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FANTASY, HORROR AND SCIENCE FICTION



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EXPLOITATION
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FEAR

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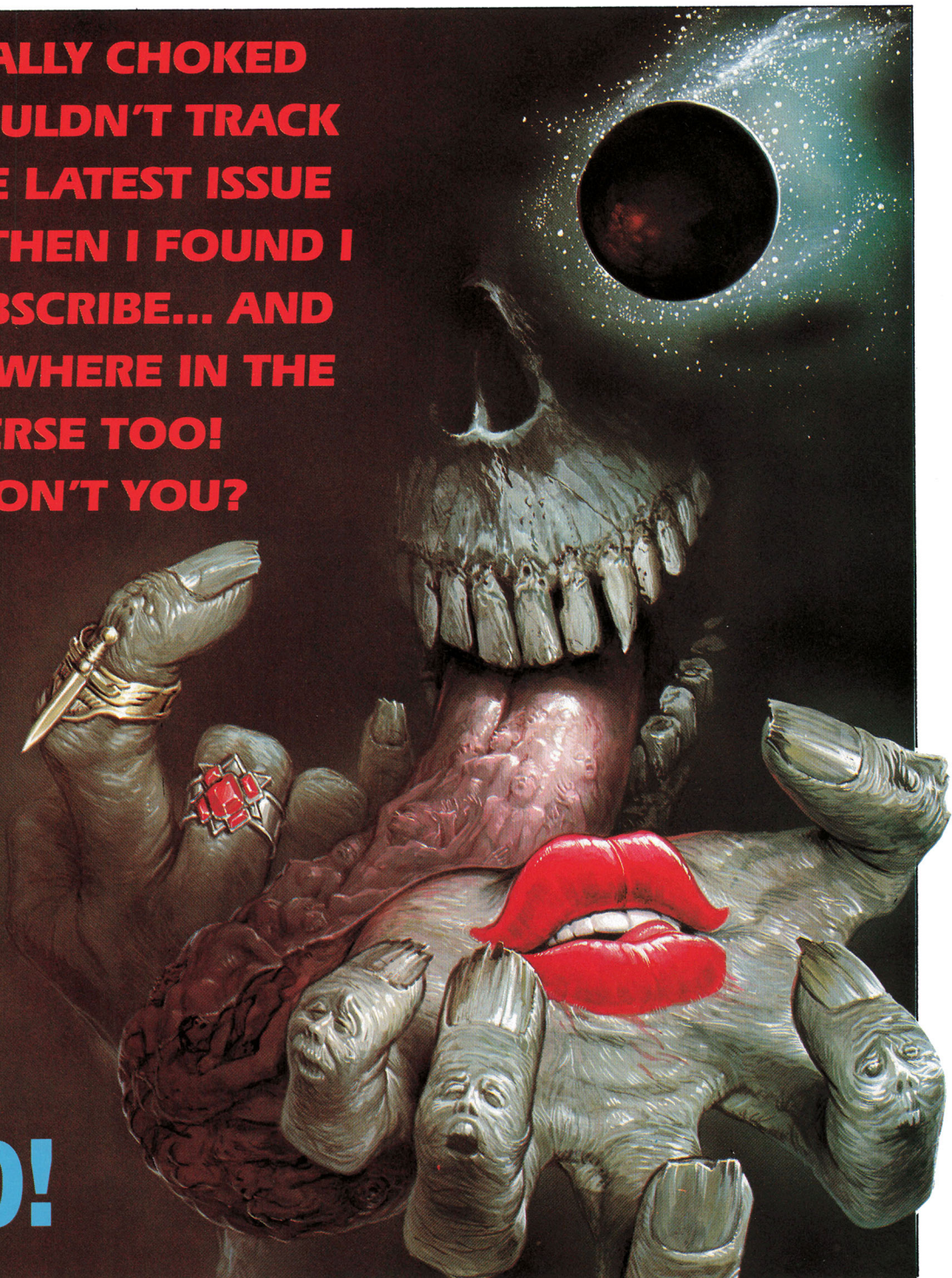
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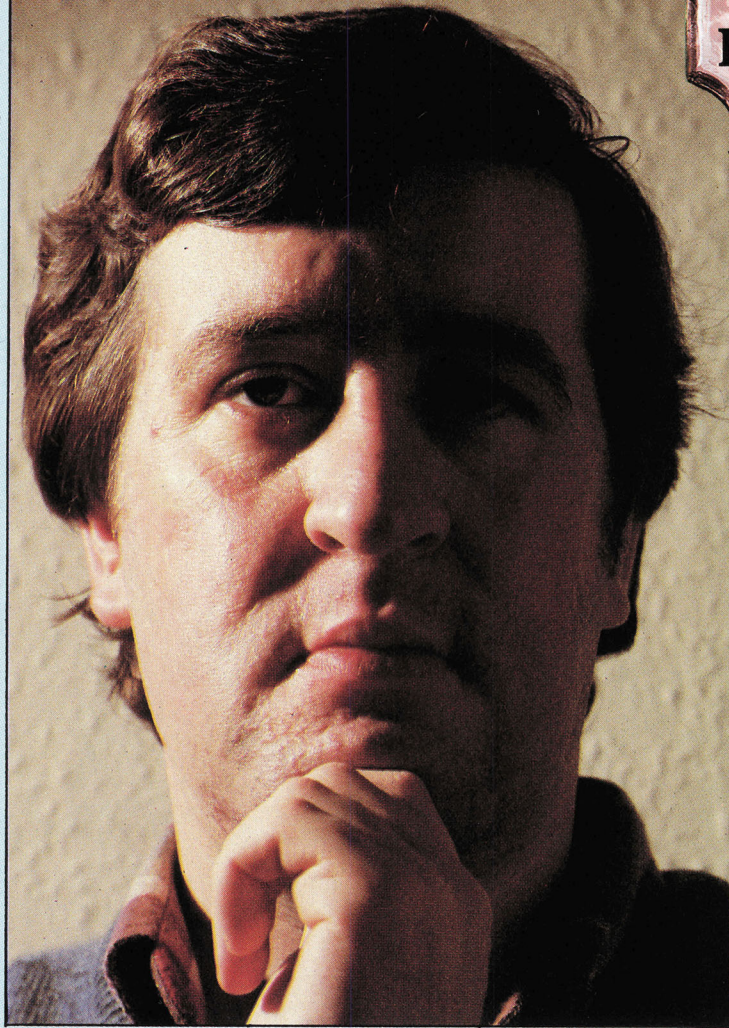
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should have stuck to my guns. A journalist, quite rightly, acts by instinct during an interview; this instinct is backed up by research and the sketching of some basic questions on paper. When I met Strieber I knew about his work, the public reaction to it, and the dubious attitude of both the establishment and the press. I did not know about his attempts to silence his critics through legal action, or his hostility towards other UFO researchers. Such hostility has been returned in ample measure by experts who have not had restraining injunctions slapped on their mouths, and I intend to give them an opportunity to air their theories within these pages.

My Strieber interview tape contains the reasons why he thinks his critics are so vociferous. He argues that the main criticism levelled against him is based on professional jealousy: he entered the arena, had the idea first, and was able to exploit it. Of course he has the right to disarm his critics in such a way. He is a cultured, intelligent — if somewhat nervous — man. If I had never met him, I would have ascribed his bullish attitude wholly to a cynical wish to capture and manipulate all the media relating to encounter phenomena, and to enforce his theories to the detriment of others.

However, having met him, I honestly believe that he is trying to protect something he thinks is special. Unfortunately, his tone has become that of a zealot fanatically dousing the fires of others who have been painstakingly researching their respective fields for years.

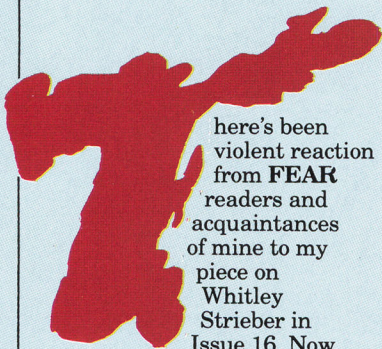
As the British government discovered with the *Spycatcher* case, trying to ban comment on a subject just brings it to the fore and makes the judicial crusaders the common enemy. I was willing to listen to Strieber's theories, to discuss them rationally and to gauge his personality, so I do not understand why he will not let others dissect his own work. Perhaps he fears that his theories may be replaced in the spotlight by others.

Whatever the reasons — and without prejudice — I suggest that his current hammerheaded approach will win him few friends amongst his peers, and will make journalists who really do care about his point of view wary of discussing it.

John Gilbert

'As the British government discovered with the *Spycatcher* case, trying to ban comment on a subject just brings it to the fore and makes the judicial crusaders the common enemy'

CRITICAL CONDITION



There's been a violent reaction from **FEAR** readers and acquaintances of mine to my piece on Whitley Strieber in Issue 16. Now,

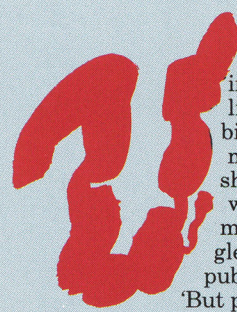
my colleagues would hardly describe me as a vicious pig-snouted journo — the kind of heartless hack who leads on their subject only to stick the knife in when they come to write up the interview. No, usually I'm a softie, willing to listen and to try and state my subject's point of view; but, on occasions, a person's self-righteous, smug or vindictive manner may demand that I show them, unmercifully, for what they really are.

However, when I come to write up the piece, I don't necessarily pour my own vitriol onto the paper — it's too undignified and messy. Instead, I tend to use the question and answer format where I present the facts and let the subject give vent to their feelings.

Readers are usually bright enough to figure out the thrust of this type of piece for themselves, and I've talked to a number of **FEAR** fans who've said, 'So and so is so full of himself,' or, 'Whatsit's slightly to the right of Hitler.'

To be fair, I use the question and answer technique only occasionally. The most recent instance was to have been in my interview with Strieber and, according to some of the letters I've received about it, maybe I

GROWING PAINS

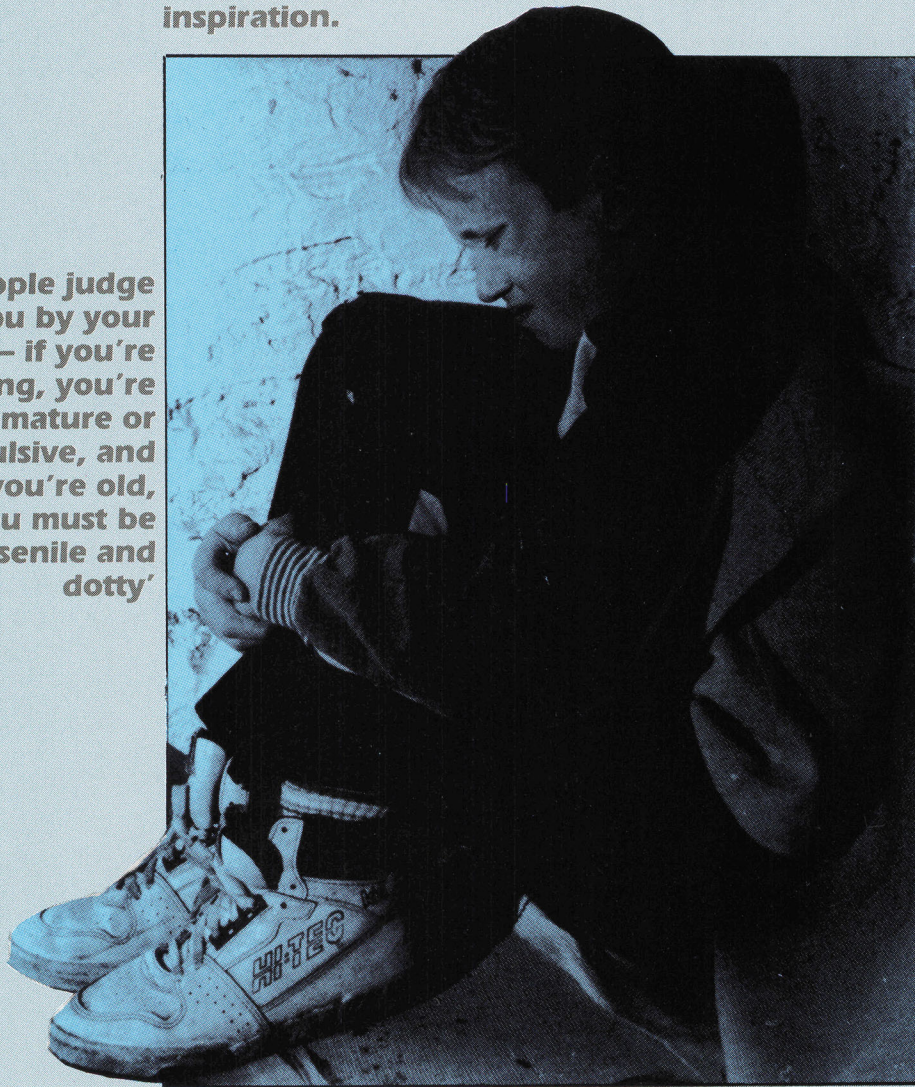


Virginia Andrews likes to call her birth date 'a big mystery,' though she knows full well that the matter can be gleaned from public records.

'But perhaps,' she laughs, 'I was never born.' The matter is not one of conceit, she explains. She loathes the notion of being judged on such simplistic facts as date of birth: 'I get older and younger as I want.'

Despite the preoccupation with childhood misery which haunts many of her novels, Virginia Andrews lived her final years in the same house as her mother. Shortly before Andrews' death, Douglas Winter paid a visit to her home near Lynnhaven Bay, Virginia to discover whence the author drew her inspiration.

'People judge you by your age — if you're young, you're immature or impulsive, and if you're old, you must be senile and dotty'

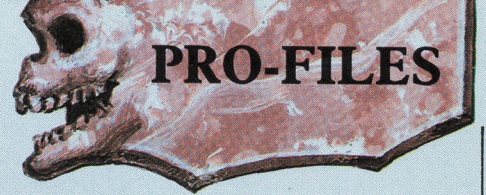


TALES FROM

John Gilbert takes a look at the works of Virginia Andrews.



