

The Account of Officer Hutchins
By Danny Cove

Officers Hutchins and Paulson were out on patrol when the sporadic calls had started coming in from the station. Sheriff Anders had been worked up about something which the dispatcher, Marcy, hadn't chosen to disclose. Nonetheless, they were ordered to turn south, outside of the area they'd usually cover at that time of night, and head past the hospital. "What the hell do you think's happening?" Paulson asked, slouching in his seat so that he looked a full head shorter than Hutchins, even though the latter was only taller by an inch or two.

"Not sure," Hutchins said. "Damned radio's been fritzzy for the past week, just like the phones and the net."

"Solar eclipse, maybe?" Paulson asked, one of his eyebrows crooked in that curiously cartoonish way of his. "I've heard they interfere with radios and electronics and all kinds of gizmos."

"No eclipse that I've seen," Hutchins responded. "Besides, isn't a solar eclipse supposed to be during the day?"

"I think it's at night," Paulson answered. "That's why it's called a solar eclipse: because it's 'solely' at night."

"Well, you just pulled that out of your ass, didn't you?"

"Hell if I know, I just talk sometimes. Hey, does the hospital look a little empty to you?" As Paulson pointed, Hutchins slowed the patrol car as they passed the enormous, five-story leviathan of a hospital, which loomed over them like some great beast. But this beast had a mostly empty parking lot, looking as if it was operating with a skeleton crew of three people who hadn't chosen to carpool.

"Let's keep looking," Hutchins said as they picked up speed again. "Dale said to go south. Sounds like something's happening that way."

"And how would they know? It's not like they're getting calls right now."

"Maybe someone went to the station and reported weirdness in person."

"Weirdness in person?" Paulson asked mockingly.

"I don't know, I just talk sometimes," Hutchins grinned back at his own bantering jab.

They drove in silence for a few minutes, passing an eerily dark and silent Roanoke Street as they continued south on Barrow. Hutchins slowed the patrol car to a crawl as they advanced down the street, noticing the streetlights illuminating...nothing. The houses were cold and dark, silent, no lights on anywhere. Hutchins got goosebumps as he checked the time, noting that it was way too early for everyone to be in bed with the lights out, especially given the chances of there being at least a few night-owls on each street.

"I'm almost waiting for Mrs. Baylock to come running out in front of the car," Paulson said suddenly, startling Hutchins out of the mesmerizing silence.

"Mrs. Who?"

"Mrs. Baylock, you know, from *The Omen*. It's that movie where the dad finds out his kid's going to grow up and be the damned antichrist. He hires this nanny named Mrs. Baylock, who creeped the hell out of me."

"And this has to do with...what, exactly?"

"In the end of the movie," Paulson went on. "The dad's getting in the car with his kid and he's about to drive away when suddenly Mrs. Baylock appears in front of the car to stop him. Of course, by this time, the dad's had enough of it and he runs her down."

“Ah, that’s...an odd reference to make.” Hutchins waited a moment, passing each house slowly, staring into the windows for any hint of life or movement. “Truth be told, when you said Baylock, my mind went more to the Monster of Baylock.”

“Monster of what now?” Paulson asked, slumping back in the seat. He’d been doing the exact same sweep as Hutchins, only on the other side of the street.

“It’s an old Irish myth that my grandma told me,” Hutchins said. “I don’t remember all the details, but it was something to do with this wizard who used magic to help a couple get pregnant, only when the kid was born, he wouldn’t stop growing, and the bigger he got, the faster he grew. Finally, the kid was so big that he became dangerous, so the wizard locked him up beneath a lake. Legend has it that the day before the end of the world, he’ll be released and he’ll swallow Ireland whole. They call him the Monster of Baylock, after the lake he was trapped under.”

