



Interview with Jonathan Woods, author of Hog Wild (August 26, 2022)

Contact: Leslie Barrett, leslie@prbythebook.com

1. Why crime fiction?

Growing up I was a huge fan of Edgar Allan Poe. Still am. And who doesn't love reading a grizzly murder story in the Sunday paper? There, but for the grace of God, go I, etc. Tales of crime (murder and mayhem) pretty much sum up the human condition from Camus' *The Stranger* to Robert Stone's *Dog Soldiers* to Patricia Highsmith's twisted Ripley tales to Barry Gifford's snarky Sailor & Lula stories.

2. Why feral hogs?

Feral hogs are a big problem down in Texas, breeding like crazy and despoiling the environment. Texas even permits hunting them by helicopter. Humans are a big problem in the world, breeding like crazy and despoiling the planet. Ergo, hogs and humans have a lot in common—though hogs, to my knowledge, don't write crime novels. So I wondered what it would be like if hogs and humans went head-to-head, each species out to exterminate the other. There's a planet of the hogs dystopian undercurrent going on too.

3. Why a Texas cattle ranch?

In Texas everything is bigger, wilder, crazier, more baroque. To play out my little human versus hog drama, I needed a closed-in environment. What more perfect a place for pulp noir madness and mayhem to breed and flourish than on a vast and remote King Ranch type cattle ranch? And the Cross clan that inhabits the ranch? Completely looney—egotistical, sexually rampant, murderous, cutthroat, twisted and manipulative. Your basic cross section of humankind (from a Rabelaisian POV).

4. Who is Ray Puzo?

Ray Puzo is the hero of *Hog Wild*. While most of his life has been spent in the military, fighting in foreign locales, he enters civilian life as an innocent barely able to keep afloat amid the wily plans and secret agendas of the ranch owners, the Crosses. There is a little of Forrest Gump in Ray as he struggles to find his way through the plots and counterplots of the Cross clan and cash

in on the money tree by marrying the whacky Cross daughter, Loretta. But above all else, Ray is a survivor.

5. Why become a writer?

I always dreamed of being a writer. As a kid I was hauled back and forth across the country, from Rhode Island to L.A. to small town Massachusetts, upstate New York and rural Ohio. In school I was always the new kid, the outsider. So books were essential companions. Later I studied English Lit at McGill University and edited the literary magazine in my senior year. After many years working as a deal lawyer for a multinational high-tech company, I finally got my writing act together.

I attended Bread Loaf, Sewanee, Zoetrope: All-Story and Sirenland writers conferences and Southern Methodist University night school. My short stories began to appear online at crime & literary sites such as *Plots with Guns*, *3:AM Magazine* and *Thuglit*. Then I met Jon Bassoff, who ran a small press called New Pulp Press, specializing in transgressive crime fiction. He published my first book of stories, *Bad Juju & Other Tales of Madness and Mayhem*. I've never looked back. There's nothing I'd rather do than take a blank page and fill it with the schemes and scams of twisted characters behaving badly.

6. How would you describe yourself as a writer?

I'm always trying to push the envelope. Most certainly I don't write traditional murder mysteries or thrillers. Reviewers have compared my work to 1960s pulp crime writer Gill Brewer crossed with Hunter S. Thompson; of being a menage of the Coen brothers, Kurt Vonnegut, Jim Thompson and Quentin Tarantino; as being part Hunter S. Thompson and part Jim Thompson; as having roots in the stories of Henry Miller and Graham Greene; as constituting absurdist and erotic noir; as being gonzo noir and as being crime fiction with a David Lynch aura. I'll take any of those comparisons.