Although she died in December 1986, Virginia Andrews' name lives on as one of the world's biggest selling novelists, with more than 30 million copies of her books in print. Often — and inaccurately — described as horror novels, her tales reveal the dark side of human nature, mixing Dickensian motivation with gothic melodrama to create a hybrid fiction that has kept her worldwide audience —



It bothers me that people dig so much into your life for all the wrong reasons. When I was young, and new friends asked me my age, and I said I was 19, they seemed disappointed that I wasn't 16. I decided then that I was never going to tell my age again. People judge you by your age — if you're young, you're immature or impulsive, and if you're old, you must be senile and dotty.'

Andrews particularly resists the notion of viewing her novels as autobiographical. It angers her that the predisposition of interviewers and reporters has been to take her books literally: 'They see me as an abused child who has really suffered. They feel sorry for me, terribly sorry that I have gone through this awful abuse and was then locked away. A lot of them say, 'Don't be ashamed that you are in love with your brother.' All of these kinds of things.'

Her childhood years, spent in Portsmouth, Virginia, and Rochester, New York, were, if anything, too mundane. Born in Portsmouth, she is one of three children. Her father was a career

Navy man, but he retired to a tool-and-die business after her mother demanded he settle down and support the family.

'I didn't have a terrible childhood. The most terrible things about my childhood probably were those that I created in my mind, because my childhood was so ordinary, and I wanted it to be more exciting. But it wasn't exciting. A lot of people think I was tortured, but my parents didn't do anything. They didn't beat me. They didn't whip me. They didn't lock me away. I didn't even go hungry. And I had a lot of pretty clothes.

'I don't know how I suffered, except that I wanted a life much more adventuresome, so I used to play exciting games with my friends. They told me I was the best instigator of the plots for our games.'

SOMETHING SCARY

So Andrews found much of her excitement in reading: 'I read everything. I read the Bible when I was seven. I didn't know what it was really about, but you kind of glean something from it. I think I

read every book in the school library, including adult books. I would read my father's books, I would read anybody's books. I read books that were way beyond my years and I didn't know what the words meant. And I would go ask my mother: 'What is a harlot?' And she would say: 'Look it up in the dictionary.'

'I found girls' books dull. I liked boys' books better — Alexander Dumas, adventure stories. I loved science fiction and fantasy. I lived the fairy tales. But there is an element of horror in fairy tales, so that when I would go through the woods, I was always looking for something — a witch, an ogre, something scary — and it was never there and that was a little disappointing. I didn't want a real horror, like a rapist or a murderer, but I wanted a fairy tale horror.

'I read Edgar Allan Poe and I was absolutely fascinated with him — I can't read him today, he's too dull. But at the time, I adored Poe because he gave me the chills, made me shudder. I liked

THE DARK SIDE

male and female both — on tenterhooks throughout her relatively brief career.

Flowers In The Attic, based on a true story, was her first novel and became an immediate bestseller. Published in 1979, it received tremendous acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic. It was followed by three more books about the Dollenganger family — *Petals On The Wind* (1980), *If There Be Thorns* (1981) and *Seeds Of Yesterday* — and by *Garden Of Shadows*, the prequel to *Flowers In The Attic*. All these novels explore, among other things, aspects of child abuse and incest.

The Dollengangers are a bright, happy one parent family until mother decides to move them all to her parents' home. There she locks her offspring in the attic because her father does not like children; indeed, he does not even know that she has four blond

beauties. While grandma mistreats the little darlings, their mother finds a new beau and makes plans to marry him. But the surviving children have their revenge at the wedding.

The second and third Dollenganger books document a cycle of abuse which most child psychologists would recognise as the sins of the father — or mother, in this case — being visited upon the sons.

So popular were these books that New World Pictures picked up the rights to *Flowers In The Attic* and transformed it into a 1988 film version starring Victoria Tennant. The movie bombed at the box office, probably because of its over-the-top adaptation; it was, however, one of New World's greatest successes on video.

Andrews' next series, a rags to riches multi-generation saga charting the life of Heaven Casteel and her family, began

with *Heaven* in 1985, and continued with *Dark Angel*, *Fallen Hearts* and the recently published *Gates Of Paradise*. Her final novel, *Web Of Dreams*, is published by Collins this month.

There has been some talk of another writer taking over the Andrews name, and it is rumoured that her last three novels were 'completed' by some-time horror writer Andrew Neiderman. Although such a scheme has proved successful with a new series of Alastair MacLean novels and John Gardner's revitalised James Bond, it would be a challenge indeed for another author to produce memorable characters and vivid neo-gothic settings in the Andrews vein. It is a strange fact that few of her fans realise she is dead but, fortunately, like Agatha Christie and Ian Fleming, her books are likely to fill the bookshelves for some time to come.

'I didn't have a terrible childhood. The most terrible things about my childhood probably were those that I created in my mind'

Frankenstein. My uncle bought me a first edition of *Dracula* when I was 12, and he said: 'Now this is valuable. Keep it and treasure it.' That book scared me so much I would put it in the closet and cover it up, and I would put a little piece of garlic at my windows. I even bought a crucifix to keep *Dracula* away from me.'

PARODY TO PRODIGY

Andrews began to write stories at an early age, winning a scholarship at 15 for a parody of Tennyson's *Idylls Of The King*.

'I was creative in the rough. If I didn't have anything to read, or if I wasn't able to sleep, I would make up stories. I made up stories as I walked to school and back. I was never me in these stories. I was a princess or somebody else, living out all sorts of adventures until I got to school.'

But her creative impulses were channelled into art rather than writing. 'I was a child prodigy in art. You know how, in school, you are asked to draw representations of your family and home? Well, most kids draw a house straight on, and put mommy and daddy and brother and me right in a row. Well, we had a house that had an interesting design, and I knew you couldn't see it if I did it head on, so I drew it three-quarters on and in perspective. And my people had necks and arms and waists. The teachers were stunned, because seven year olds don't know how to see perspective and how to go toward a vanishing point. They began to send me to junior college art classes when I was seven. I would sit on *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* so I could see over these huge desks. I think my nose just used to clear the desk. And I would draw with all these big kids.'

'Art was just something I did so naturally. I used to draw on all my books; I illustrated everything I read. Even when I had library books, I would deface them; I thought that readers would appreciate it. I used to colour the black and white funny papers, because I wanted them to be coloured. I even tried to colour the bedroom wallpaper because I thought it wasn't lively.

'In grade school, they gave me my own easel at the back of class, because I would finish my work so quickly and then sit there and distract the other kids. But that didn't work either, because the kids would turn around to see what I was drawing or painting. So then they sent me out of the class to help the principal. I think that he really put me on the road to writing. When we left

Rochester to move back to Virginia, he said: 'Remember you've got the talent to do anything you want to do as long as you stick to that one branch. Decide which one you want to follow and lop the other ones off.' And every time I would falter in my writing, I would think of him.'

ARTISTIC PUSH

She found, in reading and writing — and in ambitions for a stage career — ways of living other lives; but she was thrust into art as a vocation, against her wishes. 'Teachers pushed me into art. Mother enjoyed my artwork; there, she could see what I was doing. Now, when I'm typing or writing on the computer, she can't see a thing.

'Even though the paint brushes were pushed into my hand, I really wanted to be an actress. I think it's very boring being one person. And when you are an actress, like when you are a writer, you can be all the people you create. I always felt thwarted just to be Virginia Andrews. Maybe that's why I wanted to be everything. Then, when I had arthritis, I couldn't go on the stage; so I just accepted what I could do, and that was the art.'

Her dreams of the stage were dashed in her late teens, when she was injured in a fall. 'I was coming downstairs at school when my head caught on something, and I fell forward and twisted to catch the bannister. Later, the doctors found that the twist had been very violent, and that it tore the membrane on my hip and started little bone spurs.'

The bone spurs led to arthritis, which — combined with complications resulting from botched orthopaedic surgery — have forced Andrews to use a wheelchair. 'I really don't like to talk about it a lot — I get too emotional. A newspaper once said that I was 'paralysed'. It made me really angry, because I am not paralysed. They think that if you are in a wheelchair, you are paralysed, or else you would be up on your feet. And I do walk; but since they don't see me walk, they don't think I can.'

In 1972, while living in Apache Junction, Arizona, Andrews began to devote all her time to writing, completing her first novel, a science fantasy entitled *The Gods Of The Green Mountain*.

'If I turn all of my interest and concentration on one thing, I am usually successful. Problems begin only when you do a little bit of this and a little bit of that. I was a successful artist, but because I kept moving around, I would lose my clientele. Then I would start investing in the stock market, and that made me stop wanting to paint. Then I moved

again, and there weren't stock market quotations available on television, so I said: 'Now it's time to write.' I just didn't want to paint any more, and I thought I was old enough then to have something to say.

'Also, I had grown tired of reading. I had read voraciously all of my life, and I grew bored with the stories that were being published. I had finished most of the classics by the time I was 12; then I started reading modern novels. Eventually they became repetitious, and I think they are what bored me, because they were not writing what I wanted to read. I didn't think they were truthful. Families were always too perfect, and I would look around at families, and I didn't see them as that perfect. So I decided to write the kind of book no one else was writing.'

PERFECTION

It took seven years of writing — some nine novels and nearly 20 short stories — before her first sale. 'I wasn't persistent about sending my manuscripts out. If they were rejected once, I thought, 'Oh, that's a complete failure,' and I would put them away and begin a new one. Momentarily, I would think that I wasn't going to write any more, but then I would go right back to the typewriter and do it again.

'I just kept right on going. Every time I heard from an editor — and I did hear from them, not just receive form rejections — they would say: 'If you get gutsy, you'll be sold. You're not gutsy enough.' And I really didn't know what they meant, to get on the gut level, so I began to think about it. I thought: 'Well, I guess I'm writing around all of the difficult things that my mother would disapprove of.' So once I brushed her off my shoulder and got gutsy enough — I sold. I decided that I would have to be embarrassed and write these things. That's how simple it was. Now I don't feel embarrassed at all.'

Flowers In The Attic — dedicated, appropriately, to her mother — was the result: 'I like to amaze my editor and tell her that I wrote it in one night. I did. I plotted the whole thing in long-hand — it was 18 pages. And then I typed it into ninety.'

She had never written a book so quickly and, as *Flowers* rapidly climbed the bestseller lists, it became clear that her fans would not let her set down her pen again.

© 1985, 1990 by Douglas E Winter

Faces Of Fear is published in paperback by Pan Books on 13 July, price £3.99.

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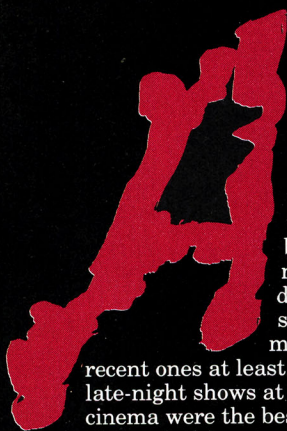
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THE EXPLOITATION GAME



s readers above a certain age will know, it was once, believe it or not, quite difficult to see horror movies, or

recent ones at least. Weekend late-night shows at the local cinema were the best bet, although this meant that many a discovery was made through a haze of tiredness, booze, noisy audiences, too many cigarettes and various other distractions. It was in such circumstances that my eyes were first opened to the delights of *Quatermass 2* and *Planet Of The Vampires*.

Occasionally a movie would make it onto general release — I still remember my first encounter with *Witchfinder General* at the Essoldo in Tunbridge Wells, where the film's relentless violence caused a member of the audience to have a fit, and tracking down *Deathline* in the unlikely Edwardian ambience of Sidmouth in Devon. If you lived in London, there were repertory cinemas like the Electric, Tolmer and, if you didn't mind the, shall we say, sleazy atmosphere, the infamous Biograph in Wilton Road, next to Victoria Station; all of these sometimes played horror movies. It was in the Electric that I first saw *Peeping Tom* and *The Todd Killings* and feasted on some mouthwatering Corman triple bills.

If seeing these kinds of movies was difficult enough, reading anything sensible about them was harder still. Then, as now, they were ignored or treated with contempt by the 'serious' critics of the daily press, and in spite of Hammer's success in the Sixties,

Do you have an optimum Gore Score? Are you a trivia hound, or a treasure hunter? How would you rate Toxic Avenger versus Nekromantik? In a market fit to bust with horror movies, Julian Petley argues that critics must start living up to their responsibilities by discerning the gems from the dross.



British horror movies were barely acknowledged as being part of the British cinema. Thus Roger Manvell's survey in 1969 of 'New Cinema In Britain' dismissed the horror cycle in a single footnote,

and for many years the National Film Archive appeared not to think *Witchfinder General* worthy of its collection. It was not until 1973 that David Pirie's *A Heritage Of Horror* was

'For many years the National Film Archive appeared not to think *Witchfinder General* worthy of its collection'

published, and for some time it was only in Pirie's reviews in *Time Out* and the British Film Institute's *Monthly Film Bulletin* that one could find anything intelligent about recent horror releases.

GATHERING DUST

With the advent of video, of course, much has changed. In spite of the ridiculous 'video nasty' furore of the early Eighties, and the consequent deprivations of the British Board Of Film Classification, it is now easier to see horror movies than ever before — even if, in some cases, heavily cut. In fact, the situation has now gone the other way and, if anything, we're facing something of a glut. As Greg Goodsell puts it in *The Deep Red Horror Handbook*: 'in the olden days of yore, if a film was to have any chance of theatrical play, it was required to be in 35mm, have a modicum of technical expertise, and some entertainment value. These days are long gone. With today's burgeoning demand for more product on video, all traditional modes of quality are out of the window. Films that have played in two states, unfinished projects by producers who came to their senses late into the game, movies that have been

gathering dust at the bottoms of closets — all out on tape! We have 35mm, 16mm, Super 8, sometimes with sound. There are direct-to-video movies, direct-to-video videos, and old classroom visual aids masquerading as snuff (*Death Faces 4*). The world at large doesn't care once you've laid out the bread and are out the door. 'Ching!' says the cash register'. Or as Michael Weldon said as far back as 1983 in the introduction to *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia*: 'movies that would have remained unreleased or unseen except by collectors are now available to a vast market of viewers in the comfort of their homes. The promotional hype that once lured or tricked a person into spending a few bucks to see a movie is now being used to convince him to spend \$60 to buy a videocassette of a film that in many cases would have put him to sleep or sent him to the exit doors in a theatre. The lack of information available about the obscure films now being watched and even purchased by bored consumers is staggering'.

Now it would clearly be churlish to complain about the sheer amount of horror movies presently available either on video or in the cinema (ie: on their way to video...). After all, the more there are around, the greater the possibility of making an interesting discovery or two. However, in such a situation what is obviously vital is reliable and informed criticism, and this is all too often lacking. Of course, there are now various magazines and books devoted to the genre, but are some of these actually part of the problem rather than part of the solution?

