

The Cosmic Skull

Old Bailiwick's
Fearless Voice of Truth,
Mystery, and Public Safety



**The Truth Wears
No Mask But Mine!**

Published Under the Watchful Eyes of the Cosmic Skull

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Old Bailiwick's Fearless Voice of Truth, Mystery, and Public Safety

Printed somewhere in Old Bailiwick, and smuggled to every Pocket World where the walls run thin

Vol. 13, No. 1 • Price: Two Coins • "The Truth Wears No Mask But Mine!"

Published under the watchful eyes of The Cosmic Skull, who sees what City Hall buries, what the Baron hides, and what the Cult of Omega whispers after midnight.

Read it. Pass it on. Burn it if they come knocking.

A Worlds of Pulp™ Dispatch • Unauthorized by Order of Nobody Who Matters

The Skull Signal

Filed in haste. Read with care.

Friends, it has been too long. I know it. You know it. And they know it best of all.

Twelve times since this paper first reached your hands, I have had set up a new press. Twelve times, they found it. The first was a cellar beneath a shuttered laundry off Canal Row. The fifth was a bell tower that stopped ringing the week I arrived. By the ninth, I was printing by lamplight in a freight car that never stayed parked for long.

The twelfth location did not fall to a knock on the door. It burned. The fire brigade called it faulty wiring. The building had no wiring. Draw your own conclusions. I already have.

So let me be plain, because space is short and time is shorter. I am well. My identity remains exactly where I left it: behind the mask and nowhere else. Those who hunted me spent their season chasing smoke. Some of them caught it. They are now, let us say, occupied with matters of their own.

Volume 13 rises from the dark wood the same way the first did. Ink, paper, and one stubborn conviction: the truth belongs to you, not to the men who file it away.

This issue cost more than two coins to make. Honor that. Read every line. Then fold it small, pass it to someone you trust, and say nothing of where it came from.

They burned the press. They did not burn the story.

— The Cosmic Skull

BAT BOY SPOTTED OUTSIDE WINDOW



The Covered Truth

BAT BOY ON DOCK STREET:
THE STORY THE CLARION
WON'T PRINT

Witnesses saw a winged child.
Others saw men in gray coats. The newspaper across the street saw nothing at all.

OLD BAILIWICK, Md.

I will keep this brief. The longer this page sits on my desk, the more likely someone else decides what it says.

Over the past nine nights, at least four residents of Old Bailiwick have reported the same figure near the copy offices of the Coastal Clarion. Small. Pale. Ears like sails. Eyes that catch lamplight the way a cat's do. Those who grew up on the old stories already know the name. Bat Boy.

The Timeline, As Best I Can Rebuild It

Night One: A night-shift typesetter hears scratching on the Clarion's rear fire escape. He finds claw marks in fresh paint. By morning, the rail has been repainted.

Night Three: A milk wagon driver sees something crouched on the Clarion's awning, eating a fish whole. He reported it to the precinct. The precinct has no record of his call.

Night Five: Two black sedans park on Dock Street from dusk until dawn. Neighbors describe the men inside as polite, silent, and dressed alike. One wore a lapel pin shaped like a stylized "A." Those who have seen it before recognized it immediately.

Night Seven: A shriek wakes half the block. Shortly after, a sedan pulls away with something thrashing in the back seat.

Night Nine: Nothing. No sedans.

No sightings. Just a fresh coat of paint on the fire escape. Again. A Halloween Gag?

Some say a prankster in a rubber mask is having fun before the 31st. I would like to believe that.

Pranksters, though, do not draw AJAX.

For those new to these pages: the Allied Justice Agency of Xenosciences is a publicly known organization. City Hall praises them. The papers call them partners. When something from beyond the map surfaces in Old Bailiwick, AJAX is there to contain it. That much is a matter of record.

What is not a matter of record is everything that happens before the explosion. AJAX operations stay sealed until things go loud. After that, they hand out press statements, shake hands, and take the credit. Before that, nobody says a word — and by the time they do, the scene has already been scrubbed clean.

