



KUMPA

a novel by
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A FANGORIA GRAPHIX NOVEL

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BUMP

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CONCEPTION:**30 YEARS AGO****1**

The old pickup shuddered and lurched as it rumbled down the rutted back road. Chunks of brittle rust cracked loose and fell, tumbling to the asphalt as bald tires found every pothole and dip in the vehicle's path. Worn brakes ground metal teeth in complaint as the truck entered a steep curve, the tired engine thundering its agreement, forced to accelerate when the road straightened again. From inside, the jostling yellow glow from one functioning headlamp crawled over moving banks of night fog and pinpointed the thousands of dead leaves raining from the surrounding woods. They fell in a riotous mix of brown, orange and red, only to fade to a sickly ochre pallor in the single cone of illumination before colliding with the faded metal of the truck's hood in a skitter-scratch dance of passing.

In the truck's cab, the driver watched the leaves fall and listened as their skeletal edges raked the oxidized metal. The sounds seemed to speak to him, their repetition lulling him and taking his thoughts from the road as his mind's eye opened to show him flickering sepia visions of fat spiders crawling across the weathered faces of tombstone angels. His ears picked up the subtle thrum of heavy wings flexing and churning against fickle updrafts. Audible met visual as the storm of leaves outside transformed to a shower of

white down dipped in red and the night resounded with the sounds of flight. He shuddered as goose flesh rose on his arms and neck. Cold sweat trickled down his forehead and hot blood hammered in his temples. Straining, his gloved hands gripped the flaking wheel in sweaty anticipation and he blinked repeatedly to dissolve the autumn vision. He shook his head, breathed deep and brought the world back.

Only when his vision cleared did he allow himself a quick glance at the burlap bag on the opposite floorboard. He could feel the quickening thud of his heart and his breath came in desperate gulps as his eyes roved the rounded humps and sagging depressions beneath the coarse, woven fabric. If he concentrated, he could imagine that he had x-ray eyes, could see right through the sack- see what waited for him inside. And if he listened hard, straining to hear above the rumble of the truck's motor and the spider dance of the leaves, he could just make out the slow rasp of shallow breathing.

“Angelth” he said, drooling a bit as he pushed the word through broken lips.

Behind the wheel of the battered pickup, the thing that was Edgar Dill smiled.

2

The house was old, much older than the truck that coughed and wheezed as it parked at the base of the weedy, sloping yard. The tortured engine rattled its last and died, finally allowed to rest for the night. Meager light from a single bare bulb mounted next to the

front door barely reached down the steep, overgrown hill, yielding little illumination to the gravel drive beyond. In the drive, the driver's door swung open on whining, rusted hinges. Broken springs added their voices to the din as Edgar shifted his huge bulk and stepped down, work boots crunching on dusty stones. With a grunt, he slammed the rusted door and trudged around the truck. As he rounded the tailgate, he glanced into the bed, eyes roving quickly over its contents. Piles of wood, an axe, a well oiled saw, large sections of fresh-cut logs and tree limbs met his gaze. He nodded his head in approval.

A good day's work. Good, thtrong wood.

Kin make thumpthin' of that.

But not tonight.

Edgar continued to the passenger side, extending a huge hand toward the door handle. Hesitating, he paused to raise his large head toward the house. His eyes roved the structure, taking in the familiar details of the only place he'd ever thought of as home. He gazed at the sagging, sway-backed front porch, the peeling clapboard that sheathed the structure, yellow windows glowing with spare, flickering light on the ground floor. His gaze followed the irregular line of the weathered roof with its shingles missing in spots, the leaning brick chimney and the weedy, debris strewn expanse of dying grass that stretched from the drive to the treeline deep in shadow behind the house. He grunted in approval. Everything was in its place, just as he'd left it. Home was still home... still safe. His hand found the door latch again, twisting it confidently and pulling the groaning door open. He wouldn't delay any longer. He couldn't. There was work to be done.

The burlap bag slid easily over the door's frame and landed with a crunch in the drive. Its contents made no sound as Edgar slammed the passenger door and drug the sack toward a twisting flight of concrete stairs that led up the hill. Edgar grunted as he climbed, chill autumn air pluming from under the fleece-lined hunter's cap covering his head. The hat's earflaps were askew, one laced to the button at its crown, the other hanging down over his right ear. It capped his gigantic bulk in drab contrast to the bright red-checked wool coat that covered his powerful, obese frame. The coat glowed crimson, standing out against the fall backdrop as he topped the stairs and stood in the full wash of the porch bulb. Heaving, he brought the burlap sack up and over the lip of the final concrete stair and slowly trudged up the short flight of wooden risers to the porch.

