

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

STEPHEN KING

WRITING AS RICHARD BACHMAN



THE
REGULATORS

A NOVEL

Praise for *THE REGULATORS*

"This devilishly entertaining yarn of occult mayhem married to mordant social commentary is pure King. . . . The narrative itself warps fantastically, from prose set in classic typeface to handwritten journals to drawings to typewritten playscript and so on."

—*Publisher's Weekly*

"Stephen King revives his alter ego Bachman, who 'died' in 1985, for a rip-roaringly violent thriller whose main action takes place in little more than an hour and a half. Whew!"

—*Booklist*

"The Regulators blends the occult with social commentary for a suburban tale of terror."

—*Anniston Star*

"[The Regulators is a] devilishly entertaining yarn of occult mayhem married to mordant social commentary. Call him Bachman or call him King, the bard of Bangor is going to hit the charts hard and vast with this white-knuckler knockout."

—*Publisher's Weekly* (starred review)

"The action is fierce and Bachman's imagination proves boundless."

—*Library Journal*

"The Regulators is a rip-roaring fable that exposes suburbia's id and brings all that escapism out in the open where there is no escape."

—*Time Out New York*

STEPHEN
KING

THE REGULATORS

A NOVEL

SCRIBNER

New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi

Thinking of Jim Thompson and Sam Peckinpah: legendary shadows.

EDITOR'S NOTE

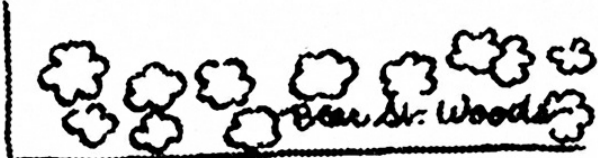
Before his death from cancer in late 1985, Richard Bachman published five novels. In 1994, while preparing to move to a new house, the author's widow found a cardboard carton filled with manuscripts in the cellar. These novels and stories were in varying degrees of completion. The least finished were longhand scribbles in the steno notebooks Bachman used for original composition. The most finished was a typescript of the novel which follows. It was in a manuscript box secured with rubber bands, as if Bachman had been on the verge of sending it to his publisher when his final remission ended.

The former Mrs. Bachman brought it to me for evaluation, and I found it at least up to the standards of his earlier work. I have made a few small changes, mostly updating certain references (substituting Ethan Hawke for Rob Lowe in the first chapter, for instance), but have otherwise left it pretty much as I found it. This work is now offered (with the approval of the author's widow) as the capstone to a peculiar but not uninteresting career.

My thanks to Claudia Eschelman (the former Claudia Bachman), Bachman scholar Douglas Winter, Elaine Koster at New American Library, and to Carolyn Stromberg, who edited the earliest Bachman novels and validated this one.

The former Mrs. Bachman says that, to the best of her knowledge, Bachman never travelled to Ohio, "although he might have flown over it once or twice." She also has no idea when this novel was written, although she suspects it must have been late at night. Richard Bachman suffered from chronic insomnia.

