

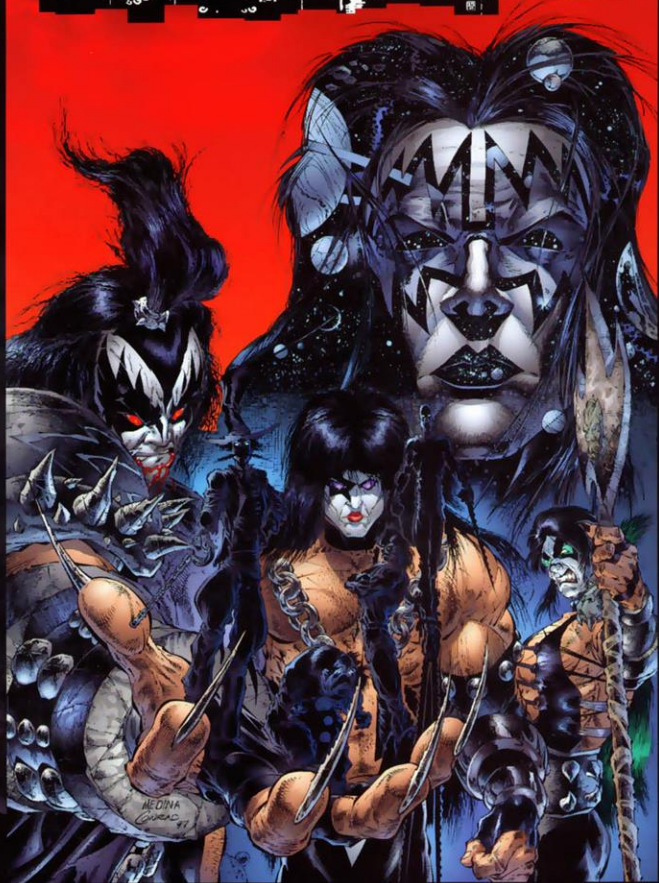


9

\$2.95 US  
\$3.49 Can

# KISS

## PSYCHO CIRCUS



# TICKETS

"IT WAS A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT..."

"WHAT WAS THAT, KISMET?"

"SOMETHING MY GRANDFATHER USED TO SAY. WHEN I WAS A LITTLE KID, BEFORE THINGS STARTED GETTING ALL WEIRD, WE USED TO GO VISIT MY GRANDFATHER IN THE SUMMERS."

"HE LIVED IN THIS CABIN WAY UP IN THE WOODS. NO TV OR ANYTHING. WHEN IT RAINED LIKE THIS, WE'D JUST STAY INSIDE AND HE'D TELL US THESE WILD STORIES."

"I MEAN, THEY WERE PRETTY LAME AND ALL, BUT HEY, I WAS A KID. WHAT DID I KNOW? AND THEY ALL STARTED THE SAME WAY..."

"IT WAS A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT..."  
THAT'S WHAT TONIGHT IS. A REAL STORYTELLING NIGHT.

ARE YOU SAYING YOU WANT TO TELL US A STORY?

**Fuh!**





WELL, NO.  
ACTUALLY, I  
WAS KINDA HOPING  
YOU WOULD TELL ME  
ONE. I WANT TO KNOW  
HOW YOU CAME HERE,  
TO THE CIRCUS.

I MEAN,  
I KNOW HOW  
MADAM RAVEN  
GOT HERE, AND  
I KNOW HOW I  
GOT HERE...

WAS  
THERE SOME  
HAUNTED CIRCUS  
WANT AD IN THE  
PAPER OR  
SOMETHING?

SLAM

HAAAAA!

SO YOU WANT  
TO HEAR A TALE, DO  
YOU LASSIE? VERY  
WELL, I WILL OBLIGE  
YOU. BUT IT'S NO

*Fairy Tale.*

AND I DOUBT  
YOU WILL FIND MUCH  
COMFORT IN IT!