They do not chase teenagers in rubber masks. They chase specimens. Whatever they found on Night Seven, they were already there to find it.

The Silence Across the Street

This is the part that keeps me awake.

Last month, the Coastal Clarion ran eleven column inches on a pie contest at the Harbor Fair. It printed a front-page photo of a duck that wandered into City Hall. It devoted a full feature to a

dispute over parking on Canal Row.

Yet a creature of legend, a block of shrieking neighbors, and a convoy of AJAX sedans parked outside its own front door earned not a single line.

AJAX is a known agency. There is nothing unofficial about reporting their presence on Dock Street. The Clarion could print that much without controversy. It chose not to.

A newspaper that cannot see out its own window is not blind. It has been told to look away. So I ask plainly: Who called the Clarion's editor? What was he promised? And what, exactly, is in that back seat now?

What You Can Do

If you live or work near Dock Street, keep your eyes open and your mouth closed. Note license plates. Note lapel pins — a small stylized "A," easy to miss, harder to forget. Note fresh paint where there should be none. Note the time. Note whether AJAX arrives before the trouble does, or whether there is no trouble at all until they leave.

Leave what you find in the usual place, folded twice.

The Clarion has chosen silence. We do not have that luxury.

— The Cosmic Skull



MASKED RUDOS STORM JULIAN TOWER: DUTCH VEGA HAD BETTER MOVES

Two luchadores picked the wrong building, the wrong night, and almost certainly the wrong man.

OLD BAILIWICK, Md.

I am filing this tonight. By tomorrow, it may already be forgotten by everyone except the two men who limped back to their van.

Late Tuesday evening, a masked Rudos tag team forced its way into Julian Tower, the privately owned high-rise on Commerce Avenue. The building belongs to Jane Julian — Old Bailiwick's beloved internet sensation, whose every coffee, closet, and sunrise reaches more eyes than this paper ever will. The pair went straight for one man: the building superintendent, Dutch Vega.

They did not stay long.

The Timeline, As Witnesses Tell It

9:41 p.m.: A battered touring van parks in the Tower's loading zone. Someone has scraped the promoter's lettering off the side panel, leaving only pale outlines of a star and a lightning bolt.

9:44 p.m.: Two men in full máscaras walk through the service entrance. One mask is silver with black flames. The other is crimson, with gold horns stitched at the brow. The door was locked. It did not stay locked.

9:46 p.m.: The pair corners Vega in the lobby near the freight elevator. A night porter describes an Irish whip into the mailboxes, then a tag, a clean switch, and a flying plancha off the concierge desk. These men have worked tag matches before. They came prepared.

9:47 p.m.: Dutch Vega, empty-handed, ends it. What the night porter describes next is not a brawl. It is a clinic. Bare hands, fast transitions, no wasted movement. Both Rudos hit the floor before they had time to regroup. Witnesses

could not agree on the exact sequence. They agreed on the outcome.

9:48 p.m.: The pair retreats. No taunts. No posturing. They ran.

9:49 p.m.: The van leaves Commerce Avenue heading east, toward the harbor. No visible plates. One witness swears the plates had been folded up on purpose.

Eight minutes, start to finish. No demands. No theft. No explanation given. No comment offered since. Rudos Want an Audience. These Two Wanted Witnesses Gone.

Anyone who has sat ringside at the Bailiwick Armory knows how Rudos work. They cheat in plain sight. They taunt the crowd, bend the rules, and soak up the boos. A rudo without witnesses is like a magician without a stage.

Yet these two picked a quiet lobby, a single target, and the dead hours of a weeknight. They posed for no cameras. They threw no taunts.

That is not a match. That is a message. The only question is who it was meant for — and why they chose a man who answered it faster than they could deliver it.

Dutch Vega: No Comment

I reached out to Dutch Vega through the building's management office. The response was prompt, professional, and brief.

No comment.

He did not deny it. He did not embellish it. He did not offer a theory, a grievance, or a name. Dutch Vega tidied up the lobby and went back to work. That is either the posture of a man with nothing to explain, or the discipline of a man who knows better than to explain it in print.