—Charles Verrill
New York City



Bear Street

Brad & Belinda Josephson 251

Gary & Marielle Anderson 249

Audrey Wyles & Seth Garin 247

Cammie Reed Jim & Dawn Reed 245

Kim & Susi Geller & Petri Ross 243

E-2 Stop 24 241

Poplar Street

John Marinville 250

The Carvers 248

Jim Billingsley 246

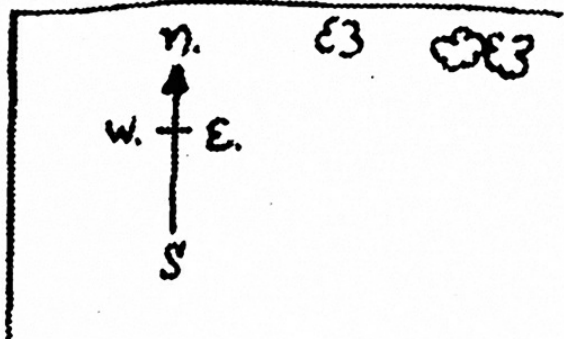
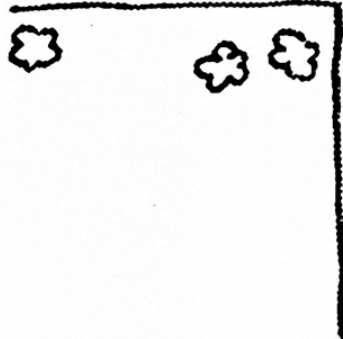
Peter & Mary Jackson 244

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Entragian 240

Green Ball

Hyacinth Street



“Mister, we deal in lead.”

—Steve McQueen
The Magnificent Seven

Postcard from William Garin to his sister, Audrey Wylor.

July 21, 1984
Dear Aunt,
Well we are in Carson
City (Nev.) tonight and about
to bid you fare tomorrow. I
know you would "be buns!"
about no driving, but it was
the right decision. WE HAVE HAD
AN AMAZING BREAKTHRU
WITH SETH! ~~more later - see~~
phone you from Las Vegas - all
I can say now is "good things
happening" - you're ready for
her. @ @ Bill

Ms. Audrey Wylor
247 Poplar Street
Wentworth, Ohio 43292

CHAPTER 1

Poplar Street/3:45 P.M./July 15, 1996

Summer's here.

Not *just* summer, either, not this year, but the apotheosis of summer, the avatar of summer, high green perfect central Ohio summer dead-smash in the middle of July, white sun glaring out of that fabled faded Levi's sky, the sound of kids hollering back and forth through the Bear Street Woods at the top of the hill, the *tink!* of Little League bats from the ballfield on the other side of the woods, the sound of power-mowers, the sound of muscle-cars out on Highway 19, the sound of Rollerblades on the cement sidewalks and smooth macadam of Poplar Street, the sound of radios—Cleveland Indians baseball (the rare day game) competing with Tina Turner belting out "Nutbush City Limits," the one that goes "Twenty-five is the speed limit, motorcycles not allowed in it"—and surrounding everything like an auditory edging of lace, the soothing, silky hiss of lawn sprinklers.

Summer in Wentworth, Ohio, oh boy, can you dig it. Summer here on Poplar Street, which runs straight through the middle of that fabled faded American dream with the smell of hotdogs in the air and a few burst paper remains of Fourth of July firecrackers still lying here and there in the gutters. It's been a hot July, a perfect good old by God blue-ribbon *jeezer* of a July, no doubt about it, but if you want to know the truth, it's also been a *dry* July, with no water but the occasional flipped spray of a hose to stir those last shreds of Chinese paper from where they lie. That may change today; there's an occasional rumble of thunder from the west, and those watching The Weather Channel (there's plenty of cable TV on Poplar Street, you bet) know that thunderstorms are expected later on. Maybe even a tornado, although that's unlikely.

Meantime, though, it's all watermelon and Kool-Aid and foul tips off the end of the bat; it's all the summer you ever wanted and more here in the center of the United States of America, life as good as you ever dreamed it could be, with Chevrolets parked in driveways and steaks in refrigerator meat-drawers waiting to be slapped on the barbecue in the backyard come evening (and will there be apple pie to follow? what do you think?). This is the land of green lawns and carefully tended flowerbeds; this is the Kingdom of Ohio where the kids wear their hats turned around backward and their strappy tank-tops hang down over their baggy shorts and their great big galooty sneakers all seem to bear the Nike swoosh.