IT BEGAN  
IN THE  
DAYS OF  
MAD KING  
GEORGE...

# BLACKWELL'S TALE



**B**lackwell the Devil they called me. The most feared highwayman in all of England. Scourge of the countryside. If ye had anything that glittered about ye, I'd have it off ye. If ye were merely rich and ye didn't do anything stupid, I'd send ye off with ye'r pulse a little quicker and ye'r purse a little lighter! But if ye were an *aristo*, or worse, a royal, well... the *crows* would be picking at ye'r bones before sunset. Seeing the *nobles* blubber like *babies* for their lives, it gave me pleasure. I don't deny that.

**M**y father was once a nobleman. When I was a boy, he fell into arrears on his taxes. The Bastard King sent his gang of Red Coated *thugs* to our home and had it burnt to the ground. I watched them cut the throat of my father and do *worse* to my mother. They just laughed at me as I begged them to stop. I grew up on the run and swore my life to *vengeance*. Joined a band of *thieves* and when I was old enough, became their leader. And a fine band of brigands we were.





And the next day the coach train came by right on schedule. The plan went off without a hitch. Or nearly so, anyway...



WELL, BURN THE WAGONS AND WE'LL SEND THEM BACK TO THAT MAD JACK KING WITH THEIR TAILS BETWEEN THEIR LEGS.

THEY'LL HANG US FOR A FARTHING AS SOON AS A FORTUNE, BLACKWELL. THIS IS BAD BUSINESS, MATE.



The takings from the job were a little light. Not that I cared. Vengeance was always my goal. If I struck a blow against the Crown, made the King's head rest a little more uneasy, then I was happy.

But not every one of us felt the same way.

O' Riley was a hard man. And a greedy one too. I thought I could trust him, but there was no honor in him. You see, the jingle of a coin was a siren song to Riley and he was going to get it, one bloody way or another. Even if that meant cutting a deal with the Red Coats and turning in his own band of brothers.



It will come as no surprise that there was quite a pretty price on our heads. That ol' Judas earned his proverbial 40 pieces of silver and then some. Told them where they could find us.



Of course, we suspected nothing. A couple days later we were in the north, outside of Lincoln. Riley had spied an old tower in the woods, left from Cromwell's days or even before. Thought it might make a good safe house. A place to hide yourself or your booty. Always a handy thing.





A patrol of Red Coats, hot on our trail. There was no way they could have tracked us. I knew that much. Something didn't add up, but I didn't piece it together right then and there. If we moved fast, we could outrun them. Red Coats were a lazy bunch, didn't have the stomach for a good chase.

But as I turned to leave, I understood how they knew where to find us...

AARGH!

Riley slashed my face up one side and down the other - yes, dear, that's how I got these scars. Even with the hot blood rolling down my cheeks, I could still see that foul brute laughing at me.

SEE YOU IN HELL, BLACKWELL!

I fell backwards and the timbers beneath me gave way. He must have rigged them before he called me up there. As I plunged into the darkness, I cursed his name.





As if I didn't have worries enough at that point, Riley chucked his torch down that hole after me. The place went up like a box of matches. I was in a right fix, alright.

No way out. Trapped like a rabbit in a hole. But I had no fear.

No, at that moment, the only thing in my heart was pure, all-consuming hate!



The smoke burned my eyes and flames licked at my flesh. I swore my revenge. They must have heard my screaming three counties away. Well, in any case someone, somewhere heard it.

DO YOU HEAR ME, RILEY? THIS ISN'T OVER! I'LL COME BACK FROM THE GRAVE IF I HAVE TO!



I'LL TEAR OUT YOUR HEART AND EAT IT FOR MY SUPPER! MARK MY WORDS, RILEY! YOU HAVEN'T SEEN THE LAST OF ME!



I SWEAR BY EVERYTHING UNHOLY --





JONATHAN  
BLACKWELL...  
I HAVE COME  
FOR YOU!

