

Synopsis for: DARK ROAD HOME by Jonathan Maberry

When Mick Sweeney took a million dollar wound while liberating the death camps he thought the war was over for him. He wanted to be done with violence, with killing...with the horror.

He heads home to his rural Pennsylvania home town of Pine Deep, wanting to fade into the rustic scenery and let the ordinary work-a-day life of a farmer put him back in touch with the humanity he lost in increments, beginning with parachuting into Normandy in advance of the D-Day invasion, to the bloody battle of Bastogne, to the haunted barracks of Dachau.

Pine Deep, however, is not going to be a safe haven for Mick.

Only seconds after he steps off the bus at a deserted crossroads a madman in a crop-duster tries to kill him. An hour later he's attacked by a killer with wax-white skin, black eyes, enormous strength...and the longest, sharpest teeth Mick has ever seen. Mick manages to kill the attacker, but only after a vicious struggle that leaves him physically battered and shaken to the core of his being. The attacker had been far too strong, too impervious to pain; and there were those damn teeth.

In an isolated farmhouse deep in the vast autumn cornfields, Mick meets a band of seven farmers who have barricaded themselves in --and barricades the night out. Pretty but farm-touch Jennifer Tyler and her flint-eyed father; rough-edged Thor Guthrie; the frightened Halwyns --Hub and Grace; nervous pilot Nat Cowan; and the amiable Napa Pete --a handful of survivors of a war that has been raging for months --not overseas, but right there on American soil. A war between the farmers and the blood-thirsty creatures that come in the night.

It started as a plague, they tell Mick; with all of the animals dying, right down to the last hunting dog and farm cat. Then the people started to die. One night it was a little girl; the next a couple died; after that it was whole families. This was no plague. Each body was bled white, each had savage bite marks.

Mick doesn't want to believe this crap. It's ridiculous. He didn't survive the siege of Normandy, the Battle of the Bulge, and the whole German army to come home and find this. Mick is a practical soldier. Damaged, burned-out, cynical, but practical and there is no place in his world for vampires.

It can't be true.

Over the next few days Mick investigates this bloody mystery and one by one his doubts crumble. No matter how much he doesn't want to believe, the evidence is overwhelming. There are bodies everywhere. There are *signs* everywhere. Nat Cowan's crop-duster --nicknamed *Grave-Duster*--has been used to spread a mix of garlic and mustard powder over the graveyards in the region in hopes of stopping the undead plague. It hadn't worked --the vampires have been hiding elsewhere.

Every night the creatures attack the farm.

As one by one his friends are slaughtered, Mick's detachment is ripped away; and his locked-up heart is pried open by Jennifer Tyler, whose beauty softens him and whose unshakable will to fight back shames him. Mick is left with a choice --keep retreating from the things he doesn't want to face, or stand up and fight back.

Beneath all of the pain and scar tissue Mick Sweeney is a soldier, and when he decides to fight back he doesn't do it by half. He takes the fight to the enemy.

Mick begins experimenting on the vampires during the fight, watching what works against them and adding that to his arsenal --garlic, holy water, headshots-- and discarding those preconceived notions that belong only in books and movies -- stakes, mirrors. He arms himself with creative and vicious weapons and goes to war against the vampires, racking up a body count that begins to make them afraid of him.

Using the borrowed *Grave-Duster* to move around the region, Mick penetrates deeper into the mystery surrounding the vampires and their attack, he discovers something almost too horrible to bear. These are not just undead, not just creatures from nightmare --they are a deliberately chosen and aimed weapon. He cracks the secrets and learns that the Nazis, knowing that they are losing the war, have sought out a number of different doomsday weapons. The Nazi scientists had found vampires hiding among the Gypsies in the death camps, and had made unholy bargains with them. By the closing days of the war special teams of SS infiltration troops had been converted into vampires and sent in secret to the United States and Great Britain with one chillingly simple mission: create other vampires, have them create even more, until a geometric increase in these undead creatures sweeps the earth, leaving nothing behind but vampires with no humans left on which to feed. A doomsday weapon of revenge. A true Final Solution.

Mick learns that the SS team leader, Grieg, has been using Pine Deep as a laboratory to study the effectiveness of the vampire spread --the Red Wave- as he calls it. Once he figures out the timetable he'll send teams of vampires all over the country and the Red Wave will wash across the world.

Grieg's study is nearly completed and Mick learns that he is planning an all out assault on the Tyler farm to wipe out the troublesome opposition. As a massive storm slams into Pine Deep, Mick flies the *Grave-Duster* back to the farm, the craft dodging lightning and buffeted by hurricane winds. He crash-lands in the field in front of the house just as hundreds of vampires swarm out of the woods and attack Jennifer and her few remaining friends.

The odds are too great, the fight hopeless.

In desperation, his weapons fired-empty and his mind reeling with the horror of knowing that he can't save Jennifer, Mick tries a desperate last trick and calling on his long-ago youth as an altar boy, he recites the Blessing Ritual used to turn water into Holy Water.

Mick blesses the storm.

The screams he hears rend the sky and instantly hundreds of vampires are writhing in terrible agony as the storm becomes a holy weapon to smash them down. They die. All of them.

Except Grieg.

Hidden from the rain in the barn, Grieg waits out the storm and as it passes he rushes out to attack Mick, knowing that if he kills the only person who knows the Nazi doomsday plan, then the Red Wave can be tried elsewhere.

Grieg is a huge, powerful Aryan pureblood with rock-hard fists and a ruthless bloodlust powered by supernatural strength. He attacks Mick with horrifying force, beating him down again and again as Mick scrambles to escape.

Mick flees back into the barn with Grieg, triumphant, striding arrogantly after him; but though Mick may lack the vampire's strength and stamina, he still has the soldier's ruthlessness, courage and inventiveness. He covers himself in garlic powder and garlic oil and then attacks Grieg.

The garlic --the only thing in every culture that is a known proof against vampires-- reduces Grieg's strength to that of an ordinary human. He is still powerful, still dreadfully formidable -but Mick Sweeney is fighting for his life, his love, and his country.

In a long and terrible battle, Mick Sweeney beats Grieg, finally smashing him down into the mud and cutting his head off with a scythe.

The Red Wave is over.

Mick stays with the Tylers as he recovers from his wounds, and spends hours on the telephone trying to get someone from the government to listen and *believe* his story. The Red Wave had not only been aimed at the USA, but at England.

Finally a pair of strangers visits the farm, takes his statement, and tells him that he is never to talk about the matter again. To anyone. Ever.

Mick wants to press them, but the G-Men are immovable. After they leave, Mick and Jennifer settle down to live their life together on the farm. The first crop they plant the following spring...is garlic.