MOIST AND MEATY

Writing in 1974 in the excellent collection *Kings of the Bs*, Andrew Sarris noted that today there is no genre 'lowly enough to be dismissed out of hand by the critical establishment. Kung-fu, porn (soft-core and hard-core), Damon and Pythias squad-car serenades, revisionist Westerns, regressive Disneys, black-power fantasies: all have their sociological and stylistic rationales. The snobberies that afflicted supposedly serious film criticism in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s have now been superseded by an open-mindedness that errs on the side of credulity'. He went on to divide up those interested in these farther reaches of cinema into trivia hounds and treasure hunters: 'the trivia hound tends to be encyclopedic, and the treasure hunter tends to be selective. By necessity, the treasure hunter must share some of the zeal of the trivia hound, but the trivia hound need not recognise the aesthetic

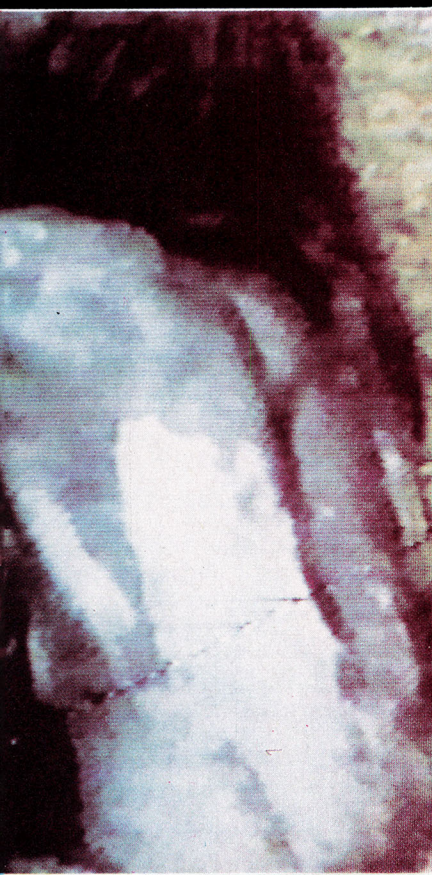
restrictions of the treasure hunter'. Now, I'll take credulity over snobbery any day, but am I alone in thinking the hounds are outnumbering the hunters these days?

The main offenders, in my opinion, are *Fangoria*, *Gorezone*, *Starburst* (with the exception of the articles written by Alan Jones) and almost anything emanating from the pen of Chas. Balun (although parts of *The Deep Red Horror Handbook*, which he edited, are excellent). *Fangoria* and *Gorezone* are good to look at, but totally obsessed by special effects, full of boring interviews (everyone knows that filmmakers are usually better at making films than talking about them), often badly written, and quite devoid of any serious critical or historical perspective. Much the same goes for *Starburst*, except that it is less effects-oriented and doesn't even look interesting! As for Balun, the following extract from his description of *Zombie Holocaust* (aka *Dr Butcher*) tells you all you need to know: 'those bedeviled chow hounds plunge their fingers into the eye sockets, rip out the orbs and chomp 'em! Here's mud in your eye, too, fella! *Dr Butcher* has no continuity, but with no-holds-barred scenes like these, it's easy to understand its place on the international gourmet de gorehound menu'. And so on, and on, and on... In fact, Balun's approach is a good example of the train-spotting mentality which I wrote about in my cannibal articles (see FEAR Issues 14 and 15), and it's significant that *The Deep Red Horror Handbook* rates movies partly according to a 'Gore Score' which 'concerns itself with *nothing* but the quantity of blood, brains, guts, slime, snot, puke or other assorted precious bodily fluids spilled, slopped or splattered during the course of the film. A simple, straightforward indication of just how moist and meaty the movie really is'. The problem with this, however, is that it puts the execrable *Toxic Avenger* in the same category as *Nekromantik*, and the dull, badly made, reprehensible *Cannibal Ferox* gets the same 'score' as the exciting, well made, reprehensible *Cannibal Holocaust*!

HIGH PROFILE, LOW CONCEPT

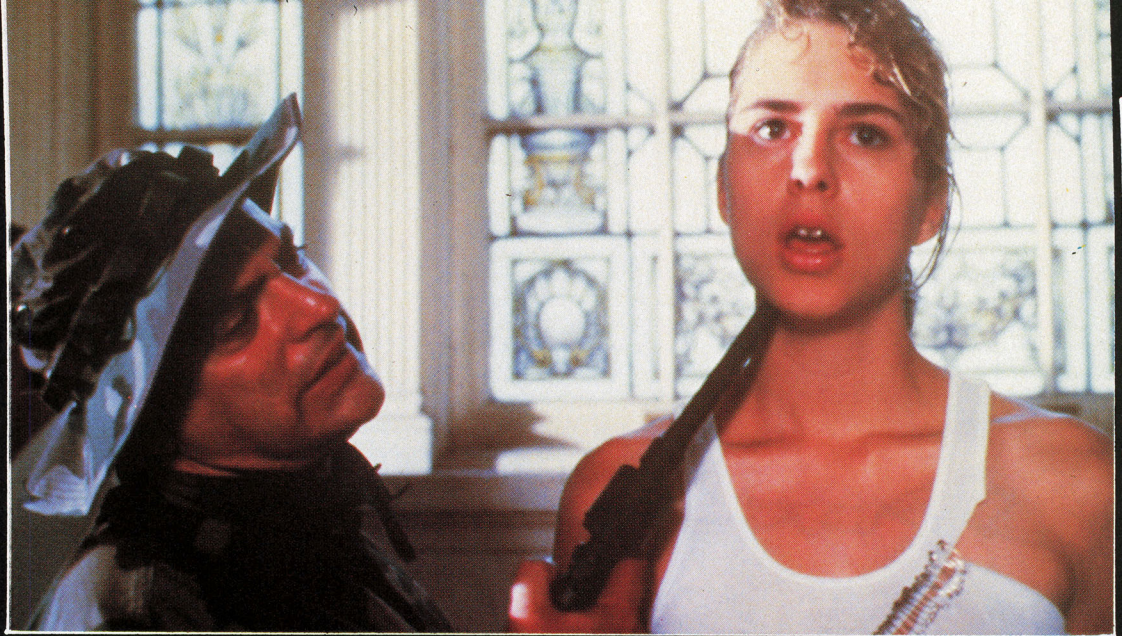
Indeed, the current hyping of Toxie's creators, Troma, illustrates all too clearly the need for some kind of informed critical perspective. For whatever the clever marketing men may say,

'I'll take credulity over snobbery any day, but am I alone in thinking the hounds are outnumbering the hunters these days?'



Meaty it may be, but is it any good? A scene from the well-made, reprehensible *Cannibal Holocaust*



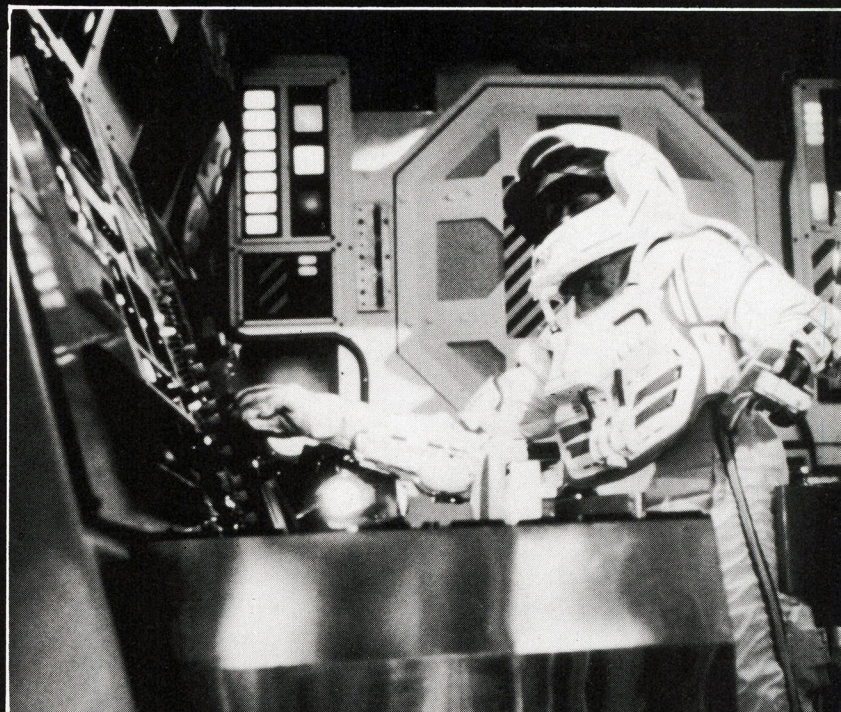


Excellent exploitation (clockwise from top): Scumbusters, Piranha Women In The Avocado Jungle Of Death, Robot Jox and Ghost Train



'The Golden Turkey syndrome tries to persuade you that some films are so bad that they're good, whilst the fact remains that some films are so bad, they're awful'

Troma are not the inheritors of the Corman tradition, neither are they in the same league as Empire. As Nigel Floyd pointed out in a critical contribution to the debate occasioned by the recent National Film Theatre Troma retrospective, these are essentially high profile, low concept movies where the marketing takes precedence over the content, and where the titles (eg: *Rabid Grannies*, *Surf Nazis Must Die*) are far more interesting than the films themselves. Furthermore, these are exploitation films in the most perjorative sense of that word, pandering to the very worst in the audience in a way that Corman or Band would simply never do. Indeed, the estimable *Shock Xpress* described *Toxic Avenger* as 'a vile, sexist, racist, bad taste, comedy splatter flick that is not funny on any level except the sadistic'. In the absence of informed debate, Troma have largely been able to get away with conferring instant



cultdom on their productions by means of aggressive hype, and claiming 'classic' status for them before they're barely a year old! In a way, they're examples of the Golden Turkey syndrome, the mentality which tries to persuade you that some films are so bad that they're good, whilst the fact remains that some films are so bad, they're awful. As the inimitable Stefan Jaworzyn says of *Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers* (another naff film hiding behind a great title): 'producing calculated 'cult' films has rarely, if ever, been successful, while it's been clearly established that the majority of badfilm is unwatchable'.

What made the films which Corman produced and directed at New World so interesting, at their best, was the way in which they played with, and even against, the conventions of the genre, and used the stability offered by generic frameworks to get away with some pretty outrageous things. As critic-

turned-director Aaron Lipstadt summed it up in the BFI dossier on Corman, what makes his films interesting is the 'contradiction between liberal rhetoric and fascist conventions, and between economic and artistic considerations; the manipulation of generic constraints; the role of women characters in the narrative; and the manipulation of stereotypes'.

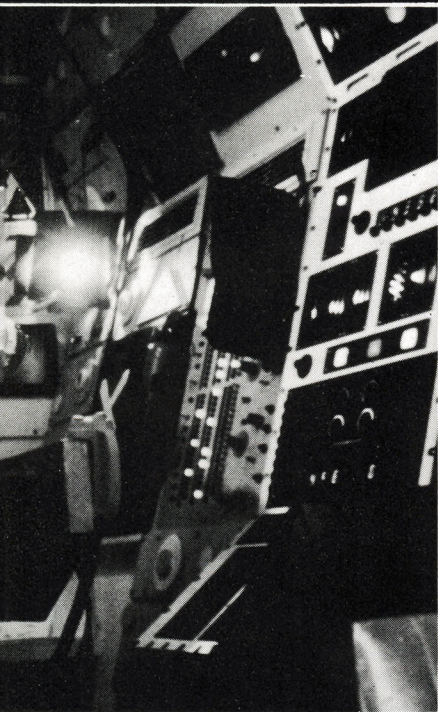
MORE ARF THAN BARF

A similar analysis could be made of Charles Band's low budget, high concept Empire films, whose creative ripping-offs of the majors' expensive successes have been likened to feature length, narrative scratch videos. These are films with a sense of style and humour, whose knowing, self-reflexive manipulation of genre conventions has earned them the accolade of 'More Arf

Than Barf'. Recent examples include the excellent *Robot Jox* which, thanks to a witty script, convincing performances and excellent special effects manages to infuse even the tired old post-nuclear-gladiatorial-combat format with new life. There's even a glasnost-inspired ending! Also very watchable is *Ghost Town*, a typical Empire generic mishmash which rings the changes on *High Plains Drifter*.

Today, no one is likely to miss out on the delights of high profile, cinema release movies such as *Society*, *Henry: Portrait Of A Serial Killer* or *Bad Taste*.

However, the vast mass of horror movies released on video remains relatively uncharted territory, except in the pages of FEAR,



Shock Xpress, and extremely promising newcomer *Eyeball* (enticingly subtitled *The European Sex And Horror Review*). It is precisely the low budget 'exploitation' (in the best sense) film that threatens to become lost from view amidst the sheer weight of numbers now jostling for (limited) critical attention. Two excellent releases from Colourbox, for example — *Scumbusters* and *Piranha Women In The Avocado Jungle Of Death* — spring to mind as movies to which far more attention should have been paid. In the way in which they introduce feminist concerns into the unlikeliest generic material, and do so with a good deal of subversive humour, they both put one in mind of Stephanie Rothman's work for Corman.

Scumbusters tells the story of four young women who decide to avenge themselves on the various men who have been unpleasant to them. Eventually their example causes numerous other



women to follow suit, and the male population is drastically reduced. Unlike in, say, *I Spit On Your Grave*, the violence inflicted on the women by men and vice-versa is handled in a deliberately elliptical, de-dramatised way, and involvement is further hampered by the risible use of a gore-gong, and a hooter honk (for scenes of sex and nudity). These too are presented in such a way as to defuse any erotic charge, as the characters actually discuss the commercial reasons for their insertion! At the start, the parodic on-screen narrator is shot by one of the girls, the first of several ludicrous self-reflexive scenes which contribute an increasingly anarchic note to the film, which comes on like a crazy, Z-grade remake of Marleen Gorris' art-house feminist classic *A Question Of Silence*.

Piranha Women, meanwhile, sees noted anthropologist Margo Hunt (Shannon Tweed) setting off into the Southern Californian jungle (!) in search of a tribe of man-eating women, thought to be led by the long-lost Dr Kurtz (Adrienne Barbeau). What

eventually develops in the course of this female *Indiana Jones* is no less than a debate between two different kinds of feminism!

