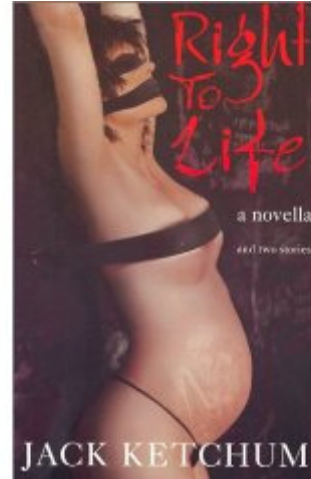


Right to Life
(A Novella and Two Stories)
By Jack Ketchum
1998, Edge Books



What can I say about Jack Ketchum (a pen name) as a writer? I first came across his work when I met him at a *Chiller Theatre* convention, where I picked up his book, *Off Season*.

Are Ketchum's stories horror stories? Yes indeed, but not the Universal, or Hammer, style of make-believe horror. Ketchum writes of *real horror*, the horror of bent souls, twisted lives and warped minds. Ketchum's stories hit you somewhere below the belt. He grabs your innards and keeps them clenched in his grip until you reach the end of the particular tale you are reading. He doesn't follow the usual conventions of horror stories—his only convention being to take no prisoners.

The writing style Ketchum uses is spare and fast moving and I like that. He writes as if he can't wait to get to the ending. He doesn't lard his paragraphs with detailed descriptions and excess verbiage – just enough to get his point across. Point's a good word too, for his stories prick you like the tip of a sharp blade. Do you begin to care for a character? Don't care too much, for that character may meet his or her end as fast as a speeding bullet. Think you've reached the depth of a harrowing situation? Think again, for the room just got darker.

I picked up *Right to Life* because the title grabbed me. And under that title was the picture of a bound and gagged, semi-naked pregnant woman with the ghostly, skeletal image of a baby in her womb. The story setup's simple. A woman walking into an abortion clinic is kidnapped right at the front door. Knowing it to be a Jack Ketchum novella, I was prepared for the worst. Yet I couldn't resist reading it because I'm a right-to-lifer myself. I ended up reading the book in two short sittings on the same day. It was riveting, catching you up into its web by the end of the first page.

Whether you're a right-to-life advocate or not, this taut little shocker has something to say. Author Ketchum manages to tell his tale without overtly falling on either side of the right to life debate, twisting the motivations of each of its characters inside out. Through *Right to Life's* twists and turns, to its shocking conclusion, your thinking is piqued by serious thoughts—thoughts about fear, and despair, and death—and thoughts about how precious life really is.

The two bonus stories are bonbons for making it through the novella. Number one is "Brave Girl" a tale about a four-year-old child dealing with an unconscious and injured mother, who has taken a fall in the bathtub. Number two is "Returns." The ghost of a dead man haunts his estranged wife, in an effort to keep her from killing his beloved cat.

Steven King was right. You won't find Jack Ketchum's stories on *The Disney Channel* any time soon.