Inside, the foyer welcomed Edgar as he swung the front door wide. He stood silhouetted against the fall night, filling the open doorway as crisp brown leaves tumbled in ahead of him on swirling drafts. He paused, breathing heavily, feeling and smelling the heat from the house's wood burning stoves. Beneath that, he could discern the cloying smell of cigarettes and whiskey, as if they saturated the walls and wood of the place. His eyes took in the familiar wallpaper, yellowed and peeling, with patterns faded and lost to time, picture frames hanging cracked and empty at angles of neglect, reflecting threadbare, filthy carpets and furniture long past their prime, mottled with stains and burns. A long hallway stretched away before him, lit by dim bulbs dangling on lamp cord overhead and to his right, the scuffed, sagging risers of a well-used staircase disappeared into darkness on the second floor. His gaze lingered on the stairs, traveling upward into shadow. He

longed to climb that final flight, dragging his prize. It was getting late and he was anxious to get started.

“Stay tuned for more Gunsmoke!”

Familiar words from the television in the next room snapped Edgar back to the world. He stepped inside the foyer, slowly and quietly closing the front door behind him. At the foot of the stairs, he turned to squint against the grainy light falling from the black and white console set near the window. On its screen Marshall Dillon talked tough to someone Edgar didn't recognize. The tough stuff didn't work and Dillon fired his pistols. Edgar caught his breath at the sudden harsh sounds of the gunshots, his gaze darting left to fall on the slumped form of an elderly woman, asleep and snoring softly on a tattered sofa across from the television. Her hair shone silver-white and monotone images of dying cowboys flickered across the lenses of her spectacles.

“MOMMEE?”

Edgar winced at the sound of his own voice, watching for a reaction from his mother. The old woman didn't stir. He paid close attention, watching her chest rise and fall beneath the stained green housecoat, noting the angle of the empty whiskey bottle leaning against her left thigh, focusing on the long, curved snake of ash hanging precariously from a long-dead butt clamped between the fingers of her right hand. Nothing moved, nothing

changed. Mommy was alive, *he'd just seen her chest moving hadn't he?*, and sleeping peacefully. He wouldn't disturb her. She needed rest.

Turning away from the living room, Edgar lifted the burlap bag into his massive arms and climbed the stairs. The risers groaned under his bulk, the old wood protesting yet another trip to the upper floor. At the top, Edgar turned right, squeezing his bulk and the bulge of the sack past the flaking banister and newel post that separated the hallway from the stairs. A few steps more and he stopped before a door, allowing the heavy bundle to slide to the floor. Reaching up, Edgar tugged at the beaded metal chain of a hanging light fixture. The bulb popped to life, shining moth-stained light onto his shoulders, head and the door before him. The door was old, swollen from moisture and hanging a bit crooked in its frame. Its drab paint was peeling badly and its brass knob was discolored with age. Carved into the wooden surface of the door, in a haphazard, juvenile scrawl, was the word, EDGAR.

3

Edgar drug the burlap sack behind him as he passed through his bedroom. He huffed and grunted with the effort, pushing the door to the hall closed and ignoring the riotous mess all about him. The room was a staggering scene of littered chaos. Piles of filthy clothing dotted the floor and spilled from the lone closet, un-washed plates covered with blue-gray mold stuck to dust covered furniture. Mildewed stacks of worn men's magazines sporting shrieking damsels and shadowy assailants with black-gloved hands teetered on the night

table and grimy mattress. The stained sheets and quilts lay in a crumpled, discarded heap on the bed and hazy, framed pictures hung precariously from rusting wire or lay where they had fallen to the floor in sprays of broken glass. In every corner, neglect and abuse seemed to crawl the walls, extending their withering touch to everything in the room. Everything, that is, except the carvings.

They were everywhere. Small and large, some half finished, some complete. Wooden statues depicting everything from woodland animals to farm machinery to human beings perched and crowded every available flat surface in the room. On the nightstand, a fat owl stared with eternally bulging eyes as a milkmaid squatted on a tiny stool before a fat heifer. On the dresser, a stately hawk oversaw the unlikely confrontation between a growling bear and a freight train engine. Wooden pegs driven into cracked drywall supported dangling marionettes on dusty strings as a half-carved puma leapt from the bole of a bark-covered log in the corner under hastily hung shelves that tilted at precarious angles supporting dozens more figurines carved from wood, clay and bone. Each one was placed lovingly among its brethren, spaced and balanced for maximum exposure and display. And each piece was a true work of art, evincing the deft touch of a master's hand. This was Edgar's passion, his only true talent. With the untrained yet perfect touch of the true savant, he could whittle away at anything and produce a masterpiece.