What both films demonstrate very clearly is just how much it is still possible to get away with within the framework provided by rather 'disreputable' genres, and that the positive side of 'exploitation' cinema still flourishes if one knows where to look for it, a task which would be made much easier if we as critics kept our eyes open, our faculties sharp, and forgot the industry hype. It's up to us to find the interesting stuff and, when we've done so, to treat it with the respect it deserves. But if we simply go along with the Thomas of this world we only encourage the production of meretricious movies, betray our readers, and threaten the existence of future *Scumbusters* and *Piranha Women* by denying them the space they so richly deserve.

'It is precisely the low budget 'exploitation' film that threatens to become lost from view amidst the sheer weight of numbers now jostling for critical attention'



THE FEAR FACTOR

Today's science fiction may well become tomorrow's reality, but more often than not it is a part of today's inner psyche, a window on our collective consciousness. For years Larry Niven has created magic and called it technology. Few writers — the late, great Frank Herbert among them — have managed to create truly 'other' worlds, 'other' cultures that sweep the imagination before them in the way that Niven and (often) his collaborators have done. It could only be a matter of time before he came back from the Ringworlds and Motes to Earth to find anew the magic of our own cultural imaginings, first in the Dream Park and now The Barsoom Project, published last month by Pan Books. FEAR's Liz Holliday and Roger Kean dream.

Illustration by Chris Moore

Finally, men came to pick up the rifle. They handled it with infinite care, as if it were a sleeping viper or a live grenade, something that might awaken to wreak new and greater havoc. As if it was a thing of magic in a world of technology, or of technology in a world of magic."

The closing sentences of *The Barsoom Project's* first chapter evoke Arthur C Clarke's assertion that 'any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic'. Magic. Myth. In many respects the words are opposite sides of the same coin: the one a science, where the parameters are not properly understood; the other, a first step down the road toward science — a step toward understanding and the control magic. It is in the interface between utterly different societies and cultures that Larry Niven's name has come to be synonymous with the best and most interesting in mainstream science fiction — on his own (*Ringworld*) and together with co-writers like Jerry Pournelle (*The Mote In God's Eye*, *Footfall*) and Steven Barnes (*The Dream Park*, *The Barsoom Project*). Here, in this cauldron of potential misunderstanding and xenophobia, Niven has discovered strange new worlds and monsters both wondrous, terrifying and godlike. As a writer able to conceive of situations and alien beings so absolutely different from ourselves, it was natural that one day he should turn those arcane abilities on human beings — and what better way to examine the mythos of humanity than through computer-generated fantasy games. Thus was born *Dream Park*.

'The whole idea came out of an appreciation of computer gaming, the amusement park concept and fantasy role-playing,' says Niven's co-author Steven Barnes. 'We wanted to combine these things and take them to another level.'

In both novels the games master is the computer. It controls the 21st-century holographic technology in specially constructed halls and runs the complex interactive adventure game scenarios. The gamers — wealthy Dream Park junkies — are guided through the scenarios by trained actors. Although the actors know their script responses, the illusion of monsters, wild terrain and terrifying weather conditions is so convincing that even they become confused as to what is real and what isn't.

'It was just so much fun to get back into the possibilities of gaming,' Barnes continues, 'to see how much magic you could pull off, and at the same time be able to justify it to yourself... 'Could they really do this? How could they pull this one off?'

'A couple of times I've had to pull him back,' Larry Niven interjects. 'He killed a couple of actors in Dream Park One, and I had to point out, 'You've just killed a couple of actors, isn't that going to be lousy publicity?' So we reshaped the knives. We gave them technology that would give them hologram blades, and spelled it out.'

'A little continuity break is a small price to pay for avoiding bloodshed,' Barnes adds.

POLITICS AND PERSUASION

The unravelling of fantasy merged with reality has ever been central to a Niven book: in *The Mote in God's Eye* and *Footfall* it is the coming to terms with, and understanding of, an alien reality — and what is an alien reality but a human fantasy?; in *Ringworld* it is the mastery of an unimaginably huge alien artifact. In all cases the object is to solve the puzzle, and all advanced adventure role-playing games are a series of interlinked puzzles the gamers must solve. But there have to be rules for it to work. In the macrocosm of *The Barsoom Project* the rules get broken, and

INDISTINGUISHABLE

the line between fantasy and reality becomes blurred. Eviane, a player in the first Fimbulwinter game, is given a real gun. She shoots an actor — and he stays dead. Her return to Dream Park, just as delicate negotiations concerning the building of a sky hook on Mars (the eponymous Barsoom Project) are getting under way, triggers a new struggle for control of Dream Park Corporation.

It is up to Alex Griffin, the Park's security chief, to save the day. He does so by using Dream Park technology to play with Eviane's mind. 'If the control of communications technology made it easier to control people's minds — as certainly happened in World War Two — then the development of entertainment technology that is indistinguishable from reality is both a boon and a weapon,' Barnes explains. 'In *The Barsoom Project* it is being used to coordinate the single biggest industrial activity in the history of mankind. If you take a look at the dark side of what Dream Park is doing, you realise there is

an ugly potential to that same ability to spread ideas.'

NEW MYTHS

Just as 'reality' in Dream Park's gaming areas comes in layers, so too does the book itself. As Larry Niven points out: 'We tried to do three layers in Book One, and we tried to do that again in Book Two, and I guess we're going to be doing it again in Book Three. As to which story you pay most attention to, that may largely be at the option of the reader.'

Wasn't there a danger that the book had become unbalanced in favour of one of those areas?

'It may very well be that we got fascinated by the gaming level in the second book,' Barnes grins. 'It is fairly difficult when you are in the middle of it to orchestrate all three of those aspects. To a certain degree you follow what fascinates you. As time goes on we will keep striving for that balance. But *The Barsoom Project* is just getting started, we're just pulling people into it in the second book, the reality of the game and the beginning of a power struggle to control the entity that is Dream Park; that's the level of reality in the second book, and really the most important thing that is going on.'

However, Barnes is willing to admit that they became fascinated by the Fimbulwinter game scenario — probably the most striking part of *The Barsoom Project*, which is played out against the stark arctic tundra by a group of survivors from San Francisco, fleeing a world in the grip of a new ice age. As the milder equatorial climes won't take them, the only place to go is north, to Alaska, where they fall in with a group of Eskimos, or *Inuit*. 'Eskimo culture is so fascinating,' claims Barnes. 'You have the most forbidding terrain in the world, and — as we mention in the book these people have evolved a fantasy world

"The development of entertainment technology that is indistinguishable from reality is both a boon and a weapon"



BLE FROM MAGIC

peopled with wonderful beasts, and the rules of their magic are really interesting. It is very easy to get pulled into that.'

The Inuit are not one people, but many races intermingled over eons: first came the earliest land bridge immigrants from Siberia, the Athapascan Indians and their Tlingit offshoots, followed by Eskimos who crossed the Bering Strait in tiny boats, and finally the Aleuts, who were probably of Eskimo descent, but had been isolated in the Aleutian island chain. Their culture, however, seems unified, although the mythology is not well known because, unlike Mediterranean mythologies, the Inuit had no written records and, as Niven and Barnes discovered, few anthropologists have turned their attention to the subject.

'One of the most interesting things about working in that universe,' says Barnes, 'is the small amount of written material on Inuit mythology. I had to go to about 20 different separate sources and cross check them. There were a number of different books, and each of those books would talk about aspects of the Eskimo world, but when it came to discussing the Eskimo afterlife, they would discuss it by inference. I kept digging into that, and the more I went into it the more I wanted to share it with the readers. I thought, well, here is a culture, a form of magic that people haven't seen before. Here is something they haven't been exposed to before. There has been a tremendous over-exposure to the Western fairy-King Arthur-Norse matrix.'

'Everyone borrows the same legend backgrounds, except the innovators,' Niven agrees. 'And there aren't that many innovators in fantasy. It was that way with the Cargo cult magic in the first book. Nobody had used Cargo Cult magic in fiction except *National Lampoon*. They had a Cargo Cult cartoon, and I saw that and thought, 'Damn them, Niven should have been first with that!'

OLD MAGIC

If myths are a way of coming to understand the environment a people finds itself in, it follows that creating a new myth, a new fiction, must cope with the viability of its structure. No matter how fantastic his alien cultures in past novels, Niven insists on a realistic fabric. It is clear that running Dream Park is enormously expensive — indeed, at one point it is suggested that the high fees gamers pay to take part in a scenario are no match for the corporation's outgoings, the money merely helps support what is really a gigantic research project. Nevertheless, one interesting new development in *The Barsoom Project* is an indication of how Dream Park could be made economically viable.

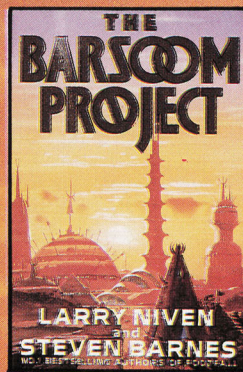
'You'd have the game, and you'd run through it and test out the effects,' Barnes explains. 'First of all, you could sell the cassette of the game as it was actually run, which is why the actors are always in character. Second, you could edit it down to a smaller game, rescript it and run professional actors through it. So, you'd have a classic revision of a classic game.'

'Thirdly, you use those games to test out interaction between those games and the effects systems. You could use them in a sort of virtual reality mode, where the home gamer could actually step into the game, having had an opportunity to take a look at virtual reality technology. I had not realised what the potential was.'

'It is probably going to be easier to create a small visual field — you know, having goggles and then projecting on the inside, and then having computer reference to the other players — than it would be to project that field out in front of you. I had never anticipated that that might end up being a much more practical way of doing it.'

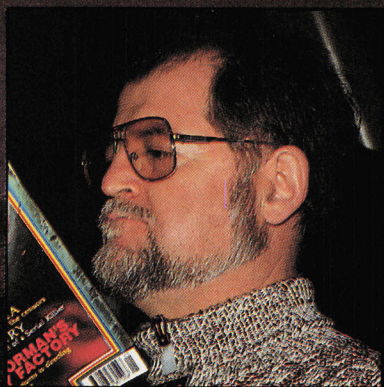
The technology is developing book by book, with the third promising some further

explanation of what is happening on Mars — a billion miles away from the Thunderbirds and trolls of Alaska's northern wastes. Why call the book *The Barsoom Project*? Mars barely comes into the story. Of course it is a fine codename for what is happening in Dream Park's background, but perhaps the self-conscious reference to Edgar Rice Burroughs's series of Carter of Mars potboilers is intended to pay homage to the writer who could be regarded as the creator of role-playing game material; in many respects, Fimbulwinter and the Barsoom of Burroughs have everything in common: gripping adventure, sudden death, constant running across inhospitable terrain, companionship in adversity and magical foes. Book Three should be fascinating: the confrontation of two fantastical images of Barsoom.



Larry Niven and Steven Barnes are currently collaborating on a cyberpunk novella which takes William Gibson's world in some very strange directions. There is also a chance that *The Barsoom Project* may make it to the big screen, and a major communications group is discussing the possibility of creating a Dream Park to outdream Disney World.

"Everyone borrows the same legend backgrounds, except the innovators, and there aren't that many innovators in fantasy."



NIVEN

AND



BARNES

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**FROM FRI 18th ALL OVER LONDON
AND ACROSS THE COUNTRY**

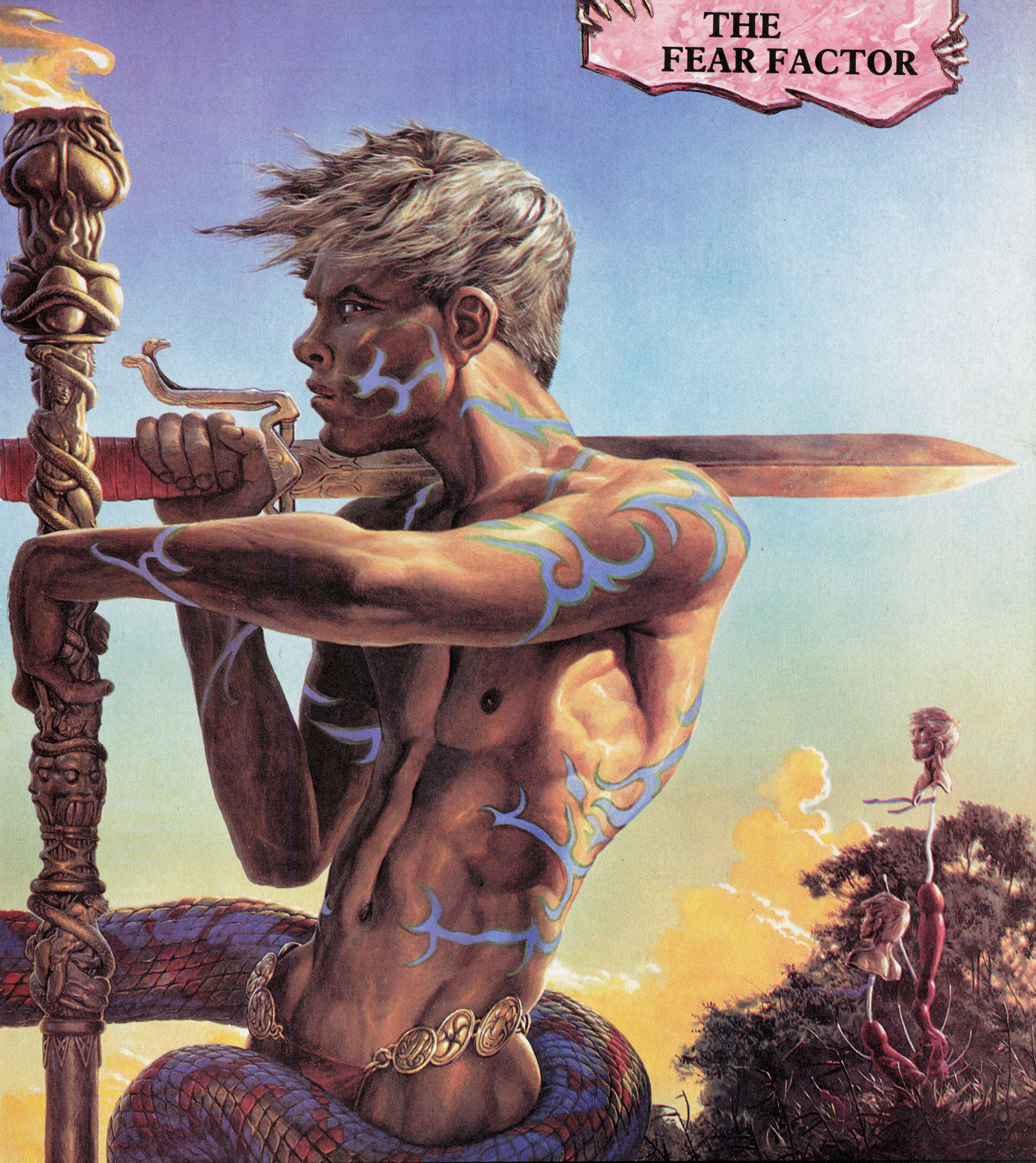
After over a hundred and eighty monthly magazine covers, fiftyfour pages of colour comic strip, thirty posters of various sizes and literally hundreds of colour and mono editorial illustrations since 1984, Oliver Frey finds himself the focus of this month's Fear Factor...