On the block of Poplar which runs between Bear Street at the top of the hill and Hyacinth at the bottom, there are eleven houses and one store. The store, which stands on the corner of Poplar and Hyacinth, is the ever-popular, all-American convenience mart, where you can get your cigarettes, your Blatz or Rolling Rock, your penny candy (although these days most of it costs a dime), your BBQ supplies (paper plates plastic forks taco chips ice cream ketchup mustard relish), your Popsicles, and your wide variety of Snapple, made from the best stuff on earth. You can even get a copy of *Penthouse* at the E-Z Stop 24 if you want one, but you have to ask the clerk; in the Kingdom of Ohio, they mostly keep the skin magazines under the counter. And hey, that's perfectly all right. The important thing is that you should know where to get one if you need one.

The clerk today is new, less than a week on the job, and right now, at 3:45 in the afternoon, she's waiting on a little boy and girl. The girl looks to be about eleven and is already on her way to being a beauty. The boy, clearly her little brother, is maybe six and is (in the new clerk's opinion, at least) already on his way to being a first-class boogersnot.

"I want *two* candybars!" Brother Boogersnot exclaims.

"There's only money enough for one, if we each have a soda," Pretty Sis tells him with what the clerk thinks is admirable patience. If this were *her* little brother, she would be very tempted to kick his ass so high up he could get a job playing the Hunchback of Notre Dame in the school play.

"Mom gave you five bucks this morning, I saw it," the boogersnot says. "Where's the rest of it, Marrrrr-grit?"

"Don't call me that, I hate that," the girl says. She has long honey-blond hair which the clerk thinks is absolutely gorgeous. The new clerk's own hair is short and kinky, dyed orange on the right and green on the left. She has a pretty good idea she wouldn't have gotten this job without washing the dye out of it if the manager hadn't been absolutely strapped for someone to work eleven-to-seven—her good luck, his bad. He *had* extracted a promise from her that she'd wear a kerchief or a baseball cap over the dye-job, but promises were made to be broken. Now, she sees, Pretty Sister is looking at her hair with some fascination.

"Margrit-Margrit-Margrit!" the little brother crows with the cheerfully energetic viciousness which only little brothers can muster.

"My name's really Ellen," the girl says, speaking with the air of one imparting a great confidence. "Margaret's my middle name. He calls me that because he knows I hate it."

"Nice to meet you, Ellen," the clerk says, and begins toting up the girl's purchases.

"Nice to meet you, *Marrrrr-grit!*" the boogersnot brother mimics, screwing his face into an expression so strenuously awful that it is funny. His nose is wrinkled, his eyes crossed. "Nice to meet you, Margrit the Maggot!"

Ignoring him, Ellen says: "I love your hair."

"Thanks," the new clerk says, smiling. "It's not as nice as yours, but it'll do. That's a dollar forty-six."

The girl takes a little plastic change-purse from the pocket of her jeans. It's the kind you squeeze open. Inside are two crumpled dollar bills and a few pennies.

"Ask Margrit the Maggot where the other three bucks went!" the boogersnot trumpets. He's a regular little public address system. "She used it to buy a magazine with *Eeeeeethan Hawwwuoke* on the cover!"

Ellen goes on ignoring him, although her cheeks are starting to get a little red. As she hands over the two dollars she says, "I haven't seen you before, have I?"

"Probably not—I just started in here last Wednesday. They wanted somebody who'd work eleven to seven and stay over a few hours if the night guy turns up late."

"Well, it's very nice to meet you. I'm Ellie Carver. And this is my little brother, Ralph."

Ralph Carver sticks out his tongue and makes a sound like a wasp caught in a mayonnaise jar. What a polite little animal it is, the young woman with the tu-tone hair thinks.

"I'm Cynthia Smith," she says, extending her hand over the counter to the girl. "Always a Cynthia and never a Cindy. Can you remember that?"

The girl nods, smiling. "And I'm always an Ellie, never a Margaret."