Edgar Dill was born to carve.

Across the room, a deadbolt yielded, its shaft sliding back with a grating clank as Edgar wrenched a tarnished key in the heavy lock. The lock was set near the handle of a huge steel door built into the side wall of his bedroom. The door was rough metal, dented and rusty, its hinges recessed, mounted by unskilled hands to aged timbers under chipped and peeling plaster. It groaned as he tugged it open and white, powdery dust dropped onto his shoulders as the thick panel swung inward. The room on the other side was dark and musty, the air stale as it rushed through the doorway. Edgar paid it no mind as he bent down and grasped the burlap sack in his gloved hands.

Lifting the sack, Edgar's eyes fell on the dangling puppets across the room. He cracked a small smile as his eyes searched their caricature shapes and homespun costumes. The puppets were his favorites. He had painstakingly carved and painted each one and mommy had sewn the clothes, squinting over her bifocals as she threaded the needles, cussing softly to herself when she stabbed one into her thumb. *Mommy didn't cuss much, but when she did, she whispered so Eddie and Jesus wouldn't hear.* Mommy had helped him string them as well, showing him how to lace the strands of fishing line through the crossed flat brackets so the little figures could dance, nod and even talk with the aid of his carved system of hinges and joints. Mommy had laughed when the little Dutch girl had danced with the circus clown. She had leaned in real close too, squinting to catch all the action as the two knights, in their sheet metal armor and turkey feather helmets had crossed swords behind a cardboard carton in the kitchen. But her favorite, and Edgar's too... was the cowboy. Edgar looked at him now, grinning wider as he saw the big, hinged smile, the carved wooden Stetson and boots and the chaps mommy had made out

of old car seat upholstery. The cowboy... Edgar's best work, puppet-wise. He'd been the best... and the last. The last one before Edgar had discovered a whole new kind of puppet... and a whole new way to carve.

4

The police cruiser's tires screamed, leaving a fresh layer of rubber on the rutted tarmac as its driver stood on the brakes. The big sedan skewed to the right, risking the ditch before it corrected, spinning in a tight "U" to face the opposite direction. The car's spinning lights flashed red, white, red white, soundlessly tearing the night with blinding flashes as it accelerated again, taking the correct turn this time. With a crunch, its tires met the gravel covering the overgrown lane leading off the main road to the right. As the cruiser roared forward, its strobes pulsed against the rusted gray metal of an ancient mailbox nailed to a rotted wooden post.

The name scrawled on the mailbox in fading white paint read: DILL

5

Edgar flopped the heavy burlap sack onto the rough surface of his worktable. Its contents remained silent and there was no movement from within. He pulled a length of string

overhead, turning on another bare bulb light. Blinking at the sudden glare, he rubbed at his watering eye until it cleared then stared again at the bundle. He watched the bag for long seconds, holding his breath, listening. Unwilling to blink, he stared at the shapes underneath the rough brown weave, his heart catching in doubt and nervous fear at its continued stillness. Seconds ticked by. *There!* He exhaled loudly in relief as a mound near the top of the sack rose and fell gently, wrinkling the burlap ever so slightly.

Angelth breathe in their chethts. Eddie breathes in hith belly.

Smiling widely now, Edgar stood back, pulling his gloves off. He let them drop to the sawdust-covered floor and pulled off his hat and the heavy coat. Hurriedly, he unbuttoned his flannel shirt, popping one button and flinging it away into the shadows. Next, he unbuckled his heavy belt, unzipped and dropped his pants. As he bent to pull the cuffs from around his work boots, he frowned. A bulge was beginning to show in his underwear. Nervously, he pulled the pants off, yanked off the boots and stepped away from the table. He was shaking... sweating.

He looked around the room, hoping to take his mind off of the growing sensation between his legs. His eyes took in the familiar details of the place, blinking in the yellow light from the spotty bulb. The room was small, just a spare bedroom before Edgar turned it into something better, something useful. The walls were the same cracked plaster and a window was set into its rear wall, just like Edgar's room. He had boarded this one up, though. He needed privacy to do his work. The walls were lined with racks and shelves,

brackets, nails, hooks... all to hold row after row of well-oiled, immaculately sharpened wood carving tools. Hammers, awls, saws, sanders, planes and drills dangled or lay in their assigned places on every available inch of wall space. Axes hung by their broad heads, chisels and shaping files dangled from leather straps by the dozen, sledges and punches littered shelf upon shelf from ceiling to floor. A large bin in the corner held logs and planks of various shapes and sizes and sawdust covered the floor, ankle-deep in spots. The playroom was well stocked... and Edgar took good care of his toys.