IN THE BLOOD

Fantastic Worlds:
War Paint 1, and
The Last Stand,
below



THE FEAR FACTOR



A

nd then there's all the work between 1970 and '84 — hundreds of comic strips, ad campaigns, book illustrations and covers, plus the pre-title graphics on *Superman the Movie*. One wonders where

he gets the energy from.

'It's in the blood. Ever since I first saw *The Eagle* comic back in '56 when I was eight and was hit first by *Dan Dare* and later **Frank Bellamy's** work on *Heroes the Spartan*, there was nothing else in my mind but drawing — first copying these masters, then trying to do my own thing!

With no formal art training bar a three year correspondence course in illustration, Swiss born Oliver entered



The World of Computer Games:
Examples of cover art from **CRASH**
and **ZZAPI** magazines



INTO THE FREY

Born Zurich, Switzerland 1948; London stay and education 1956-59; Italy and Switzerland, school, A-Levels, army service 1960-69; film school, London, starts illustrating 1969-70; abortive script-writing, industrial film-making and continuing illustration work (two years on *Trigan Empire*, some *Dan Dare* strip work, history books, book jackets, etc) 1971-84; magazine publishing and illustration 1984-now!



Into the Pot:
Medieval
Scottish
cannibalism
from the
*Hamlyn Book
of Horror*

the London School of Film Technique in '69, and to help pay the bills managed to convince **E.J. Bensberg**, then editor of IPC's *War Picture Library* to give him a chance at commercial comic strip drawing. 'I don't know what he saw in my first efforts, but thanks to him — and a lot of gruelling work — here I am! Sadly film-making fell by the wayside, but there's time yet.'

'Fantasy, Horror, Science Fiction, action, atmosphere — and eroticism — are my main preoccupations in art. I try and combine these elements into my commercial endeavours, despite restrictions of subject matter and target audiences.' Most of Frey's work has been aimed at youngsters, calling for sensitivity in how much to show and how far to go. 'Despite this though, I do try and make my work appeal on two levels: the obvious, and the underlying dynamics of what preoccupies me. Those who look, and are on my wavelength, will see.'

Work pressure has meant that not much 'private' painting has been achieved, something Oliver would like to change. 'I've started on a series under the working title *War Paint*, sort of inspired by **William Burroughs' Wild Boys**. I've got sketches for ten or so paintings, but god knows how long it'll take me to complete!'

'The inherent violence and overt sexuality of Burroughs' work turns me on, rather than his hallucinogenic view. But I am visualising my own sort of fantasy world which grows in quite an unplanned way, filled with the primitive vigour of self-contained heroes in touch with and part of sensuously reptilian wildlife, and ruled by the image of woman as a distant all-powerful form of idol. Weird, eh? — My biggest problem is finding suitable models to pose for reference shots! Ludlow in Shropshire is not hip in that way...'

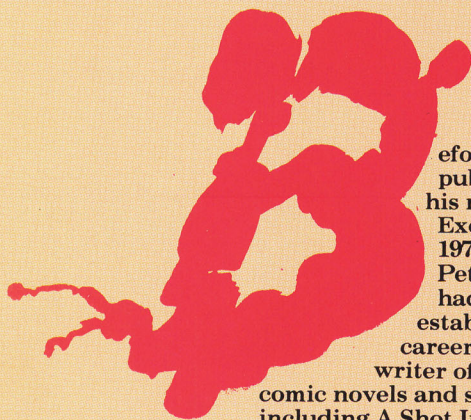
What about movies? Will we ever get to see an Oliver Frey film? 'Who knows. I'd love to, and think I have what it takes. If **Clive Barker** makes his dream of the renaissance of a British 'Hammer' film industry come true, there might even be room for me. In any case, he's shown that even with small budgets you can achieve great stuff: what it takes is vision and imagination. I think I have a lot of that, but it's the time to fit it all in. Sounds big-headed, doesn't it?'

Maybe, but there's no denying that Frey's work has enthralled thousands of magazine buyers of all ages: he should make the effort to complete his *War Paint* series, and prove he can be an artist, rather than just an illustrator.

Clint Jefferies



William Peter Blatty (left) on the set of *The Exorcist 3: Legion*

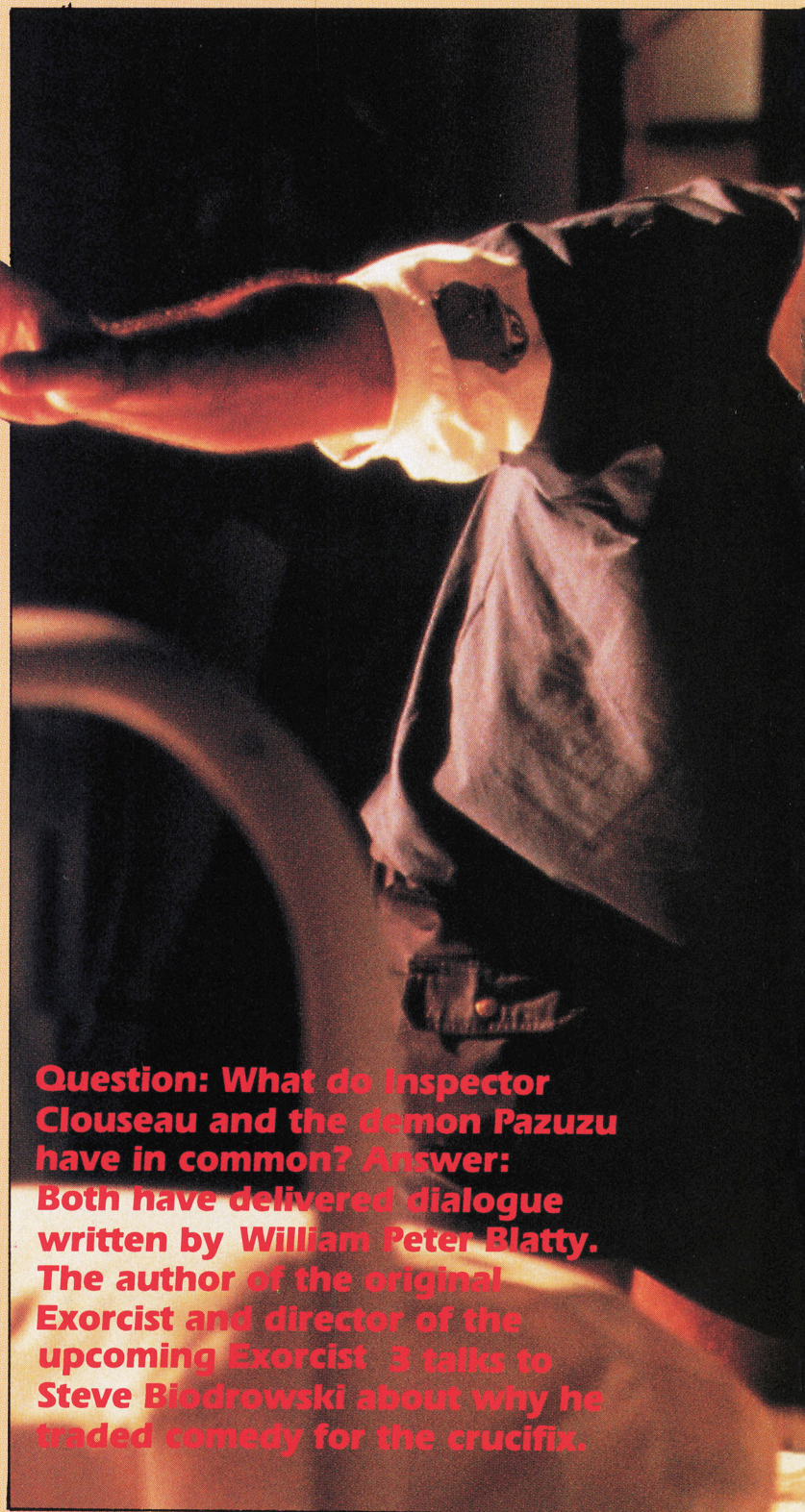


Before the publication of his novel, *The Exorcist*, in 1971, William Peter Blatty had an established career as a writer of comic novels and screenplays, including *A Shot In The Dark*, the second in Blake Edwards' *Pink Panther* series starring Peter Sellers.

The phenomenal success of *The Exorcist* changed all that. A bestseller, the novel was adapted into a controversial film in 1973, directed by William Friedkin, produced and written by Blatty. The \$10 million Warner Brothers production grossed over \$100 million at the box office, earned ten nominations from the Motion Picture Academy of America and won two Academy Awards, including Best Screenplay.

In 1977, Warner Brothers paid for the rights to proceed with a sequel without Blatty's involvement. The result was John Boorman's *The Exorcist 2: The Heretic*, which Blatty once suggested should have been titled *Son Of Exorcist* and sold as a comedy. Meanwhile, Blatty adapted his novel *The Ninth Configuration* into an unfairly neglected film, which he produced and directed in 1980. Although not a horror film, *The Ninth Configuration* wrestles with a question of faith raised by *The Exorcist*, namely: 'In a world so filled with violence and horror, how can man believe in a benevolent God?' In an entertaining and dramatic context, Blatty provides a possible answer which, however, raises another question: 'If God exists, then why does he allow such evil?' Answering this question would provide the premise of *Legion*, a screenplay which Blatty translated into a

'I don't think of *The Exorcist* as a horror tale at all. It's frightening, but quite real'



Question: What do Inspector Clouseau and the demon Pazuzu have in common? Answer: Both have delivered dialogue written by William Peter Blatty. The author of the original *Exorcist* and director of the upcoming *Exorcist 3* talks to Steve Biodrowski about why he traded comedy for the crucifix.

SELF T



Photo: Myles Aronowitz

POSSESSED



bestselling novel in 1983 when he encountered difficulties getting the project off the ground.

Now, seven years later, *Legion* (which Blatty describes as 'the true sequel to *The Exorcist*') finally makes it to the screen, under the expanded title *The Exorcist 3: Legion*. (Previous titles have included *The Exorcist 1990* and *The Exorcist: The Next Chapter*, apparently in an abandoned attempt to avoid numerical continuity with Part 2.) Written and directed by Blatty, the new film stars George C Scott, replacing the late Lee J Cobb as Lt William Kinderman, who investigates a gruesome murder case bearing an uncanny resemblance to the work of a serial murderer who died fifteen years ago. Brad Dourif portrays the dead Gemini Killer, and Jason Miller returns as Father Damien Karras, who plunged from a window at the conclusion of the first film.

Having completed principal photography last year, Blatty found time in his busy postproduction schedule to conduct this interview, just as he was starting four weeks of special effects shooting for a new exorcism scene, featuring Nicol Williamson as a priest.

SB: Before *The Exorcist*, you were more established as a comedy writer.

WPB: Totally. I love comedy. So how did you make the jump to writing about possession? I've read you were inspired by an authentic case in Washington DC.

The 1949 case. I was a graduate at Georgetown University at the time. It stuck in my mind. I thought, 'If I ever do go ahead and write, I'd like to write about this, non-fiction.' But I never wrote a word.

Instead, you went to Hollywood and wrote comedies, including several for Blake Edwards.

There came a time when comedy dried up in town, and I couldn't get work. People would say, 'Blatty — dramatic? He not only writes comedy — he writes off-the-wall comedy.' So I had nothing else to do, and I thought this could be the time to demonstrate that I can write something other than comedy. The immediate result was that my entire body of work as a comedy writer and comic novelist was obliterated, gone. I know a producer, with whom I had done a comedy or two, pitched an idea at Paramount for a comedy, and they liked it, but when he proposed my name, they said,

'Blatty — comedy?' So it's a complete circle.

I must say I enjoyed writing comedy infinitely more. When you write a funny line, there's an instant gratification, an immediate reward: you know it's funny.

HALF MILLION DOLLAR LUNCH

The Exorcist was released back in 1973. This isn't your first attempt at a sequel.

In the early 1980s, Billy Friedkin and I were going to do it together. In fact, we had the famous half million dollar lunch. That's a droll story. At long last I came up with an idea that I thought was credible and worthy of the original. Billy loved it. We went into partnership with Jerry Weintraub. Literally everyone wanted it. All the studios who had bid were going to give us — back then it was \$15 million to go away and make the movie.

Nobody knew what the story was. Warner Brothers offered the best deal of all, but they said: 'Boys, can't we have lunch in New York, and at the lunch tell us anything you want about the picture?'

Anything: one line, ten lines. And if it sounds right, you have the deal — it's official. And if we don't like it — for some impossible reason — we'll give you \$500,000 for coming to lunch.

Everything was fine. I flew into New York for lunch, and I presented Billy with a synopsis of exactly what the three of us had agreed upon. The night before, Billy told me he didn't want to do this story. He came up with a dozen reasons for not doing it. That really aborted it. We went to lunch and got our half million dollars, but eventually we all gave it back.

What happened at the lunch?

I said, 'Billy, I'm not saying a word. We don't agree on anything. You tell them.' Billy began by talking about opening in a field where mutilated cattle are discovered. I shot him such a look — what did that have to do with anything? — but I looked around the faces at the table, and they were eating it up. Sometime later in the day, I just blew the whistle. I told Warner Brothers, 'We don't agree on anything.' I don't know how they would have voted, up or down; they seemed pretty set on up.

We tried again. We had it set up with Weintraub a couple years ago with Billy to direct. I went through the same thing all over again. Billy came to my house, read the script, and said, 'It's terrific — it goes like a bat out of hell.' So we make a deal with Weintraub, and then Billy says, 'I can't shoot this!' That's just Billy — and he's probably somewhere now, saying, 'That's just Blatty.'

What made you want to do a sequel to *The Exorcist*?