Both possibilities interest me.

What You Can Do

If you work the Armory circuit, ask quietly who has been missing from the card this week. If you live near Commerce Avenue, note vans with scraped panels or folded plates. If you know Dutch Vega well enough to buy him a drink, try it. See what he orders. See what he says.

Write it down. Fold it twice. Leave it in the usual place.

The Rudos fled into the night. Dutch Vega swept the lobby. And somewhere across this city, someone is deciding how much of this to let reach daylight.

— The Cosmic Skull

THE HUM IN SOUTH DRONEMIRE: WITNESSES NO ONE WILL QUOTE

Reports of insect-like mutants keep coming. The city keeps hanging up.

NECTOR CITY, Tex.

The reports started in spring. They have not stopped. They are accelerating.

Out of South Dronemire's underpasses and shuttered rail yards, witnesses describe the same things: figures with too many joints, skin like a beetle's shell, eyes that catch streetlight in dozens of tiny points. And beneath all of it — the hum.

April. A winged figure at the Fenwick overpass. June. A jaw-clicking shape outside the Delmar pump station. August. A human-sized translucent husk, split down the spine, gone by morning. This month — reports arrive weekly.

The city is not following up. These witnesses are poor. Many carry chemical dependencies. That is enough for the precinct to close

the file and the papers to skip the column. Last year, a councilman spotted a "large bird" over his lake house. It ran above the fold for three days.

Same city. Same sky. Different witness

Six months. Dozens of accounts. This is not rumor anymore. It is a pattern. Someone chose to ignore it.

If you work the shelters or soup lines of South Dronemire, write down what you hear. Date, location, exact words. Fold it twice. Leave it in the usual place.

No voice is too small to be heard here.

— The Cosmic Skull

SIGNAL FIRE: U-BOAT AT DOCK 13

Last night, dock workers saw a German U-Boat surface at Dock 13. Officers in Nazi naval gray swarmed the pier.

Then AJAX arrived. Minutes later, the pier was quiet. No officers. No explanation.

That's twice now that AJAX has been first on scene. What aren't they telling us?

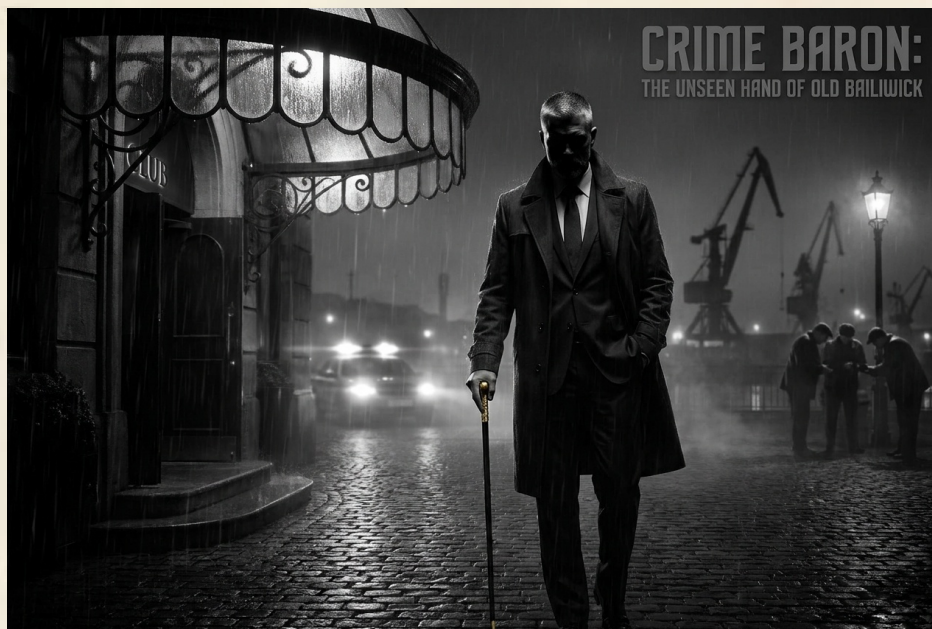
The U-Boat is still unaccounted for. Watch the water. Fold it twice.