In the center of the room, under the bulb-light, was his worktable. Hand-built from heavy planks and post wood, the thing was massive, stretching four feet wide and over six feet in length. The table's surface was rough, unfinished and covered in deep gouges and coppery brown stains. It had seen its fair share of work. A heavy vice sat on the table's nearest corner, tightly bolted through the wood with half-inch steel hex heads. The table's surface was un-cluttered besides the vice, except for the leather straps. Four of them, one to each corner of the rectangle, bolted down, heavy, grommeted like a belt with large brass buckles.

As Edgar stared at the worktable, his eyes darted to the sack again. Instantly, the tingling in his crotch returned, stronger. A quiet moan involuntarily escaped his trembling lips and cold sweat rose from his pores to bead his forehead. He balled his fists and pierced his palms with dirty nails, veins popping out in his arms as corded muscle rose under the flab on his biceps. Trembling, he willed his gaze away from the burlap sack...

Thith not right! NATHTY! NATHTY! Bad feelingth in the bad plathe... mommy says ith NATHTY! Can't think about the nathtieth... think about the work. Think about the angelth. Makin 'em clean. Makin' ANGELTH...

...to the two large wooden cabinets flanking the worktable. Like the table's surface, the doors and handles showed splotches and runnels of dried copper. Each cabinet's double doors stood locked, handles laced with strong chain and huge padlocks. There were no distinct markings on the wood faces of the wardrobe-like containers- no labels and no signs. Edgar needed no reminders. He knew what they housed. His finest work, his greatest glory, lying secret and safe in the dark confines of the sturdy, locked boxes.

ANGELTH.

Sudden warmth flooded Edgar's body. The sweat on his brow dried and the tension in his muscles fled, fingers unfurling, arms relaxing at his sides. He closed his eyes and twin coronas of shimmering white light exploded behind the lids, dazzling him. Images of gossamer, white-feathered wings and sparkling haloes of gold danced and floated across the landscape of his vision. Cliché' Seraphim and Cherubs twirled and swooped across an azure sky banked with gauzy clouds of purest white. Edgar smiled widely, mind cleansed, thinking of nothing save the work and pure, clean angels as he opened his eyes. Flaccid now, he calmly donned a heavy canvas carpenter's apron and returned to the worktable to untie the burlap and begin another masterpiece.

6

Rosa Dill had been dreaming. It was a hell of dream, a good one for once and she fought like caged hell not to leave it. She was young again and reasonably pretty this time. It was summertime and hot and Nathan hadn't left her after all. Hell no, he was home and happy to be there. Happy with her. She knew how happy her husband was- she could tell by the way he had her legs pushed straight up next to her ears, gripped tight in those big hands of his, his head bowed and dripping as he pounded into her. She could smell it in his sweat. She could feel how happy she was too. She could feel her nails raking his back, feel her own sweat gluing her back to the sheets- feel him hard and thick, thrusting and hammering away at her down there. She could even feel a scream building in her throat as he brought her to the edge of another climax. The damned dream was so real; she could even hear the banging of the big wooden headboard against the plaster as Nathan pushed her young, blonde head into it time after time.

BAM-BAM-BAM!

7

All Abigail Lundy could do was feel. She felt the bruises on her jaw, the swelling and tenderness surrounding her left eye, two loose teeth and a split lip. She could even tell where dried blood had glued her blonde hair to her cheek. She could feel herself being lifted, the hovering sensation of momentary weightlessness undeniable through the fog of

semi-consciousness. She could feel rough fabric sliding down her shoulders, arms and legs, leaving her feet bare and cold. She felt her body's weight dangle for the merest of seconds and then come down, hard, on a rough, unyielding surface that scratched her back and made her skin itch. She felt hands, calloused hands, on her body- everywhere. All these things felt real and she knew, in some dark, tamped-down corner of her mind, that she should react to them, scream, lash out, do something- but she couldn't. It was as if the things that she felt were happening to someone else, someone far separated from her- a dream person (*victim?*), cut off from her by a gauzy, black wall of dream. The sensations had no visual counterpart, no image in place to co-incide with the nerve response. She could *feel* rough hands, but she couldn't imagine what those hands might look like, or whose they were.

So she lay there, feeling, watching from an obscured distance as the invisible hands cut away her dream twin's blouse, jeans and panties. She felt the soft, warm clothes sliced away, heard the snik-snak of the shears, felt their cold steel blades brush the flesh of her chest and thighs. She felt the hands again, rough, probing, squeezing- exploring, accompanied now by harsh, ragged breathing. Still, she felt no real impulse to react, no urge to open her eyes and accept what was happening or the fact that it was happening to her.