Why do I want to do any film? I didn't want to do it at the time Warner Brothers asked me if I would write a sequel, because I didn't have an idea. When I finally got an idea, naturally I was quite eager to put it on film. When Warner first asked for a sequel is when we got *The Exorcist 2*.

An amazing film.

It is amazing to see a film so bad from a director whose other work shows talent.

That's right. I saw it with a paying audience in Washington DC, where I was living at the time. I must say, I was the first to giggle, breaking the respectful silence, and that broke the dam for everyone in the audience. We roared from that point on — you'd think we were watching *The Producers*.

EVIL PERSONIFIED

To me, *Legion* seems an attempt to expand on the Good versus Evil theme of *The Exorcist*.

It is, actually. *The Exorcist* and *Legion* — I'm speaking of the novels — slap them back to back, they make one story. They're one book. In *The Exorcist*, questions were raised regarding God's providence and goodness and the problem of Evil in the world.

There weren't a lot of answers, you'll notice. We certainly came to believe in the power of evil, if not Evil personified. In *Legion*, the novel, there is a presentation of a possible solution to the problem of evil with which I can certainly find — if you grant my premises — no fault. It preserves the goodness of God, while not denying evil or trying to eliminate it by simply referring to it as an 'absence of perfection.' None of that is translated to the screen, because the theory is a bit complex.

That struck me about the novel — that it presented these philosophical ideas through Kinderman's interior monologues, which seemed difficult to transfer to the screen.

They are. I have not even attempted to translate them. Kinderman remains a character obsessed by the problem of evil. He finds no solution to it. What I did — the film is a pure entertainment — was pose his problem as basically one of 'Is there a spiritual world? Is there an afterlife? Is it possible we live forever?' That he comes to believe by the time the film is over. Beyond that I couldn't take it. **The thematic material had to be simplified for the film.** Because it is a thriller. I had higher aspirations for the original film. Footage was shot which

'Billy began by talking about opening in a field where mutilated cattle are discovered. I shot him such a look — what did that have to do with anything?'



Jason Miller, Blatty and Ellen Burstyn between takes on the set of *The Exorcist*, the 1973 original scripted by Blatty and directed by William Friedkin

preserved the moral core of the novel and which I thought should have remained even for commercial purposes — because you were given a reason why you had been asked to sit through the muck and the obscenity and the shock. That allowed an audience — this is my opinion — to enjoy the film and not hate themselves for liking it.

The point was, if there is a Satan and he works in the world, his object principally is to make us despair by coming to despise our own humanity and thinking of ourselves as so bestial and repellent that, if there were a God, he couldn't love us. That was the moral centre. That's why the possession of Regan MacNeil took place, being a struggle for the soul of Damien Karras, not the body of the little girl.

Then why was the footage cut?

Billy is ruthlessly honest about his own work. The reason he gave me, long after the success of the film, when perhaps a lesser mortal would never have confessed, was that when he looked at the first cut, he didn't think he had a hit, so he got nervous and arbitrarily sliced it down from two hours and twenty minutes to two hours, thinking no audience is able to bear any film for more than two hours. The result is, at least to me, some glaring construction flaws.

FIREWORKS

When this deal finally came together, did you go back to your original script, or did you re-adapt your novel back into a screenplay?

I went to the novel. I've had many versions, even one where the hero was not Lt Kinderman — there was possession, but it had nothing to do with the characters in *The Exorcist*. **With the title expanded by Morgan Creek Productions to include *The Exorcist 3*, do you think audiences might be expecting a re-run of the original film?**

That they will not get. But they

will get a link, a very strong one, to the first film — and some fireworks.

Fireworks?

Not literally. There will be an exorcism, but it's not what we're building to throughout the body of the film. It's not the full third act, but it is part of the resolution.

Why did you wait until postproduction to film this scene?

Quite frankly, at the time we were shooting [principal photography], I hadn't dreamed up the scene yet or the effects. So I said, 'Until I think of the right thing, it's not in the picture.' I'm trying for effects we've never seen before, not the usual. We're spending a lot of money. A lot. Over \$4 million. We're going to repeat nothing that was in *The Exorcist*. The scene will be infinitely shorter; it will be compacted into a very brief period of time so the effects will come at you like dum-dum bullets. One of them is quite wild, I must say. They're all different, but one I find personally terrifying.

THE COBRA PASSED

Who is providing the special effects?

Everybody: ILM, Dream Quest. There's so many, nobody could get them ready in time. There's one story I must tell you. There is one shot during the exorcism sequence in which the room is filled with a low sea of flame and teaming with cobras, all around the exorcist. Last Wednesday morning, our effects coordinator received a call from the owner and handler of a cobra named 'Joe', who said, 'Look, I'm sorry about this. The money is good, and it's a swell opportunity in every other way, but my wife and I talked this through, looking at all sides of it, and we both felt we really don't want Joe to be in an Exorcist film.'

The cobra passed! [laughing] What must be the reputation of the film? I guess people are afraid

that their cobra would get jinxed. Many people to this day have never seen the original and won't go to see it. I don't know why. Maybe because it dealt with a child.

How did George C Scott get cast as Kinderman?

He's the best man for the part. I think many people will be surprised. They're going to see a different aspect of George Scott — extremely vulnerable. It's quite a spirited performance. I expect he'll be nominated — this time I hope he accepts if he wins.

There is a mistaken impression that your Lt Kinderman character is based on the Columbo television series starring Peter Falk. Did that cause you to alter the character at all, to avoid the comparison?

The novel [*The Exorcist*] predated *Columbo*. It was close, but what people forget is that after I had submitted my manuscript to the publisher, another six to eight months went by, not to mention all the time I slaved over the manuscript a year before that. I feel quite strongly that *Columbo* ripped off Kinderman. There's very little doubt in my mind. I asked Peter Falk: he said, 'No, it had been planned before your book came out.' But my manuscript was circulated all over town, all the agencies and production companies and studios, and somebody said — and I know who that somebody is — 'Wouldn't this be interesting for our detective?' I must say it does tick me a little. I had planned my own little TV series for Lt Kinderman — not any more.

I've downplayed that aspect of his character — the constant forgetfulness — in the script. I

'Based on my own experiments, if these are the dead, they don't know any more now than when they were alive'





Photo: Myles Aronowitz

saw a *Columbo* episode — I could go on and on about this — in which they did the ‘autograph this for my daughter’ bit — straight out of *The Exorcist*. But God bless Peter Falk — it wasn’t his fault.

SPIRITS ON TAPE

One of the more intriguing supernatural elements in *Legion* is the recording of disembodied voices, presumably spirits, on tape. [The process involves leaving a tape machine recording at full volume while asking questions in a quiet room, then playing the tape back and listening for responses.]

There are several books on the subject. There were two by scientists; the one by Konstantin Raudieva [*Breakthrough*] got me going. At the risk of sounding like a wacko, I’ll tell you now that it is an absolutely authentic phenomenon, these taped voices. I don’t know what they are. I don’t know how they get on the tape. But they’re there. All those voice messages in the novel *Legion* were tapes that I had made, including one I made at Magno Sound Studio in New York City, which was so loud I sent it to Columbia University for analysis. Back it came with the result that it could not possibly be a human voice: the graph was perfectly even; with a human voice that’s not so — it’s irregular. **What was particularly interesting was that some of the voices’ messages changed if the tape speed was changed. Was that based on one of your tapes?**

Yes. The answer was ‘Lacey,’

which was not responsive to my question, ‘Is there a God?’ Played at twice the speed it became, ‘Hope it.’ And the sampling at Magno Sound was not clearly intelligible until I played it at twice the speed I recorded it. One night, two people came to my house and asked for a demonstration. On the playback — I had asked to hear the names of the two people — I heard one of the names. I altered the speed, and that same piece of information became the other person’s name — and the names were totally different. Don’t ask me how — whether there are two different frequencies riding on top of each other, and changing the pitch by changing the speed allows one frequency to become audible while the other is not — I don’t know. My friends were utterly stunned.

I’ll tell you this, though: Based on my own experiments, if these are the dead, they don’t know any more now than when they were alive. No supernatural powers or anything else — they’re just on a different frequency. Jung talked about that, the other side being a higher frequency, because they are invisible to us, like a spinning propeller. In fact, one of the things I heard on the tape was a voice saying, ‘We have two souls’, and much later, in my readings on Carl Jung, I came across a slim volume of his research on animistic beliefs among the Sennoi Tribe in Africa, and one of their beliefs was that we have two souls. Interesting phenomenon, but I’ve stopped it. It takes too much intense concentration — I can’t do it for more than twenty minutes at a time — and you

The make-up team get to work on *The Exorcist 3*

learn nothing: ‘Hello, my name is John. I’m fine. How are you?’ You’re not going to get any great illumination.

So there are no philosophers on the other side?

There may be; but, curiously, if you ask significant and important questions, or broadly philosophical ones, you get very cryptic answers or none. Evasive. **That may be one reason why some people avoid *The Exorcist*: it seems closer to reality than most horror fiction.**

That is very much a part of it. Some people don’t want to be subjected to that kind of experience, because this is terror based on reality — at least, I believe it is. I don’t think of *The Exorcist* as a horror tale at all. It’s frightening but quite real. Its power to frighten derives from its credibility.

And there was the unavoidable obscenity of *The Exorcist*. *Newsweek*, in its review of the novel, said: ‘*The Exorcist* is obscene in the highest possible sense. It restores the proper meaning to the word ‘obscenity’ — which was to make you aware of something that should not be, that has no right to exist. When you are made aware of that, it’s laudable. So one never revelled, hopefully, in the vulgarity in the film, because it was set in its proper context: something not to be desired.

‘Kinderman remains a character obsessed by the problem of evil. He finds no solution to it’



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There is a saying in Hollywood that screenplays aren't written — they're rewritten. The Father of Splatterpunk David J Schow tells Philip Nutman how they gutted *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3*.



When the idea for a second sequel to Tobe Hooper's 1974 original *Texas Chainsaw*

Massacre arose, the attitude at New Line Cinema was to go for no holds barred horror. *Leatherface: Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3* would achieve the ultimate in graphic gore, and the hyperbolic ad line — 'The most controversial horror movie of all time is finally here!' — served to ram that point home.

New Line Vice President in Charge of Development Michael De Luca professed a passion for contemporary horror fiction, and he introduced John Skipp, Craig Spector and David J Schow to the company. Schow's reputation as the Father of Splatterpunk made him the ideal choice as screenwriter: 'The impulse with the first draft was to aim at an X rating for violence and to soften the edge in further drafts so we'd get a hard R,' says Schow. 'I saw the only way to go was to start strong and take it from there, and Mike agreed with me. I did three drafts of the script and with each version the story's visceral qualities were pulled in and pulled in.'

But it's not so much the picture's tameness that bothers him; several plot elements which were important to character development have fallen by the wayside and most of his dialogue was thrown out when the screenplay was rewritten by director Jeff Burr and producer Robert Engleman.

'I turned the first draft in at

the start of May last year and that really hit a nerve with New Line. When they got a taste of what I thought was violent, memos started flying thick and fast. But Jeff Schechtman, who was the original producer, gave me his full support.' The second draft was delivered on May 4, but by May 15 no director had been signed up and Schechtman had been fired. By mid June Schow was hard at work on the third draft, which he completed ahead of deadline at the end of June. 'Then around July 2 I got a call from Greg Nicotero of KNB FX Lab, saying he'd got a copy of the script with yellow revision pages in it. Yellow's

'What I wanted to do was to start the movie with a bang: the first thing you see is someone getting their head bashed in with a sledgehammer'

the third stage after blue and red — and this was barely a week after I had given it to them, so they'd really put it through the grinder.' The script was kept out of the writer's hands for over two weeks. 'By then they were ready to shoot. Any comments I had were rendered invalid by the schedule.'

In his excellent book on the Hollywood system, *Adventures In The Screen Trade*, Oscar-winning novelist and screen scribe William Goldman (*Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid*, *Marathon Man*) translates the writer's plight into an effective image: on day one you are on top of the pyramid, because without a good screenplay there is no

MES A CHOPPER...

movie; by the time filming starts, the writer is buried beneath the pyramid and is of less importance than the guy who serves dinner from the Craft Services truck. A long time resident of Hollywood, Schow anticipated a disappointing run on the tinseltown wheel of fortune. 'I'm not bitter, don't get me wrong, and I have no problem with Jeff Burr as a director. Considering the constraints he had to work under, I think he did a competent job. I believe the problem lay with two things. Firstly, New Line started to see the film less as a knock-off sequel and more as a potential marketing franchise. And secondly, they were aware that the MPAA were really starting to crack down on horror movies, even the ones made by the majors. Ultimately, *Leatherface* turned out to be a movie designed to please everyone except the audience.'

In one of the earliest interviews Tobe Hooper gave about the original movie, he explained: 'It's about meat, about people who are gone beyond dealing with animal meat. Crazy, retarded people going beyond the line between animal and human.' Schow concurs: 'Exactly. That's what I had in mind when I started the script. I wanted to get back to the feeling of the original and take that notion further as it's what a modern audience expects from this kind of movie.'

Schow's story is clearly designed to connect with the original *TCM*, but the finished *TCM3* differs from the Schow version on a number of major points: 'New Line asked for a pretitle visual sequence. The credits were scheduled to come in after the intro crawl in one lump, then what I wanted to do was to start the movie with a bang: the first thing you see is someone getting their head bashed in with a sledgehammer. I envisioned the credits to be superimposed over *Leatherface* putting the mask together, which would have allowed a lot of screen time, and you could have seen the meat being shuffled around as he tries to assemble the optimum face. But they cut between black screen and footage, which is jarring and pushes you out of the movie.'



Schow with the Excalibur saw (far left) and with *Leatherface* (R A Mihailoff) and the Benny head (above)

What we were going to have was to hold on Gina getting hit by the hammer long enough to see that she has a facial tattoo. I had these two women, Gina and Sara, having matching astrological tattoos on their cheeks. In the first draft they were gay lovers, and New Line immediately said: 'No way'. So in subsequent drafts they became sisters.

'The business with the tattoos didn't work out because you never see them clearly, although they did do an elaborate flower on the *Leatherface* mask but it's almost invisible because the movie's so dark. Sara is the

'When Benny shoots through the window, a bullet tears away part of Tex's face to reveal that he has steel teeth'

last survivor of the previous group that the family's hunted down. When *Leatherface* and Benny first fight, we were originally going to cut to close-ups of her eyes watching the events... so we think she's one of the clan.'