Then, in that twilight moment between life and death, it appeared out of nowhere. A creature terrible and beautiful to behold. He offered me a pact: 'To be a vessel of the Elder, an instrument of revenge and retribution. I consented with a smile.

The next thing I knew, I was standing along a deserted road. Soon the Circus caravan approached and Madam Raven opened a wagon door and bid me enter. 'Then we rolled off into the mists...







OH MY GOD. IS THAT ALL TRUE?

EVERY WORD, AS FOR RILEY, THE RED COATS WERE SO ANGERED AT NOT FINDING MY BODY, THEY ASSUMED HE HAD TRIED TO TRICK THEM. HE WAS HANGED WITHIN A FORNIGHT.

THAT'S HORRID.

HAHAHA. YOU THINK MY TALES GRIM, WAIT TILL YOU HEAR FORTUNACIO'S. HE'S HERE BECAUSE OF A WOMAN!



VERY WELL, I SHALL RECOUNT THE GREAT TRAGEDY OF MY LIFE AND THE GREAT SIN I COMMITTED TO BRING ME HERE TO THE CIRCUS.

"IT BEGAN IN THE GILDED DAYS OF PARIS, DURING THE REIGN OF NAPOLEON I."

BUT GOOD SIR, EET IS ALL DAT I HAVE. WINTER COMING SOON. PLEASE, MAY I ENTREAT YOU...

# FORTUNADO'S TALE

I was an actor, a performer at L'Opera Fantastique. Mostly broad farce and musical numbers, but I was in fact quite a celebrity in my day. Considering the limited opportunities for a man of my **proportions**, it was a good life. I was especially noted for my portrayal of the Emperor himself.



There was in our company an exceedingly fetching woman named Penelope. As peerless a beauty as her Homeric namesake. Oh, how I pined for this sweet child! Though I knew our love could never be, it was so much sweeter for the wanting.



I was content to send her flowers and sonnets and other trifles anonymously, like the troubadours of old. And, if from time to time, I allowed myself to read something into her glance or make mere than I should of a kind word from her... well, who could blame me? But alas, there was a serpent in our little garden.



Penelope had taken up with a fellow named Reynard. A cad and a bully, he was a captain in the Imperial Dragons. A man with no **poetry** in his soul...





I couldn't stand to see how he treated her, snarling at her as if she were one of his soldiers. Could he not see that she was a priceless gem, a goddess who walked the earth?

She was not some mere ornament to be shown off to his friends. How could she welcome his vile company? Ever have women been such mysteries.

But when I chanced to see the bruises he had laid upon her, it was more than I could bear. How dare he strike the face I could only dream of caressing? No, the cur would have to pay for such insolence. I would no longer allow her to be soiled by his poison touch.



The flowers were from me of course. And the sonnet as well. This time Reynard had gone too far. And so, under the circumstances, I did what any gentleman of France would do.

I invited him to dinner.

It was a splendid evening, to celebrate the success of the new show. I made sure that Penelope brought Reynard along. I don't think he had a very good time, however. Something about seeing good and kind people enjoying themselves made him uncomfortable.



I endured his insults with good humor, consoling myself with the knowledge that he would be dead by morning.

The next day I went to the theater, my heart bursting with pride. I saw myself as a righter of wrongs, a slayer of dragons. No more would the sweet slych Penelope be held in the clutches of that filthy cycler. Reynard! But my joy was short-lived.



A knot of actors had gathered by the theater entrance. I assumed they had heard about the sad ending Reynard met. I tried to hide my pleasure.

But as I approached, I learned the truth. Penelope had awakened in Reynard's chambers to find her lover's dead, poisoned body. Panicked and heartbroken, and fearing that she would be blamed for the crime, the sad creature lost her senses and drowned herself in the River Seine.

My beautiful Penelope was no more. My heart died at that moment. What a fool I was to believe I could save one so fair with an act so vile.