"*Margrit the Maggot!*" Ralph cries in crazed six-year-old triumph. He raises his hands in the air and bumps his hips from side to side in the pure poison joy of living. "*Margrit the Maggot loves Eeeeeethan Hawwwuoke!*"

Ellen gives Cynthia a look much older than her years, an expression of world-weary resignation that says *You see what I have to put up with*. Cynthia, who had a little brother herself and knows *exactly* what pretty Ellie has to put up with, wants to crack up but manages to keep a straight face. And that's good. This girl's a prisoner of her time and her age, the same as anyone else, which means that all of this is perfectly serious to her. Ellie hands her brother a can of Pepsi. "We'll split the candybar outside," she says.

"You're gonna pull me in Buster," Ralph says as they start toward the door, walking into the brilliant oblong of sun that falls through the window like fire. "Gonna pull me in Buster *all the way back home.*"

"Like hell I am," Ellie says, but as she opens the door, Brother Boogersnot turns and gives Cynthia a smug look which says *Wait and see who wins this one. You just wait and see*. Then they go out.

Summer yes, but not *just* summer; we are talking July 15th, the very *roofree* of summer, in an Ohio town where most kids go to Vacation Bible School and participate in the Summer Reading Program at the Public Library, and where one kid has just *got* to have a little red wagon which he has named (for reasons only he will ever know) Buster. Eleven houses and one convenience store simmering in that bright bald midwestern July glare, ninety degrees in the shade, ninety-six in the sun, hot enough that the air shimmers above the pavement as if over an open incinerator.

The block runs north-south, odd-numbered houses on the Los Angeles side of the street, even-numbered ones on the New York side. At the top, on the western corner of Poplar and Bear Street, is 251 Poplar. Brad Josephson is out front, using the hose to water the flowerbeds beside the front path. He is forty-six, with gorgeous chocolate skin and a long, sloping gut. Ellie Carver thinks he looks like Bill Cosby . . . a *little* bit, anyway. Brad and Belinda Josephson are the only black people on the block, and the block is damned proud to

have them. They look just the way people in suburban Ohio like their black people to look, and it makes things just right to see them out and about. They're nice folks. Everyone likes the Josephsons.

Cary Ripton, who delivers the Wentworth *Shopper* on Monday afternoons, comes pedaling around the corner and tosses Brad a rolled-up paper. Brad catches it deftly with the hand that isn't holding the hose. Never even moves. Just up with the hand and whoomp, there it is.

"Good one, Mr. Josephson!" Cary calls, and pedals on down the hill with his canvas sack of papers bouncing on his hip. He is wearing an oversized Orlando Magic jersey with Shaq's number, 32, on it.

"Yep, I ain't lost it yet," Brad says, and tucks the nozzle of the hose under his arm so he can open the weekly handout and see what's on the front page. It'll be the same old crap, of course—yard sales and community puffery—but he wants to get a look, anyway. Just human nature, he supposes. Across the street, at 250, Johnny Marinville is sitting on his front step, playing his guitar and singing along. One of the world's dumber folk-songs, but Marinville plays well, and although no one will ever mistake him for Marvin Gaye (or Perry Como, for that matter), he can carry a tune and stay in key. Brad has always found this slightly offensive; a man who's good at one thing should be content with that and let the rest of it go, Brad feels.

Cary Ripton, fourteen, crewcut, plays backup shortstop for the Wentworth American Legion team (the Hawks, currently 14–4 with two games left to play), tosses the next *Shopper* onto the porch of 249, the Soderson place. The Josephsons are the Poplar Street Black Couple; the Sodersons, Gary and Marielle, are the Poplar Street Bohemians. On the scales of public opinion, the Sodersons pretty much balance each other. Gary is, by and large, a help-out kind of guy, and liked by his neighbors in spite of the fact that he's at least half-lit nearly all of the time. Marielle, however . . . well, as Pie Carver has been known to say, "There's a word for women like Marielle; it rhymes with the one for how you kick a football."

