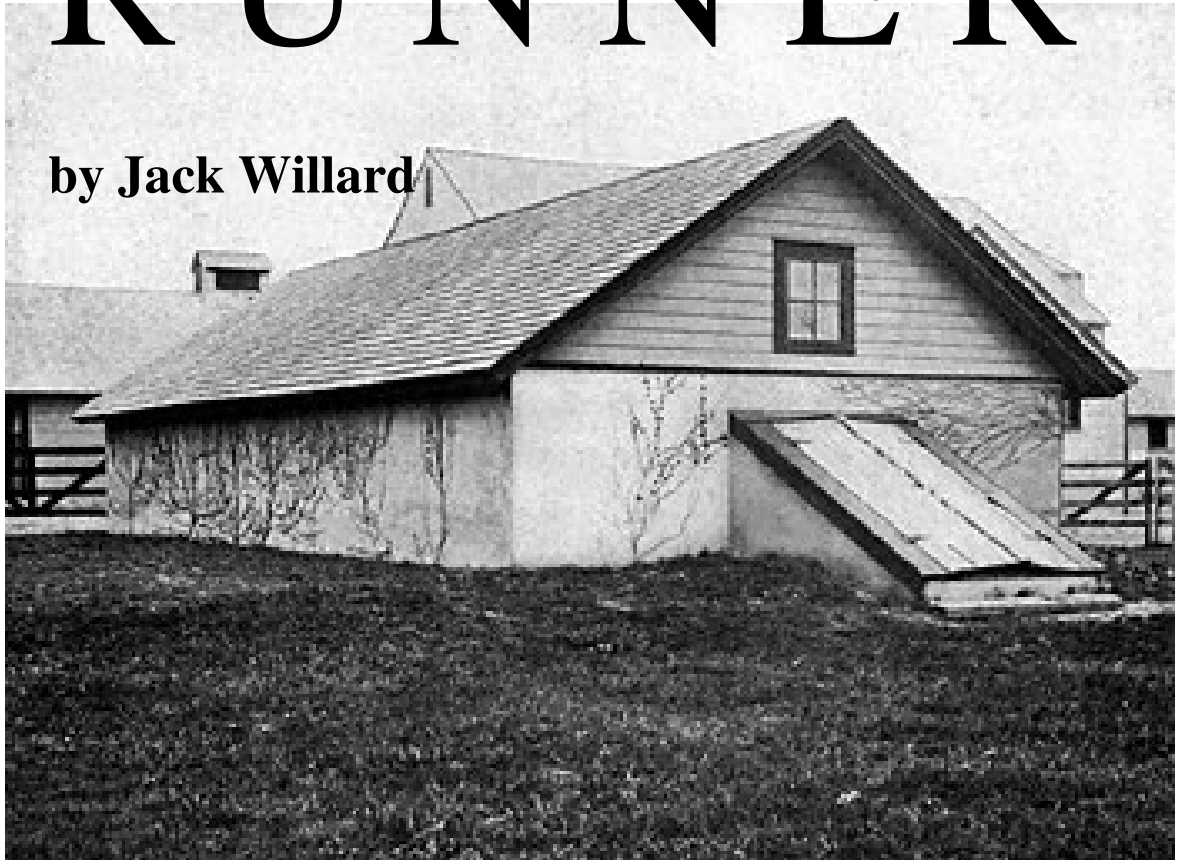


RUNNER

by Jack Willard



Phe @nuconnec.net sang the glory of the hunt to his member-only, pay-for-access e-group long before Mr. P claimed his first kill. The boy in the Glades didn't count. Mr. P was not a hunter then, nor does Mr. P recall beyond the stunned razor-thin wire of fear what actually happened. Likewise the boy he offed in Atlanta, the street kid with the nose ring and bitten nails and dull red lightning bolt tattoo on his biceps. A gum-chewing con, that one, his dirty blond hair gelled into short, hard little spikes. His sharp eyes had snaked up and down Mr. P with prurient disdain.

In the vault of Mr. P's soul, he knows he was born sometime later in the suburbs of Camden on a coarsely hot afternoon in early August when a boy of eighteen sauntered down a grassy lane under the severe distraction of summer heat, an MP3 player, and a hand-held video game, and met Mr. P's gaze through the spotless glass of Mr. P's Chevy Econoline Van.