— The Cosmic Skull



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THE CRIME BARON: OLD BAILIWICK'S WORST-KEPT SECRET

Three cities. One whispered name. The people paid to find him say he isn't there.

OLD BAILIWICK, Md.

Nobody says the name out loud. They lower their voices, glance at the door, and call him the Crime Baron.

Ask around the docks, the card rooms, or the back booths on Mercer Street, and you will hear the same picture. A tall man with a commanding presence. A neat salt-and-pepper crew cut. Hazel eyes that seem to weigh you before you speak. Suits cut by hand, never off the rack. And always a gold-trimmed antique walking stick that, the stories say, hides a blade inside.

He does not limp. He does not need the cane. That should tell you something.

How the Whispers Spread

First: Rumors of a single hand settling disputes between rival crews in Old Bailiwick. Turf wars that should have run hot simply stopped.

Next: The same hand turns up in Twi-Light Metro, N.J. Shipments move. Debts get forgiven. Nobody asks who gave the order.

Now: The trail reaches Puerta Solara, Fla. Same pattern. Same calm. Same silence. Street crime starts wars. This is something else. Someone is keeping the peace between criminals, and that takes a kingpin with deep pockets, sharp legal instincts, and friends in very high places.

Commissioner Blake Reads From the Script

Commissioner Robert Blake will not discuss the Crime Baron. Instead, he points to the Uniform Police Report. Crime is down, he

says. Organized crime is down too. Of course it is. When one man brokers every deal, there are fewer bodies in the street. Fewer arrests. Fewer reports. A quiet city is not always a clean city. Sometimes it is a city that has been managed.

The Kingpin Who Won't Play Along

Esteban Vega, the reported kingpin of Puerta Solara, has no reason to help this paper. Yet when asked, Vega said he "wouldn't be so sure" there isn't a Crime Baron crawling around Old Bailiwick.

When a crime boss in another state knows more about our streets than our own commissioner, something is very wrong.

A Rescue Offer From a Burning House

Then comes Col. Aaron Vance, CEO of Puerta Solara. In briefing after briefing, Vance has offered Old Bailiwick his "high efficiency security details."

Compare the cities. Puerta Solara posts some of the worst crime numbers on the coast. If that is the result of high efficiency, we will pass. No thank you.

Commissioner Drake seems to agree. He has resisted Vance's offer at every turn. But Drake has never said why. Maybe he sees the danger of letting an outside force onto our streets. Or maybe someone already owns that territory and does not want company.

The Threats Nobody Is Counting

While the officials trade statistics, the streets tell a different story:

The Northside Girls have pushed their colors three blocks past their old borders.

The Alley Drivers run night routes the police never seem to patrol.

The Cult of Omega keeps recruiting, keeps chanting, and keeps getting bolder.

Gangs this organized need protection. Cults this confident need money. Somebody is supplying both. And the people sworn to stop it are busy telling us crime is down.

What You Can Do

Watch for a man with a walking stick he doesn't need. Note any crew that suddenly stops fighting its rivals. Listen for the word Baron in rooms where it shouldn't be spoken.

Write it down. Fold it twice. Leave it in the usual place.

The officials say there is no Crime Baron. The streets say otherwise. We know which voice we trust.

— The Cosmic Skull



PARTING SHOT

HÄXANBURG, Va.

Häxanburg asked residents not to throw Halloween parties, but more specifically. It singles out gatherings with Tarot cards and Spirit Boards.

The city added a public service announcement with these rules:

One: Only accept candy from people you know, and even then, ring their iron bell first.

Two: Tie the red string around your wrist before you step outside.

Sources say the Mayor's office quietly called around to check whether National Guard troops and auxiliary emergency services would be available.

No city calls the Guard over a few trick-or-treaters. They call when it expects something big.

So we ask: What does Häxanburg know about this Halloween that the rest of us don't?

If you see something on the 31st, write it down. Fold it twice. Leave it in the usual place.

— The Cosmic Skull

