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Jack O’Connell, The Myth of Quinsigamond

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THE MYTH OF QUINSIGAMOND

By Michael Joseph Bennett

The two women on the hot dog grills take a quick breath and share a quiet joke as the six o'clock dinner crowd thins for a moment in Worcester's Coney Island Lunch. From somewhere an old switch is thrown and above the street neon glows mustard-yellow, drip by drip against the twilight sky. Soon the city's own, Jack O'Connell, arrives and takes a booth, eating himself in like a name etched into the rough dark wood.

From the time he was eight he would know his calling. It is a passion that to this day has never left the 39-year-old writer and is clearly evident during a conversation on his career and books in general.

In 1986, O'Connell's first published story, "Nevada", appeared in the esteemed journal, New England Review. An accomplished contemporary narrative, the piece would be an early sign of future success. Looking back, however, O'Connell dismisses the effort critically and sees it as simply a young writer's knock off on what was in the air at the time.

"Sort of like a cover band doing an old Stones' tune," O'Connell laughs in hindsight.

Bigger things, however, were yet to come.

In 1992 O'Connell published his first novel, the eerie, noir-tinged Box Nine. The book would be a watershed event not only stylistically — with its stunning introduction of the post-apocalyptic world of Quinsigamond — but also in terms of critical success. Box Nine would go on to win the Mysterious Press Discovery Award that year, ensuring the author's experience.

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