. Edward's own face gazed back at him from the visage of the figure that emerged from this shrine.

Edward Driscoll, who sold agricultural machinery, owned this “haunted house,” the father of Melissa and Michael and the husband of Michelle; Vernalier Driscoll's unfortunate grandson, thought nothing sane or logical or rational again, because the apparitions he was seeing and hearing and smelling had finally shoved him off the stable ground of reason, straight over the edge of rationale, and into the infinite black abyss of insanity from wherein this creature had arisen ...