I confessed myself to the police and waited in my cell for the guillotine. It was quite a scandal in all the papers at the time. I refused food, allowed no visitors.

I spent endless hours scribbling out love poems - guilty, aching rhymes - and tossing them from my barred window into the river that flowed past, hoping that somehow my words would find my lost Penelope. Sometimes I'd swear I could hear the faint echoes of her laughter in the trilling of the water as it passed by.



I could feel my small, mortal frame starting to fail me. It would be over soon. I knew it. And then, one twilight eve, it happened.





And so I made my pact. To atone for my crimes by being a humble vessel of the Elder, Avatar of the **Starbearer**, prince of hearts. And soon, I too found myself along a lonely, desolate road, watching the caravan of lost souls moving closer and closer.

And that is my tale.  
"Daybreak and a candle end..."





TIGERS, RHINOS, ELEPHANTS... IT WAS LIKE A FEVER WITH ME THE THRILL OF THE HUNT AND ALL THAT...

**B**ut on this trek I was hunting something special. A great White Lion with eyes like emeralds. My hunting party was led by a great tribesman called Altume. Of Altume probably skewered more lion with that great spear of his than I even looked at.

## TIBERIUS TALE

TWO WEEKS AND NO SIGHT OF THE BASTARD...

PATIENCE, MY FRIEND. TO HUNT THIS DEEP IN THE WILD, YOU MUST GROW WILD YOURSELF.



**T**he damned beast must have been stalking us as we were stalking him. Never let anyone tell you animals are dumb. He struck at our camp one night, catching us off guard, killing most of our party and nearly gutting Altume before he dashed off into the night.







**M**time died just before sunrise. With his dying breath, Utime gave me that grand old spear of his. Something in my spirit shifted that night. We buried the corpses there in Veldt. I sent the survivors back to their villages and continued on by myself. Just like that fellow who chased the whale, I was going to hunt down this great beast if it took the rest of my days. Which, in fact, turned out to be the case.

**F**urther and further into the wild I trekked, trying to think like the beast. I slept only a few hours a night, ate as a little feed and drank as little water as I could manage. He was out there, waiting for me. I could smell him on the wind.



**T**he beast was quick as lightning. My first shot missed him and he wasn't about to give me a second chance. He charged at me like a freight train, the great pads of his feet making the ground shake as he came. Before I knew it, he had knocked me down, my rifle tumbling from my hands into the long grass. He'd tagged me good! Blood dripped from four long gashes along my back. The devil wheeled around, ready for the kill. Every muscle burning, I reached with all my might for Utime's spear. Damn thing was just out of reach... I could feel the beast's breath on my neck... just a few more inches...

**A**nd just when I was almost convinced that this lion was nothing more than a ghost, I came upon him. This was to be it.





**S**omehow I got a hold of the blasted thing just as that lion made a great leap for me. I planted the spear against the ground, bracing it for the weight of the beast. He landed square on top of me, his own body pushing the blade through from belly to back. He must have weighed a ton, his carcass crushing down on top of me. So there I was. My ribs turned to powder, lungs gasping for air. We had killed each other, that much was certain.

**I** stared up at the magnificent creature and, honestly, I never felt closer to another living being in my life. All that time, I thought I understood animals because I knew how they nested, how they hunted and what tracks they left behind. But for the first time, I really knew. I knew what the Great Lion knew.



**I** don't know how long I languished there, the still, dead brute lying on top of me, but everything had changed.

**I** could feel the wind across every blade of grass, feel the ants moving across the earth, feel the hunger of the vultures that circled above us. Funny, ain't it? A handful of breaths from death, and I'd never before felt so alive.



**I** watched the sun going down over the hills and I knew I'd never see the morning. But then there was a strange flicker of light on the horizon.







**A**t first I thought it was the Devil, come to make me pay for my wickedness! But the creature called my name and offered me a pact. To be the keeper of the spirit of the **Beast King**. I looked into his wild, emerald eyes and gave him the nod. And then I found myself along a dusty road somewhere I had never been before.