Her legs were lifted, first the left, then the right and she felt something (*a rope?*) tighten around them at the ankles, holding them tight. Then it was her arms, left, then right as the (*straps?*) pulled snug, snaring both limbs. She trembled slightly as a distant finger of icy

dread ran up her spine at the realization that she was spread-eagled- open in every way and helpless in the face of this unseen force.

Then suddenly, the physical contact was broken. The hands, rough and questing, the labored respiration, the feeling of *another* in close proximity vanished and she was alone. Momentary relief blossomed in her chest. Her breathing deepened and her heart rate steadied as a welcome calm settled over her like a blanket. She even found the resolve to test the tethers that hampered her hands and feet. To her surprise, tugging at each one loosened them a bit, just a hair's breadth for her ankles, a slight slackening of whatever it was holding her left hand and...

Oh my God...

...a snap as the buckle holding the leather strap on her right wrist popped loose. Her fingers spread; loosening the thing, and her wrist slid a half-inch.

It's free. My right hand is free. Thank you God, thank you... whatever or whoever is doing this to me just fucked up royally, 'cause I'm gonna lose the rest of these straps or whatever they are and then I'm gonna get my hands on something heavy and then I'm gonna...

Then Abigail Lundy, "Abbey" as her friends called her, opened her eyes.

Thin strands of dried flesh stretched and snapped as her blood-gummed lips spread wide in a scream- a primal shriek plumed not only from her deflating lungs, but from the depths of her being; the core of her soul. The force of her cry tore at the lining of her raw throat; thrust merciless pressure from behind the swollen black flesh of her bruised eye and battered at bruised ribs. It echoed, long and seemingly endless. It ended in a rattling squeal that died in her chest, leaving nothing but a dry whistle. When even that dwindled to silence, the monster standing over her, brandishing long, rusted shears and drooling from a ruined mouth, began to speak.

“Eathy now... Eddie gon’ cut them nathties out. Make you cleeeaan.”

Edgar Dill. Edgar fucking Dill!

Abbey’s heart seized in her throat. She knew this man, or more precisely, knew of him. Edgar Dill, local weirdo- the freak who shambled around doing odd jobs, cutting down trees, hauling off garbage, digging ditches. She’d only seen him from a distance and even then only for a second. She’d seen the ratty clothes, the goofy hat and the rattletrap pickup, but she’d never seen his face. *Oh God... his face.* She’d heard rumors, gossip was thorough and made the rounds in a small town, but there’d been nothing whispered that even came close to this.

Edgar stood well over six feet tall, his bulk massive, revealing powerful, rolling muscle encased in layers of pale fat. His head was over large as well, its shape just shy of

normal, bulging on the right side and divided by a slight indentation that ran through the center of his skull- like a baby's un-joined soft spot. He was bald, with spare wisps of greasy gray-black hair sprouting here and there along the sides and crown, the loose skin of his head sporting sunspots and patches of angry red psoriasis. Uneven, mis-matched ears rode behind either temple and bags of shadow flesh bulged beneath his eyes- pig's eyes, one squinting and narrow, the other bulging and deformed. Spittle dripped and spooled as he spoke, running in thick, bubbling strands over a bloated lower lip. The upper lip, cleft from gum line to left nostril, curved upward in a permanent snarl, split and gapping to reveal malformed gums and long, crooked, yellow teeth.

Abbey narrowed her eyes, her mouth stuttering soundlessly as confused recognition warred with stark terror in her whirling brain. For a fleeting moment, she felt a twinge of pity rise unbidden from somewhere within her. She'd been raised, *trained*, to see things like this twisted creature before her in a compassionate light and she yielded to that ingrained conditioning, even now. Obviously deformed from birth, he had undoubtedly suffered unimaginably, hobbled by his defects, constantly in pain or discomfort, twisted and trapped by his own body. She had a mental flash that hinted and guessed at the measures of cruelty that would have certainly been leveled upon him by other children, stunting him, forcing him into the role of shunned recluse, trapping him in this (*House? Is this a house?*). In another place, under different circumstances, perhaps she could have sustained those feelings, maybe even offered some measure of kindness, something that for the barest of moments could alleviate some of that pain, that suffering. But not here- not now, not stripped and beaten, lashed to this table in some half-ass backwoods torture

chamber. And certainly not with this slavering, grunting thing leaning toward her, left hand reaching for her naked breast, black-nailed right filled with gleaming, rusty, razor sharp shears.

In the here and now, the best her heart could do for this creature, and herself, was slide back down her throat and make room for another scream.

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