

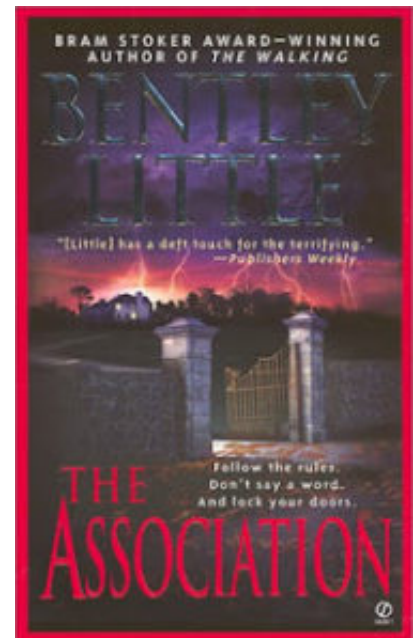
The Association by Bentley Little

This article on **The Association** by Bentley Little is part of the quest to read or re-read the 100 scariest horror novels of all time. **Stop reading now if you want to avoid spoilers.**



True to its title, the villain in *The Association* is the Bonita Vista HOA, a sinister organization that functions more like a totalitarian government and possesses supernatural powers.

Barry and Maureen, the protagonist and POV characters, first encounter the HOA



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while holding a yard sale to get rid of furniture the previous owner abandoned. They learn that yard sales are *strictly forbidden*. Soon afterwards, Barry and Maureen learn that many other things are against the rules; working at home, owning pets, having guests from outside the Bonita Vista community, playing music, etc.

The HOA also exerts controls over the homeowners' lives in petty way such as deciding what pictures may be placed on what walls. The rules are enforced by inspection and the punishments are horrible, i.e. dismemberment. The POV characters are immediately in grisly danger.

The Association, with its clever premise, had the ingredients of a legendary horror book. Unfortunately, it is not

The death-stakes brewed for too many pages as if the HOA had only recently become evil and was still learning how to flex its dark powers. When finally revealed, the monster lacked the hair raising vibe of Little's other foes. Of course, by this point I'd lost so much concern for Barry and Maureen that I really didn't care whether they lived or die.

Bentley Little might have suspected that the book was coming up short and succumbed to the temptation to explain in a last ditch effort to bring the story together:

Frank met his eyes, and Barry understood. It wasn't over. The association was not simply a group of people, it could not be eliminated by killing its members. It was a system, a series of rules and regulations that existed apart from and above the individuals who made up its membership. It could only be stopped if those rules were rejected, if people refused to join or participate. He looked down at Ralph and the volunteers. Even *they were not victims...*

Obviously, Little's ambition was to explore the dangers of ideologies and the human motivations that perpetuate them. That's an admirable goal for any writer, one that a compelling story and a writer as talented as Little *should have* pulled off. The book would've been stronger had the set-up demonstrated the fervent belief in the HOA and how blind loyalty manipulated the characters actions.

A novelists' primary job is to entertain. This paperback simply didn't. For that reason, I'm removing it from the list of scariest horror novels of all time, freeing up a space for one that does. For a far better Bentley Little book, check out [The Store](#) or [The Haunted](#). Both horror novels and worthy of your reading time.