“Well look at the two of us,” Paulson said musingly. “A dark street and suddenly I’m thinking of the antichrist and you’re thinking of a wizard and a giant, island-eating baby...man...thing. You don’t need drugs in this town, just some fog and an imaginat- wait, stop the car!” Hutchins slammed the brakes and they came to a stop beside a two-story red-and-blue colonial, with a smattering of thin trees scattered across the front yard. “Look at the front door.” Hutchins followed Paulson’s orders and saw something standing in the open frame of the home’s entryway, something vaguely humanoid, but with powerful shoulders and wild hair. All he could see was the silhouette of the thing as it stood motionless, hunched over in an oddly inhuman manner. Hutchins put the car in park and leapt out of the patrol car, one hand on his handgun as he did so. With his other hand he whipped out a flashlight, but by the time the beam met the doorway, the being which had been standing there was gone. Without hesitation, Paulson began moving in that direction, heading up the upraised lawn and around the spindly trees toward the front door of the house.

Paulson disappeared a moment before Hutchins, and the latter found his partner standing in an entryway that seemed composed of shadows and patches of oil in haphazard patterns. But as he pulled out his own flashlight and trained it in parallel to Paulson’s, they were greeted by the fact that it was not oil sprayed across the side table, walls and stairs: it was blood. It looked as if great buckets of blood had been thrown all around, like the owners of this house had been planning on repainting it to look like a scene from a Stephen King novel. Both officers instinctively raised their handguns and moved forward, their flashlights held against their weapons as they swept out of the entry and into the living room. Hutchins felt queasy at the sight, and Paulson was noticeably unnerved by what they found as well, but there wasn’t enough solidity in what they saw to determine how many had already died, or if any were still alive in this house.

They turned the opposite way, back across the hall and toward the dining room, but as Paulson set a single, silent footfall on the carpet, something enormous, dark and covered in unkempt hair reached out of the shadows and wrapped around his neck, dragging him into the dining room. Hutchins ran after his partner, but only in time to feel blood splatter across his face and neck. He shone his flashlight into the room and saw a glimmer of yellow eyes, of something enormous and beastly hunched beside the table. His eyes widened as he saw the thing turn to him and the grip on his gun loosened, his fingers unwilling to cooperate. The creature raised itself up, standing nearly a head taller than Hutchins’ already above-average height, and it tossed aside pieces of Paulson before dragging impossibly-long claws or fingernails across the dining room table, leaving four, deep gashes in the wood as it moved. Hutchins suddenly became aware of the

weapon in his hand and he fired two shots into the dark, not trying to kill the creature but just to slow it down long enough for him to spin around and reach a sprint out the front door. He didn't have time to think of poor, dead Paulson, didn't have time to consider what in the hell was thudding behind him, he just kept running, veering around the trees until he reached the patrol car.

Hutchins jumped inside the patrol car and locked the door behind himself, then slapped himself in the forehead when he realized that he'd gotten into the passenger side. He quickly shuffled over the computer console and into the driver side, but before he got there, the window shattered as a powerful, fur-covered arm smashed its way in, claws like bowie knives whipping around the end of a forearm as thick as a tree limb. Hutchins fired another shot and the hand retracted, but only for a moment. That moment was all he needed to start the car, flip it into gear and hit the gas, flying forward with a jarring motion. The clawed arm slid out of the window but then established a hold at the edge of the broken glass. This was followed by a powerful thud as the thing leapt atop the patrol car and began riding it through the night.

The thing was pounding on the roof, but as long as Hutchins kept driving haphazardly, it couldn't manage its way inside, not with the wind and the turbulent forces working on it. Hutchins knew this was his only opportunity to call for help if he wasn't able to get the thing off the car. Keeping one hand on the wheel, he grabbed the radio and depressed the button on the side. "Sheriff, it's Hutchins!" he nearly screamed into the mic. "We're being attacked by something on Barrow. It's something...something big attacking the patrol car! I can't get a clear shot at it." He knew that even if he dropped the microphone and pulled out his weapon, he'd be shooting blindly at the underside of his patrol car, and even if he could avoid the possibility of a ricochet inside the vehicle, the sound of that shot inside an enclosed car might cause him to black out. "Paulson's down, it tore him apart! I'm passing Second and Barrow heading south and I need backup to kill this damned-"

