



**PSYCHO THRILL**

CHRISTIAN ENDRES

# The Beast Within

BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT 



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# What is PSYCHO THRILL?

PSYCHO THRILL is a series of horror novellas — from the classic ghost story to the modern psychological thriller and dark fantasy. Each of the novellas has been first published in German and has been translated into English for the first time. Among the writers are popular German authors, as well as newcomers to the scene. Each story is self-contained. PSYCHO THRILL is produced by Uwe Voehl.

# The Author

**Christian Endres** is a freelance writer living in Würzburg. He regularly writes for *Zitty Berlin*, *den Tagesspiegel*, *phantastisch!*, *deadline*, *Geek!*, *Das Science Fiction Jahr*, and many other publications. As a comic editor, he has worked on the German editions of *Spider-Man*, *Batman*, *Avengers*, *Hellboy*, and *Conan*. He has been awarded the *Deutschen Phantastik Preis* on multiple occasions.



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# **The Beast Within**

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# BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT

Digital original edition

Bastei Entertainment is an imprint of Bastei Lübbe AG

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Germany

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Cover illustration: © shutterstock/Eduardo Arranz

Cover design by Christin Wilhelm, [www.grafic4u.de](http://www.grafic4u.de)

E-book production: Urban [SatzKonzept](http://SatzKonzept), Düsseldorf

ISBN 978-3-8387-4887-0

[www.bastei-entertainment.com](http://www.bastei-entertainment.com)

# 1

The first thing I feel is the cold.

In the metal.

In the air.

In my bones.

It literally emanates from all of the steel surrounding me.

The bars.

The ceiling.

The metal base under my bare skin.

I feel wretched.

The fact that there's a certain irony about this situation eludes me at this stage.

Shivering, I join my mind as it emerges from the darkness.

Lurking at the edge of the blackness, there is just more cold.

More cold and, of course, more pain.

But that also means that I am consciously aware of my body again.

Although right now, I'd prefer not to be.

I hear a whimper nearby and finally force myself to open my eyes.

Through the slightly blurred bars dancing in front of me, I see a medium-sized mutt with floppy ears, half setter, half mongrel.

Hesitantly wagging its tail, but not coming any closer.

I increase my efforts to free myself from the fetal position and the pain immediately bites again with ice-cold ruthlessness.

But it also helps me to remember.

Things have always come at such a price.

Knowledge.

Memory.

Identity.

By accepting the pain as a form of currency, I obtain a fraction of all these things.

Of my humanity.

Of my life.

The dog, for example: I clench my chattering teeth together, endure the pain, and stare at him until I can think of his name.

Marlowe. That's the dog's name.

And he is my best friend, as I can now recall again.

I want to say his name, but when I try, all that comes out is a rough croak that frightens us both to death.

No wonder the dog is backing away toward the closed door and watching me distrustfully.

It's obvious that he's torn.

That I am just as big of a dilemma for him as I am for myself.

Marlowe ...

I cling to the name and the sight of my confused four-legged friend. It helps me finally pull my mind out of the frozen blackness.

The darkness goes.

Cold and pain remain.

And the memories get stronger with each heartbeat.

More concrete.

I concentrate entirely on the question of why I'm lying naked in a steel cage in a windowless room.

Why the dog is here. Marlowe!

It takes a while, and not without the cold stinging in my limbs, but then it occurs to me.

On the worst nights of my life, Marlowe stands guard over my prison until I wake up in pain the next morning and put the puzzle back together again.



But all along, I thought that the pain, which is part of the puzzle, couldn't get any worse.

Should have really known better.

Suddenly it feels as if someone were grabbing me by the ribcage and ripping out all of my bones and guts.

I double over in the small, cold cage.

Let out an inhuman cry of pain.

Marlowe barks, frightened.

"Hey, come on, kid," Dead Crow's husky voice also resonates from somewhere.

Not that it's of any use to me now, of all times, to indulge in hallucinations of my friend and mentor.

Then it's over just as quickly as it began.

The pain is gone, as is the confusion.

Only exhaustion and coldness remain.

And knowledge.

Every haunting memory.

Every painful particular.

Every ugly detail.

My name is Jackson Ellis, this is the cellar of an apartment building in Seattle, and last night was a full moon.

Why am I sitting in this cage?

Let's put it this way:

During the full moon, I have a hairy problem.

\*

It started on my twelfth birthday.

Great party, at least for a gang of excited twelve year olds who had still never played spin the bottle and still never had a smoke. Much less known what to do with tits or pussies.

Thanks for the party, Mom.

It's just too bad that you shot yourself before I could tell you how cool it was or that I love you.