And that's how I came to the **Circus**.



TIBERIUS  
MACLIR, I  
HAVE COME  
FOR YOU!



IMAGES BLUR  
AND SWIM...  
ANOTHER PLACE,  
ANOTHER TIME...





HE IS A CHILD OF THE GUTTERS, GROWING UP IN POVERTY AND NEGLECT. ABUSED. HIS TONGUE... OH, MY GOD... HIS TONGUE WAS CUT OUT BY HIS FATHER, FOR CRYING IN THE NIGHT WHEN THE HUNGER BECAME TOO MUCH TO BEAR...

THE BOY IS TAKEN FROM HIS HOME AND REMANDED TO THE SANCTUARY OF THE CHURCH. ALL ARE SURPRISED AT HOW QUICKLY THE CHILD ADJUSTS TO HIS NEW LIFE.

MY NAME IS FATHER FIDELES.

I HOPE YOU WILL BE HAPPY HERE, MY CHILD.

HE MEETS A KINDLY OLD PRIEST, WHO TRIES TO MAKE HIM AT HOME. THE CATHEDRAL FASCINATES THE CHILD. HE HAS NEVER SEEN SO MUCH BEAUTY.

HE IS QUICKLY DRAWN TO THE DIZZING HEIGHTS OF THE CHURCH'S SPIRES. IT IS AS IF HE WANTS TO GET AS FAR AS POSSIBLE FROM THE CRUDE EARTH BELOW. AWAY FROM THE GUTTERS HE WAS RAISED IN, TO DWELL HIGH UP IN THE SKY.

THE PRIEST ALLOWS THE BOY TO BE THE BELL RINGER. THE CHILD IS HAPPY, CONTENT WITH SUCH A SIMPLE LIFE. HE IS SURPRISINGLY SURE-FOOTED, QUITE COMFORTABLE MANEUVERING AROUND THE LOFTY HEIGHTS OF THE CATHEDRAL'S ROOFTOPS.

SOON HE STOPS COMING DOWN AT ALL, EVEN TAKING HIS MEALS ON THE ROOF OR IN THE BELL TOWER.

BONG  
BONG

BONG  
BONG



"TIS A BEAUTIFUL NIGHT, IS IT NOT? LOOK, THERE'S "CASSIOPEIA."

THE BOY GROWS UP, MUTE BUT HAPPY, AND HIS FRIENDSHIP WITH THE PRIEST GROWS AS WELL.

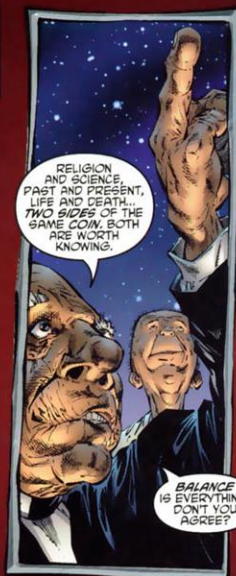
THIS FIDELES IS AN UNUSUAL MAN FOR HIS TIME. ALTHOUGH A HOLY MAN, HE HAS A STRONG INTEREST IN SCIENCE. HE TEACHES THE BOY ABOUT THE HEAVENS, ABOUT BOLD NEW THEORIES OF THE UNIVERSE'S CONSTRUCTION. THE BOY IS ENTHRALLED.

HE HAS FOUND THE BENEVOLENT FATHER FIGURE HE HAD ALWAYS BEEN DENIED. AND ALTHOUGH HE NEVER UTTERS A SOUND, HE IS A KEEN STUDENT, LISTENING WITH RAPT ATTENTION TO THE PRIEST'S LESSONS.



IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT, "PARTICLES WHIZZING AROUND AN ATOM" AND "ANGELS DANCING ON THE HEAD OF A PIN" ARE REALLY JUST DIFFERENT WORDS FOR THE SAME THING.