Before he could finish, he drove over a speed bump at nearly fifty miles an hour and dropped the radio as the car bounced two feet into the air, or so it felt to the terrified officer. His teeth smacked together and he heard a ringing in his ears, but he ignored these as he reached down for the radio, which was coiled like a snake in the floor of the passenger seat. With a strain and a grunt, he managed to hook his index finger around the wire and whip it up, catching the speaker in his hand. But he'd had to take his eyes off the road for a moment to do this, and that was an unfortunate moment in which to do so.

The patrol car skidded up onto the sidewalk, careening in accordance with Hutchins' purposefully chaotic driving, but the jolt startled him and he reflexively pulled the wheel back toward the road, swinging the rear of the car up onto the sidewalk as the front half made it back to the road. He looked to his right and clenched his teeth this time, preparing for the impact of the rear-right portion smashing sideways into a telephone line. There was a horrendous crunching sound, the grinding of metal and the cracking of wood, and then his car spun in a mad arc, plowing through a chain-link fence before the car jolted to a sudden stop. Hutchins frantically tried to restart the patrol car, but the ignition wouldn't work, and a single glance outside at the fence poles jammed through portions of the engine block, the remnants of chain-link wrapped around its hood like a fish in a net, all confirmed that his car was dead. Smoke began to waft in through the shattered passenger window, making him cough as he breathed in the acrid smell of exposed oil and grease, intermixed with the stench of burned metal and wood.

Without hesitation, Hutchins grabbed his weapon and slid out the open door to his left, landing on his haunches just outside and backing quickly away as his eyes honed in on the top of

the car. But nothing was there. A momentary glance showed him great indentations in the roof, as if something enormously heavy had been resting there, but whatever had been there was long gone. He spun around, staring in all directions, but there seemed to be a shroud of darkness, then a spark and a sputter of light; a few feet away, the lone streetlight had burned out.

Beyond the mangled fence, there was a house, and Hutchins took only a moment before he hopped over the fence and made his way toward the front door, gasping as he did so. He felt a bruise on his right arm which made him wince as he pressed it against the front door. He turned again, his gun raised as if he were guarding the entrance to the house, but there was nothing, only an interminable silence that melded into the darkness of the street. The lights were out in this house as they were in all the houses along this street; Hutchins felt confident that no one would be home, or, if they were, they'd be in the same shape as the family in the first house he and Paulson had encountered. He tried the door handle but it was locked, so he backed up and kicked the underside of his foot just beneath the doorknob, shattering the wood around the deadbolt and allowing the door to swing inward.

Inside was still more darkness, so Hutchins reached into his belt and retrieved his reserve flashlight, holding it with his gun and keeping it down so as not to draw attention from anything out on the street. Perhaps there was a landline in this house, a phone that – by some odd miracle of nature – was still operational, by which he could call the station and report the situation. He found one in the empty kitchen and put it to his ear, but there was no dial tone, just an odd squealing sound that startled him enough that he slammed it back on the hook.

Get to higher ground, he thought to himself. *Find somewhere defensible and establish a lookout*. He wasn't sure if that was the right course of action, but he had no other options so he set out to find the stairs. Unfortunately, this forced him to pass through the living room, where he found confirmation of what had happened to this house's previous residents, though there was much less left over this time. It seemed that there was more on the walls than on the floor, like some macabre psychopath had decided to repaint the living room in blood. But there was something stranger: parts of the walls seemed to be missing. It wasn't as if they were hacked away or smashed, but, rather, like they'd been liquefied and vacuumed away. Hutchins didn't know what to make of the oddity, but he had more pressing matters so he bypassed the living room and found a single set of stairs that went up toward the second floor. At the top of the landing, he turned right and found the nearest room, the one which should be looking out toward the street where his demolished patrol car waited.