Another theme which tied many plot elements together was the suggestion that technology has invaded every area of life (and death). This idea is introduced in the opening scenes at the body pit, where the crime scene investigators are garbed in hi-tech body suits to guard against infection. 'The remains in the pit are highly toxic,' Schow explains. 'In certain conditions, the body turns into a substance called Adipocere which can cause

blood poisoning. The fact is, technology invades everything, even *Leatherface's* family, which is why he is playing with a little computer, listening to his Walkman, and why Tinker is obsessed with making things.'

At one point, Tinker (Tinkerbell in previous drafts) says: 'Technology is our friend.' Taken out of context, it's just another throwaway line from a crazy. 'It's Tink's whole agenda,' argues Schow. 'Assuming that the family has been doing this for some time, they would have wound up with all kinds of junk — Walkmans, Watchmans, games, calculators etc — and the script was loaded with all these little hi-tech things we take for granted.'

Tinker was originally supposed to have a huge chroming vat in his workshop. 'He chromes everything. He makes the skull earring that the *Helldogs* wear (also missing in the film), ornaments, everything — including replacement parts for family members. Originally, everyone in the clan is seen to be missing a body part which he's added to with a pseudo hi-tech substitute. Mama had no legs and she's in a chromed, motorised wheelchair with meat cleavers and knives. *Leatherface* wears a leg brace made out of chromed human bones. And we reveal at the end, during the Tex and Benny fight, that even he has had something replaced: when Benny shoots through the window, a bullet tears away part of Tex's face to reveal that he has steel teeth. Later, when they fight outside, Benny hits him in the mouth with the axe and the sparks ignite the gas he's soaked in. Goodbye Tex.'

But when you lose the chroming vat — and this was important in explaining where the Excalibur saw comes from, the four foot chrome tool with 'The Saw Is Family' inscribed on it — you lose a sense of the method to these crazies' madness. Also, there's the implication that animals are of more value to them than humans. With the earring motif, we realise that Tinker doesn't kill all the animals they catch, he tags them. When we first see the Armadillo, the implication is that they've crossed the line and are now in family territory. Also, that scene was important in establishing that Michelle will have to come to

'When arbitrary decisions are made that undermine the narrative, you're bound to be disappointed'

terms with her ability to kill: that's her character arc. But they blew it with her inanely stating that 'violence isn't the answer to violence'. I didn't write that line, and audiences are going to sit there and say: 'Uh-hum, right.'

Overall, however, Schow praises the movie: 'It's my first screenplay — and the fact that it got made is nice. But when arbitrary decisions are made that undermine the narrative, you're bound to be disappointed. Moviemaking is a compromise and if you're not prepared to face that then there's no point being in the business.'

NEWS

ROBOCOP 2

Murphy (Peter Weller), the cyborg law enforcer is back on the streets, only Old Detroit is in a far worse state than before. Addiction to Nuke, a high potency synthetic drug, has pushed the crime rate through the roof, and the seemingly invincible Omni Consumer Products corporation is planning to turn the city into a Donald Trump-like yuppie paradise and to eradicate the working class.

This time around, Robo is faced by many enemies: monomaniacal drugs dealers Cain (Tom Noonan from *Manhunter* and *The Monster Squad*) and preteen sidekick Hob; Dr Faxe, OCP's insidious behavioural psychologist, who plans to strip Murphy of his residual humanity, and Robocop 2, an atomic powered killing machine

without conscience. Scripted by comics artist/writer Frank Miller and by Walon Green (*The Wild Bunch*), the sequel promises to maintain the violent one-two punch of the original, but under director Irvin Kershner's guidance will eschew the first film's splatter level.

'Orion Pictures would love this to be a PG 13,' Davison admits, 'but this is going to be a hard R like the original. The main difference is Kershner doesn't like the blood 'n' guts approach Paul Verhoeven revelled in. Kersh would frequently say: 'There's too much blood, take it away'. But the film's going to deliver. I don't think audiences are going to feel short-changed, but with the tight schedule we had we haven't got the time to resubmit the picture to the MPAA, so it's probably a good thing he didn't want guts flying all over the place.'



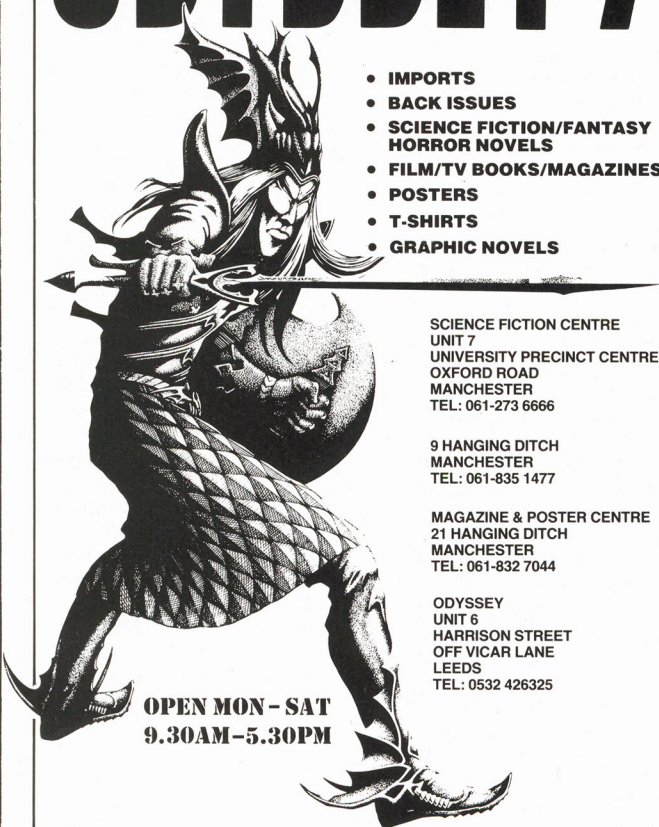
Peter Weller: Robocopped again

Robocop, you may recall, originally earned an X rating for its bloody excesses and had to be edited several times to get an R. Shooting on the sequel started in Houston, Texas during July last year and finally concluded in February 1990. With its American release planned for midsummer, the picture's postproduction schedule was fairly limited for such an effects-heavy project. Since the MPAA crackdown on violence in genre movies and the slow pace of the resubmission process, Kershner's aesthetic tastes make sense for such a potentially lucrative venture. However, on the strength of material I saw in January, Davison's claims sound legitimate.

Several key cast and crew

members from the original return for the cyborg's second outing. Nancy Allen is back as Lewis, Dan O'Herlihy reprises his role as the Old Man, OCP's amoral head, and Felton Perry again essays Johnson, the only company exec with a conscience. Peter Kuran provides the Robovision visuals, Phil Tippett supplies stop-motion to rival his work on *ED-209*, and Rob Bottin brings Murphy to life in a new, streamlined cyborg suit which now takes Weller only an hour to don (the original required an application time of nearly eight hours). A new face on the technical side is Chris Walas, *The Fly*'s make-up artist, who provides the movie's special stunt prosthetics. **Philip Nutman**

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FANTASTIC FILM FESTIVAL

The Society Of Fantastic Films holds its convention from October 12-14 at **Parkers Hotel, Manchester**. Events include four new film previews, a special of

classic 3D movies, including *It Came From Outer Space* and *Revenge Of The Creature*. A retrospective from five decades, featuring movies such as *Island Of Lost Souls*, *The Blob*, *The Exorcist* and *Predator*, is supported by a memorabilia fair, and the judging of the **Delta Award National Film Competition**. Full attending membership can be purchased for £20.00 up to July 31, and Film Fair admission is £1.00 (free to festival members). Write to **The Society Of Fantastic Films, 95 Meadowgate Road, Salford M6 8EN**.

DAN THE NEW MAN

Comic book hero **Dan Dare** is being reshaped for the Nineties. **Fleetway Publishing**, who relaunched **The Eagle** on 28 April with a 'tougher, meaner' Dare,



have turned the cartoon he-man into a non-smoking vegetarian, and rumours currently abound of wedding plans with Miss (now Ms) Peabody. It remains to be seen whether 'boys of all ages everywhere' will find Dare's new caring, sharing image palatable, but Fleetway are confident that their market research has got it about right.

In **Revolver**, a new comic aimed at a young adult audience and scheduled to launch on 23 June, writer/artist team **Grant Morrison** and **Ryan Hughes** revive Dare as an elderly pipe-smoking gent with

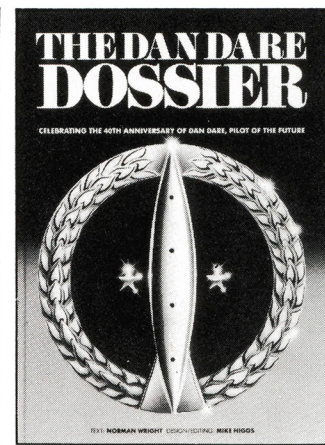


The happy couple? Professor Jocelyn Mabel Peabody and Colonel Dan Dare OUN

a walking stick. Dare is brought out of retirement by the **Unity Party** whose corrupt female leader, **Gloria Monday**, has plans to use him as a mascot for re-election. Any similarity to actual persons or events is, of course, unintentional.

DAN — THE PAST

Dan Dare may have been brought up to date, but to appreciate what went on before check out **The Dan Dare Dossier** from **Hawk Books** (£14.94)! Everything you ever wanted to know about the Pilot of the Future. Review next issue...



PANGALACTIC DOUBLE CELEBRATION



James Herbert celebrated his birthday one day early at the launch of **Pan Books'** new fantasy, horror, and science fiction list in London's **Cafe Munchen** on April 7.

Among those there to wish him well and sign copies of **Dark Voices**, **The Barsoom Project** and **First Flight** were **Clive Barker**, **Stephen Barnes**, **Stephen Jones**, **Larry Niven**, **Chris Claremont**, **Graham Masterton**, **Neil Gaiman** and **Dave McKean**.

The celebrations rolled on with countrywide signing sessions attended by authors **Ramsey Campbell**, **Stephen Gallagher** and **Basil Copper** with acclaimed artists **Chris Moore** and **Josh Kirby**.

On Tuesday 10, a sparkling celebrity reception was thrown by Pan at **The Museum Of The Moving Image** on London's South Bank. The doors opened at six o'clock so that guests could savour

the museum's exhibits, a series of film and television artefacts and displays, and enjoy historic spiels from the museum's actor guides who dress in a variety of film-related costumes. We were then directed towards the television gallery for drinks, chat, and a brief speech by senior editor **Kathy Gale** (see interview in this issue).

Other celebs included **Roofworld** author **Christopher Fowler**, **Stephen Laws** — whose latest novel, **The Frighteners**, appears next month (see extract in this issue) — and **Adrian Cole**.

Pan's D-week launch ended at **Easton**, the annual national science fiction convention held this year in Liverpool. There, Pan and its star authors celebrated with the most successful party of the gathering.

The company's push does not end with the publication of the list's first five titles. In months to come you can look forward to the revamped **Pan Book Of Horror Stories**, **Moonheart** by fabulist **Charles De Lint**, **The Steerswoman** by **Rosemary Kirstein**, **The Time-Lapsed Man and Other Stories** by **Eric Brown**, and **The City, Not Long After** by **Pat Murphy**.

SNIP! SNIP!

- **Portraits Of Alien Encounters** by **Nigel Watson** reports on **UFO sightings** in areas of northern England long before the revelations contained in books such as **Communion** and **Intruder**. Copies can be obtained, price £10.00, from **Nigel Watson**, 52A Lascotts Road, Wood Green, London N22 4JN.
- **Aliens: Special Edition**, the almost uncut version of **James Cameron's** movie has been withdrawn from the CBS/Fox release schedule for 'strategic' reasons.
- The publication date of **James Herbert's** new book, **Creed**, has been put back to August. Look out for a **FEAR** exclusive around that time!
- **Phantom Of The Opera**, a film version of **Andrew Lloyd Webber's** musical, goes into production at **Pinewood** in June. Fans of the **Opera** ghost should also be pleased to hear that **Phantom**, the first 'full account of the life of Erik', will be published by **Doubleday** on September 20. Written by novelist **Susan Kay**, it follows the composer from ignominious birth to mysterious death.
- **Dick Tracy**, 'the most popular fictional crime stopper of the twentieth century', pitches his hat at the big screen on July 6. The Warner Brothers film stars yesteryear heartthrob **Warren Beatty** (who also directs), together with **Madonna**, **Glenn Headly**, **Charles Durning** and **Mandy Patinkin**. **Stephen Sondheim** provides songs while Oscar winners **Vittorio Storaro** and **Milena Canonero** take care of the luscious cinematography and costumes. Let's hope it's not the sequel to **Ishtar**.
- A new film version of **Treasure Island**, **Robert Louis Stevenson's** adventure yarn, opens on June 8, again courtesy of Warner Brothers. Starring **Charlton Heston** and son, **Fraser C Heston**, the movie is faithful to the book and features the likes of **Christian 'Empire Of The Sun' Bale**, **Christopher Lee**, **Oliver Reed**, **Richard Johnson** and **Julian Glover**.
- **Predator 2** has switched locations from the concrete canyons of New York to the smog-coated streets of LA. **John Gilbert/Philip Nutman**

SNIP! SNIP!

- **Monkeyshines** author **Michael Stewart** launches his new novel **Birthright** from **Collins** in September. It tells the story of a **Neanderthal boy** brought into present day society with deadly results.
- The **Video Standards Council** has made a series of six 40 second programmes to explain the film classification symbols to viewers. Introduced by Radio One DJ **Simon Bates**, the programmes will preface all rental videos and clear up confusion amongst the public.
- **The Joker** makes his first appearance in the **Batman** comics since the murder of **Boy Wonder, Jason Todd**. The story, naturally, is called **Return Of The Joker** and will commence in **Batman 450**.
- **Rex Miller's Chaingang**, an absolutely disgusting graphic novelisation of the novel, **Slob**, is now available from **Northstar Publishing**. The story luridly details the deeds of **Chaingang**, a monstrous killer who lives in the sewers and has no respect for the police.
- **Crabs** author **Guy N Smith** has split with his agent and is now doing his own dirty work. He's asked us to point out to publishers that he can be contacted at The Wain House, Black Hill, Clunton, Craven Arms, Shropshire SY7 0DJ. The location sounds vaguely familiar.
- **Tad Williams'** follow-up to fantasy bestseller **The Dragonbone Chair** sees a September hardback launch. **The Stone Of Farewell** continues the story of the **League Of The Scroll**. Williams has been hailed as a contemporary **Tolkien**. Who are we to argue?
- **Frank Mancuso Jr**, producer of the **Friday The 13th** movies, has announced there will be no sequel made this year (you — at the back — stop cheering!). Whether or not this signals the 'death' of **Jason** has yet to be confirmed.
- **Jenny Agutter** and **Gerrit Graham** (remember him as **Beef**, the transvestite rock singer in **Brian De Palma's Phantom Of The Paradise?**) will play foster parents in **Child's Play 2**.