A MIRACLE DOESN'T CEASE TO BE A MIRACLE JUST BECAUSE IT IS DISCUSSED IN A LABORATORY.



RELIGION AND SCIENCE. PAST AND PRESENT, LIFE AND DEATH... TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN. BOTH ARE WORTH KNOWING.

BALANCE IS EVERYTHING, DON'T YOU AGREE?



AND THEN ONE DAY, SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENS. THE PRIEST, OLD AND FRAIL, COLLAPSES AS HE RISES TO LEAVE. HIS HEART HAS GIVEN OUT, THE BODY FAILS, GONE THE WAY OF ALL FLESH.

THE BOY PANICS, TERRIFIED AT LOSING THE ONE KIND PERSON HE HAS KNOWN IN HIS SHORT, HARD LIFE.



THE CHILD RAINS SILENT TEARS UPON HIS MENTOR, TORN AT THE THOUGHT OF LOSING HIM. THE OTHER PRIESTS COULD NEVER BE SO UNDERSTANDING. THERE HAD EVEN BEEN TALK OF PLACING HIM IN THE ASYLUM. IT WAS ONLY FIDELIS WHO INSISTED HE BE ALLOWED TO LIVE ON THE ROOFTOP.

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE HE CAME HERE, HE IS WORRIED FOR HIS FUTURE.

HE CAN'T EVEN BRING HIMSELF TO GO DOWNSTAIRS AND ALERT THE OTHER CLERGY. HE LIGHTS A FUNERAL PYRE ON THE ROOFTOP. THE PRIEST'S BODY RISES UP IN SMOKE AND SPARKS, DRIFTING OUT ACROSS THE CELESTIAL LANDSCAPE.



AND THE BOY IS STRUCK BY AN EPIPHANY, A NEW FOUND SENSE OF CLARITY. EVERYTHING MAKES SENSE NOW.

LIFE AND DEATH...

PAST AND PRESENT...

TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN. NOTHING TO BE FEARED. BALANCE IS EVERYTHING. A SMILE BROADENS ACROSS HIS FACE AND HE KNOWS WHAT HE WILL DO...

HE STANDS AT THE EDGE OF THE ROOFTOP, STARING OUT AT THE GLITTERING, STARLIT NIGHT. CALMLY HE LIFTS HIS FOOT AND TAKES ONE, FINAL STEP INTO THE DARKNESS OF THE NIGHT SKY.

OUT OF ONE WORLD AND INTO THE NEXT...





MATTHEW  
STARGRAVE...  
YOU HAVE COME  
TO ME?

A GREAT BEING  
APPEARS OUT OF  
THE ETHER, ITS HAND  
OUTSTRETCHED,  
BIDDING THE BOY  
WELCOME.

A PACT IS OFFERED AND  
THE YOUNG MAN NODS HIS  
HUMBLE CONSENT. THEN IN A  
FLASH, THE BOY IS GONE...

HE THEN FINDS  
HIMSELF ON A  
DESERTED ROAD  
HE'S NEVER SEEN  
BEFORE. YET HE  
KNOWS EXACTLY  
WHERE HE IS AND  
EXACTLY WHERE  
HE IS GOING...





INCREDIBLE...  
STARGRAVE,  
I NEVER  
IMAGINED...

WELL, LADS, IT LOOKS  
LIKE THE RAIN HAS LET UP.  
COME ON, WE HAVE MUCH  
WORK TO DO IF WE'RE  
GOING TO OPEN  
TOMORROW.

WAIT!  
WHERE  
ARE YOU  
GOING?

COME  
BACK,  
PLEASE.

I STILL  
HAVE SO  
MUCH I WANT  
TO ASK  
YOU...

ANOTHER  
NIGHT, PERHAPS.  
ANOTHER  
NIGHT...

NEXT:.....  
**DESTROYER**  
.....PART I