Cary's throw is a perfect bank shot, bouncing the *Shopper* off the Soderson front door and landing it spang on the Soderson welcome mat, but no one comes out to get it; Marielle is inside taking a shower (her second of the day; she hates it when the weather gets sticky like this), and Gary is out back, absent-mindedly fueling the backyard barbecue, eventually loading it with enough briquets to flash-fry a tune and water buffalo. He is wearing an apron with the words *YOU MAY KISS THE COOK* on the front. It's too early to start the steaks, but it's never too early to get ready. There is an umbrella-shaded picnic table in the middle of the Soderson backyard, and standing on it is Gary's portable bar: a bottle of olives, a bottle of gin, and a bottle of vermouth. The bottle of vermouth has not been opened. A double martini stands in front of it. Gary finishes overloading the barbecue, goes to the table, and swallows what's left in the glass. He is very partial to martinis, and tends to be in the bag by four o'clock or so on most days when he doesn't have to teach. Today is no exception.

"All right," Gary says, "next case." He then proceeds to make another Soderson Martini. He does this by (a) filling his martini glass to the three-quarters point with Bombay gin; (b) popping in an Amati olive; (c) tipping the rim of the glass against the unopened bottle of vermouth for good luck.

He tastes; closes his eyes; tastes again. His eyes, already quite red, open. He smiles. "Yes, ladies and gentlemen!" he tells his simmering backyard. "We have a winner!"

Faintly, over all the other sounds of summer—kids, mowers, muscle-cars, sprinklers, singing bugs in the baked grass of his backyard—Gary can hear the writer's guitar, a sweet and easy sound. He picks out the tune almost at once and dances around the circle of shade thrown by the umbrella with his glass in his hand, singing along: "*So kiss me and smile for me . . . Tell me that you'll wait for me . . . Hold me like you'll never let me go . . .*"

A good tune, one he remembers from before the Reed twins two houses down were even thought of, let alone born. For just a moment he is struck by the reality of time's passage, how stark it is, and unappealable. It passes the ear with a sound like iron. He takes another big sip of his martini and wonders what to do now that the barbecue is ready for liftoff. Along with the other sounds he can hear the shower upstairs, and he thinks of Marielle naked in there—the bitch of the western world, but she's kept her body in good shape. He thinks of her soaping her breasts, maybe caressing her nipples with the tips of her fingers in a circular motion, making them hard. Of course she's doing nothing of the damned kind, but it's the sort of image that just won't go away unless you do something to pop it. He decides to be a twentieth-century version of St. George; he will fuck the dragon instead of slaying it. He puts his martini glass down on the picnic table and starts for the house.

Oh gosh, it's summertime, summertime, sum-sum-summertime, and on Poplar Street the living is easy.

Cary Ripton checks his rearview mirror for traffic, sees none, and swerves easterly across the street to the Carver house. He hasn't bothered with Mr. Marinville because, at the start of the summer, Mr. Marinville gave him five dollars not to deliver the *Shopper*. "Please, Cary," he said, his eyes solemn and earnest. "I can't read about another supermarket opening or drugstore jamboree. It'll kill me if I do." Cary doesn't understand Mr. Marinville in the slightest, but he is a nice enough man, and five bucks is five bucks.

Mrs. Carver opens the front door of 248 Poplar and waves as Cary easy-tosses her the *Shopper*. She grabs for it, misses completely, and laughs. Cary laughs with her. She doesn't have Brad Josephson's hands, or reflexes, but she's pretty and a hell of a good sport. Her husband is beside the house, wearing his bathing suit and flipflops, washing the car. He catches a glimpse of Cary out of the corner of his eye, turns, points a finger. Cary points one right back, and they pretend to shoot each other. This is Mr. Carver's crippled but game effort to be cool, and Cary respects that. David Carver works for the post office, and Cary figures he must be on vacation this week. The boy makes a vow to himself: if he has to settle for a regular nine-to-five job when he grows up (he knows that, like diabetes and kidney failure, this does happen to some people), he will *never* spend his vacation at home, washing his car in the driveway.