He paid no attention to what he assumed to be either a guest room or the sparsely decorated bedroom of someone with little interest in interior design. He cleared the room, confirming that there was no one waiting to ambush him, and then dropped to his knees by the window, turning off his flashlight before slowly opening the shades. Outside, the smoke from his engine was still billowing out, but less so than when he'd first crashed. That same strange darkness seemed to surround the car like a black fog, but this was mitigated by the street light, which had come back to life, leaving a large circle of light stretching a third of the way across the road. Then something stepped into that light.

It was the creature.

This was the clearest look that Hutchins had of the thing, and the word *werewolf* seemed to dominate his thoughts, for that was all he could think of to describe it. It stood like a man, with two powerful tree limbs for arms, every inch of it covered in thick, brownish-black fur. Its head was elongated like that of a dog's, and it had to be over seven feet tall. Hutchins moved his arm forward to take aim at the creature and incidentally tapped the glass, having forgotten that it

was there. The tap was almost imperceptible, and yet it seemed enough to demand the attention of the thing in the street, for it turned its lupine head in his direction and seemed to bore its glowing, yellow eyes directly at him. Hutchins felt ice in his chest and he could almost hear his heart pounding away in it. He didn't want to take his eyes off the creature, even to open the window, for he knew that as soon as he did, the creature would vanish on its journey toward his location, and in the darkness, it would have the advantage. He couldn't forget the memory of the thing feasting on Paulson, unreactive to the two shots that Hutchins had sent its way in the darkness of that deathly dining room.

But then something disturbing began to happen, something which at first gave Hutchins hope, but then dashed that hope against the ground in a final stab of doom. The creature began to shake and shift, its body rippling as if caught in some sort of bizarre shock wave. The fur began to recede and its claws retracted inward, its elongated snout shortening into a more man-shaped face. At this, Hutchins felt confident in assigning it the label of a werewolf, and he prayed that this was its regression into a human form, a shape and a mind which could be reasoned with or, if all else failed, shot to death. But the dark tinge of its skin remained, and instead of shrinking, the former-werewolf began to grow, its limbs swelling beyond their already bulky frame, its head soaring to new heights atop powerful shoulders and legs that ended in enormous feet the likes of which no cobbler could successfully cover. The thing was turning into a giant, and just before its head disappeared above the level of the streetlight, Hutchins caught a fractionary glimpse of tusks extending from its mouth.

The ground began to quake as it took a lumbering step toward the house, and Hutchins could have sworn he saw first the street and then the lawn, the rocks and the dirt, all moving and flowing *into* the behemoth, as if it were absorbing all with which it came into contact. Overwhelmed with terror, Hutchins stumbled back from the window as a dark, hairless chest dominated his view, and the house began to creak and crumble, the walls breaking apart and timbers and plaster falling from the ceiling around the officer. A moment later, Hutchins was sprawled against the opposite wall and staring upward as the whole roof was pulled away, revealing the shadows of night blocked by the outline of one giant, looming frame. A circular head seemed to look down at the officer, and then a free hand – not the hand which had opened the house like a playset – reached inside, its palm nearly twice the size of Hutchins' entire body.

As the hand closed around the quivering man, he remembered that awful legend his grandmother had told him, the myth of the Monster of Baylock. *The day before the last day, it will rise from its lake and swallow Ireland whole*, he could remember his grandmother saying to him so long ago, when he was just a small little boy. *They say that once a year, when you stand near the lake, you can hear the Monster breathing, and sometimes it will ask you, "is it the day before the final day?" And when it hears no response, it returns to its slumber, to await that dark and terrible day.*

Hutchins saw the awful maw appearing in the face, felt more than saw the horrible depths to that eternal blackness, and he wondered if the legend was true: perhaps tomorrow was the end of the world.