I'm not going to have a car, anyway, he thinks. Going to have a motorcycle. No Japanese bike, either. Big damn old Harley-Davidson like the one Mr. Marinville keeps in his garage. American steel.

He checks the rearview again and catches sight of something bright red up on Bear Street beyond the Josephson place—a van, it looks like, parked just beyond the southwestern corner of the intersection—and then swoops his Schwinn back across the street again, this time to 247, the Wyler place.

Of the occupied houses on the street (242, the old Hobart place, is vacant), the Wyler place is the only one which even approaches seedy—it's a small ranch-style home that could use a fresh coat of paint, and a fresh coat of seal on the driveway. There's a sprinkler twirling on the lawn, but the grass is still showing the effects of the hot, dry weather in a way the other lawns on the street (including the lawn of the vacant Hobart house, actually) are not. There are yellow patches, small right now but spreading.

She doesn't know that water isn't enough, Cary thinks, reaching into his canvas bag for another rolled-up *Shopper*. Her husband might've, but—

He suddenly realizes that Mrs. Wyler (he guesses that widows are still called Mrs.) is standing inside the screen door, and something about seeing her there, hardly more than a silhouette, startles him badly. He wobbles on his bike for a moment, and when he throws the rolled-up paper his usually accurate aim is way off. The *Shopper* lands atop one of the shrubs flanking the front steps. He hates doing that, *hates* it, it's like some stupid comedy show where the paperboy is always throwing the *Daily Bugle* onto the roof or into the rosebushes—har-har, paperboys with bad aim, wotta scream—and on a different day (or at a different house) he might have gone back to rectify the error . . . maybe even put the paper in the lady's hand himself with a smile and a nod and a have a nice day. Not today, though. There's something here he doesn't like. Something about the way she's standing inside the screen door, shoulders slumped and hands dangling, like a kid's toy with the batteries pulled. And that's maybe not all that's out of kilter, either. He can't see her well enough to be sure, but he thinks maybe Mrs. Wyler is naked from the waist up, that she's standing there in her front hall wearing nothing but a pair of shorts. Standing there and staring at him.

If so, it's not sexy. It's creepy.

The kid that stays with her, her nephew, *that* little weasel's creepy, too. Seth Garland or Garin or something like that. He never talks, not even if you talk to him—hey, how you doin', you like it around here, you think the Indians'll make it to the Series again—just looks at you with his mud-colored eyes. Looks at you the way Cary feels Mrs. Wyler, who is usually nice, is looking at him now. Like step into my parlor said the spider to the fly, like that. Her husband died last year (right around the time the Hobarts had that trouble and moved away, now that he thinks of it), and people say it wasn't an accident. People say that Herb Wyler, who collected stamps and had once given Cary an old air rifle, committed suicide.

Gooseflesh—somehow twice as scary on a day as hot as this one—ripples up his back and he banks back across the street after another cursory look into the rearview mirror. The red van is still up there near the corner of Bear and Poplar (some spiffy rig, the boy thinks), and this time there is a vehicle coming down the street, as well, a blue Acura Cary recognizes at once. It's Mr. Jackson, the block's other teacher. Not high school in his case, however; Mr. Jackson is actually *Professor* Jackson, or maybe it's just Assistant Professor Jackson. He teaches at Ohio State, go you Buckeyes. The Jacksons live at 244, one up from the old Hobart place. It's the nicest house on the block, a roomy Cape Cod with a high hedge on the downhill side and a high cedar stake fence on the uphill side, between them and the old veterinarian's place.

"Yo, Cary!" Peter Jackson says, pulling up beside him. He's wearing faded jeans and a tee-shirt with a big yellow smile-face on it. *HAVE A NICE DAY!* Mr. Smiley-Smile is saying. "How's it going, bad boy?"

"Great, Mr. Jackson," Cary says, smiling. He thinks of adding *Except that I think Mrs. Wyler's standing in her door back there with her shirt off* and then doesn't. "Everything's super-cool."

"Are you starting any games yet?"