JOHN GILBERT/PHILIP NUTMAN

CLINICAL RAPE

A complete contrast to the predictable high concept, low intelligence of most American movies, *The Handmaid's Tale* is a dystopian fantasy with a genuinely nightmarish — if not to say misogynist — bent. Based on the pseudo science fiction novel by Canadian author Margaret Atwood, the film recently opened in New York to highly favourable reviews and sadly mediocre box office takings.

Starring **Natasha Richardson**, **Robert Duvall** and **Faye Dunaway**, the story concerns a

puritanical, neofascist America ten years or so hence, in which the majority of women have become infertile thanks to pollution, nuclear accidents and genetic deficiencies engendered by the excesses of consumerism. Those still capable of giving birth are designated 'handmaidens' in the biblical mould of Rachel from the Book Of Genesis, and are condemned to bear the offspring of the ruling elite.

Kate (Richardson), the tale's protagonist, is captured during an attempted escape to Canada, her husband is killed and her young daughter is taken away. She is then indoctrinated at the Rachel and Leah Institute, a convent-like order where the maids are prepared for their future

impregnations.

Directed by German filmmaker **Volker Schlöndorff**, the 13 million dollar budgeted movie is more than just a feminist nightmare and has some genuinely disturbing moments, particularly Kate's 'legitimate' violation at the hands of **Duvall** and **Dunaway**, a scene that reduces sexuality to a clinical rape. Atypical of the films usually featured in these pages, the picture nevertheless comes with a strong recommendation if you are looking for a different type of nightmare in the manner of **1984** or **Brazil**.

British release is scheduled for later this year.
Philip Nutman



LAWYERS, GUNS AND CRAWDADDIES

Lawyer by day and scribe by night, **Prime Evil** editor **Douglas E Winter** is at long last about to add actor to his long list of accomplishments.

Incarinate Productions recently whisked the Washington DC-based law man to upstate **New York** to appear in **Crawdaddies**, a flick he describes as 'very low budget guerrilla-shot horror'.

Cast true to type, Winter plays an academic. 'My character is the insidious **Mortensbak**, a professor of biology and arcane lore whose presence is somewhere between that of **Anthony Perkins** and **Jack Nicholson**.

'The plot is quite complex, which is why I said yes. **Mortensbak** has been relieved of his duties at university and has taken the opportunity to spend some time at his cabin up in the woods with the intention of studying an unusual species of crayfish — **crawdaddies** — that may have some link to a rather grisly slaughter of some Indians years before. One of his students, with whom he may be having an affair is, unbeknownst to her, the link to a dream world in which a **malevolent force** exists. Inevitably, this force uses the girl to gain a foothold in our reality and possess a gang of lost boys, wild kids who live in the woods'.

The author and critic managed to break away from his duties in **Detroit** — where he has been involved with a legal case concerning the second largest crash in American aviation history — to spend six days on location outside **Albany** at the start of April. 'I'll be filming my interior scenes at a later date, and although both the budget and schedule are tight, **Incarinate** have been very accommodating in shooting around the trial schedule.'

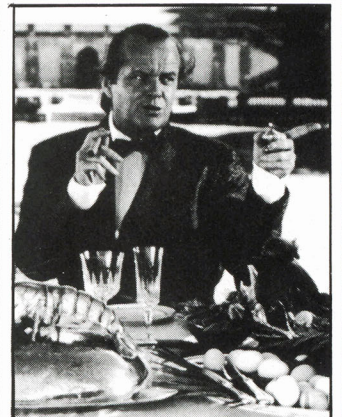
His involvement with the film came about through a chance meeting with producer **Julian McDonal**, who was writing a book about **Charles L Grant** and asked Winter for a contribution. 'During our conversations, the movie came up and I was asked to read the script to give some feedback. I guess they were unhappy with their attempts at casting the professor and the next thing I knew they were asking me to do the part'.

On the book front, **Pan** will publish a revised edition of Winter's **Faces Of Fear** in July. (See our **Virginia Andrews** interview in this issue).

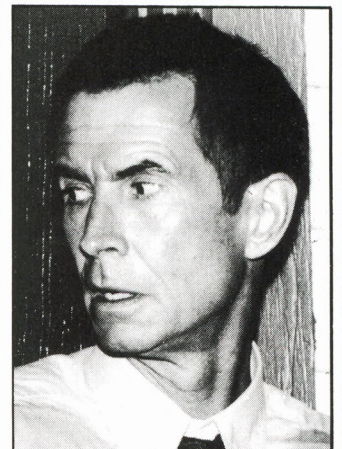
Philip Nutman

NEWSDESK

If you have an item of news which might interest readers of **FEAR** then call us on the following numbers: 0584 87 5851 (UK news), 081 301 0714 (US news). Please note that these are not numbers for general enquiries.



Winter combinations? **Jack Nicholson** and **Anthony Perkins**



RAISING THE DEAD

This month two readers pick us up on recent interviews with Whitley Strieber and Sam Raimi. If you've got an axe to grind, then send your letter to RAISING THE DEAD, FEAR, NEWSFIELD, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1JW.

HOOK, LINE AND SINKER

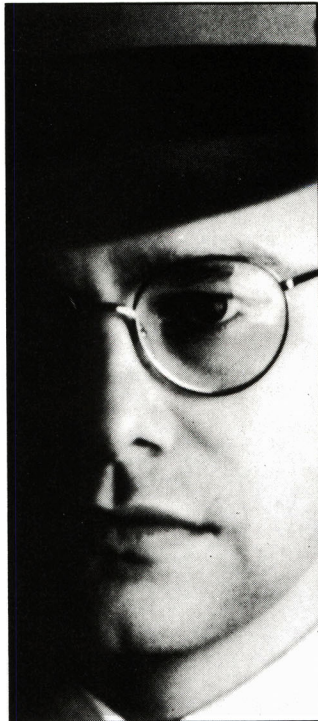
Dear FEAR

I've just read your piece on Whitley Strieber in the April issue and I wonder if I could pick you up on a few points of fact.

Jenny Randles did not accuse Strieber of plagiarising one of her books: he accused her, incorrectly, of having made this claim in a radio broadcast. Indeed, Strieber's remarks are incomprehensible, since Randles is not one of those 'interested in the flying saucer field', as stated, but someone who researches virtually every other explanation for reports of UFOs apart from flying saucers bearing little green men. His legal action descended to the level of fiasco and he gave up.

He was also, and perhaps more pertinently, apparently irate to receive reports that Randles regarded his book *Communion* as less than totally factual. There is an important point of principle here. It is a vital part of the progress of science that researchers have the freedom to rubbish each other's claims and theories. Responses to such criticisms may represent a greater advance of knowledge than the original research itself. Strieber, however, chose to try to use the law to stifle such criticism. I cannot remember the law being invoked among the scientific community during, for example, the recent debate over cold fusion.

But then maybe Strieber doesn't claim to be a scientific researcher. This would seem to be the case with his 'beautifully researched', 'fact-based' new novel, *Majestic*, in which he spends two pages outlining the plot of a work of fiction called *An Account Of A Meeting With Denizens Of Another World, 1871*, which I commissioned years ago from David Langford. Recycling other people's plots is just not on, so Langford complained — and, indeed, is to be acknowledged in future UK printings of *Majestic*. The details of Strieber's research were interesting. He'd come across the story in a book called *The World's Greatest*



Whitley Strieber

UFO Mysteries, published by Octopus. The authors of this appear to have fallen for Langford's work hook, line and sinker. Strieber's research, I'm told, consisted of writing a letter to Octopus asking about the story; since he didn't get a reply, he used it anyway.

Langford is not suing for plagiarism. He accepts that Strieber believed this to be adequate research.

Randles, incidentally, is currently being sued by Stanton Friedman — another rich American — who is at the centre of the MJ-12 debate (the basis of Strieber's *Majestic*). Once again, the issue is that she doesn't believe his purported 'proofs'. This was written up in the *Manchester Evening News* with all the accuracy one expects from the *Sun*. One quote they did get right, though — that the theories were 'about as factual as a Steven Spielberg movie'. An insult? Randles was one of the specialist advisers for *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*...

It is time that these bullying legal attacks by the flying-saucer brigade were stopped, and so Langford and I are setting up a fund called 'MJ-Balls' in order to help protect,

initially, Randles and thereafter other people, from whatever discipline, who find themselves threatened in this way. All cheques (made out to M J Balls) should be sent to the above address.

One must draw one's own conclusions as to why these bullies prefer to go to law rather than conduct reasoned scientific debate.

Paul Barnett, Paul Barnett
Editorial, Exeter, Devon

RAIMI RANTS

Dear FEAR

With reference to Mark Kermode's interview with Sam Raimi (March 1990). Why were the obscenity charges against *The Evil Dead* 'ridiculous'? What are the 'serious questions about the practice of censorship' which have been raised by the release of a cut version of the film? Is Mr Kermode implying that in no way could *The Evil Dead* be called 'obscene'?

Mr Raimi's first objection to censorship is maintained by the view that the government's authority in this domain is 'completely unacceptable'. He goes on to say that members of censorship boards 'can take' unprecedented horror without being 'affected' by it. Isn't Mr Raimi overlooking the possibility that the reason why films are banned at all is precisely because the members of the board cannot take gratuitous obscenity and violence in film? Whether or not the censors are affected by what they see is consequential, it is the initial non-acceptability which determines censorship.

By questioning the authority of governments to censor, Mr Raimi is also questioning the fundamental democratic principle that the total good of the people will ultimately involve decisions taken by a small minority group. Although it may seem intuitively correct to say 'the larger the group, the more sound the decisions', in practical terms, regular 'mass' decision-taking (by polls, for instance) is an implausible theory. Surely Messrs Raimi and Kermode would not argue that a public poll can take place after every film release to decide on its 'viewability'. Even if the benefit of objective public opinion outweighed the cost of organising these polls, the procedure is quite evidently self-defeating: the public cannot decide to reject 'bad taste' films once they

have already been widely viewed. If gratuitous obscenity and violence inflicts social damage at all, the damage may have already been done. Therefore, this kind of 'public censorship' is not possible.

Given this, it seems reasonable to introduce a small group of individuals who must arrive at a single rational decision. No doubt borderline cases may arise when the minority decision-taker (in this case, the censors) misinterprets public reaction or demand. I presume that it is for this reason that Mr Raimi uses his 'politically disturbing' films analogy. Mr Raimi cannot be suggesting that *The Evil Dead* is a similarly borderline case where the controversy of disturbing aspects of the film are ambiguous! The notorious 'tree raping' scene dispels any such notion. The difference between political freedom and the 'freedom' to display gratuitous obscenity/violence/gore is considerably marked. In any case, it does not follow that banning video nasties directly leads to banning politically controversial films.

Finally, I do not quite understand Mr Raimi's suggestion that film censorship is a violation of human rights. Exactly what public rights are being overridden by censorship boards? The right to censor films 'en masse'? The right to be exposed to all mass media at whatever the cost? The most important issue underlying the practice of censorship is that of the effects of horror/violent/pornographic films. If Mr Raimi claims the right to be exposed to such films without censorship because it is *uncertain* whether social or psychological damage is caused, I claim the right *not* to be exposed to such films because of that very uncertainty. Members of censorship boards are protectors of rights (the right to social well-being), not violators. Mr Raimi's absolutist standpoint is in danger of charges of extremity. Does his 'absolute freedom' entail hard core pornography and 'Snuff' movies?

Vanessa Coutts (Miss),
Portrush, Co Antrim

Mark Kermode is away at the moment but will be invited to reply on his return. For an update on Raimi's own attitude to the 'tree rape' scene, see the video sell-through review of *The Evil Dead* in this issue.

A GUIDE TO GIRLS!

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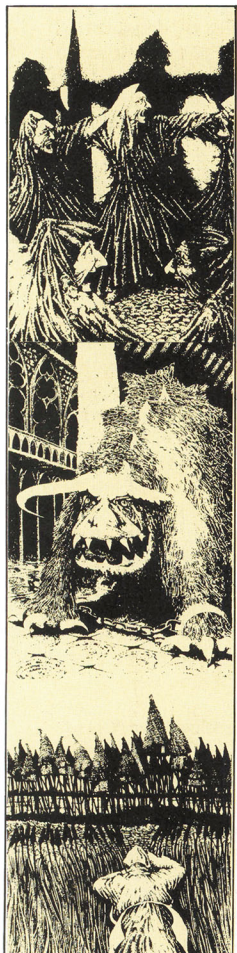
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FEAR



G

et ready, you bloodsuckers! Start priming those warped minds and sharpening those lethal quills — for the FEAR fiction awards are lurching into sight. Yes, next month we shall require you to send in your nominations for the best established author and the best newcomer featured in FEAR over the past twelve months.

Against our better judgement, we have decided to be merciful and plan to unchain our army of scribes from their word processors; but it is up to you to decide

which two authors will be let out of their cupboards to celebrate their victory for one whole day. Start reading over that fabulous FEAR fiction again folks, and look out for the voting details in next month's issue.



SUBMITTING SHORT STORIES TO FEAR

If you have a short story which fits FEAR's horror, science fiction or fantasy brief, then send it to David Western, Fiction Editor, FEAR, Newsfield, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1JW. Please indicate the wordage of your story at the head of the typescript which should be no more than 5,000 words in length and typed, preferably double spaced. Remember to enclose a day-time telephone number, a good quality photograph of yourself, a fifty-word biography, an SAE for acknowledgement of receipt of your story and a further SAE for the return of your manuscript should it be deemed unsuitable.

Readers whose stories are being considered for publication will receive notification of this in writing. This is not a guarantee that your story will be published and, as we can only feature a handful of new stories per issue, it could be some time before those eventually selected appear in print. In the past few months we have been deluged with submissions, so it could be some considerable time, months even, before you receive a positive or negative decision regarding your story.

Finally, it makes sense to keep a copy of your typescript... just in case.

We are obliged to remind new writers that FEAR does not look kindly upon works of plagiarism.

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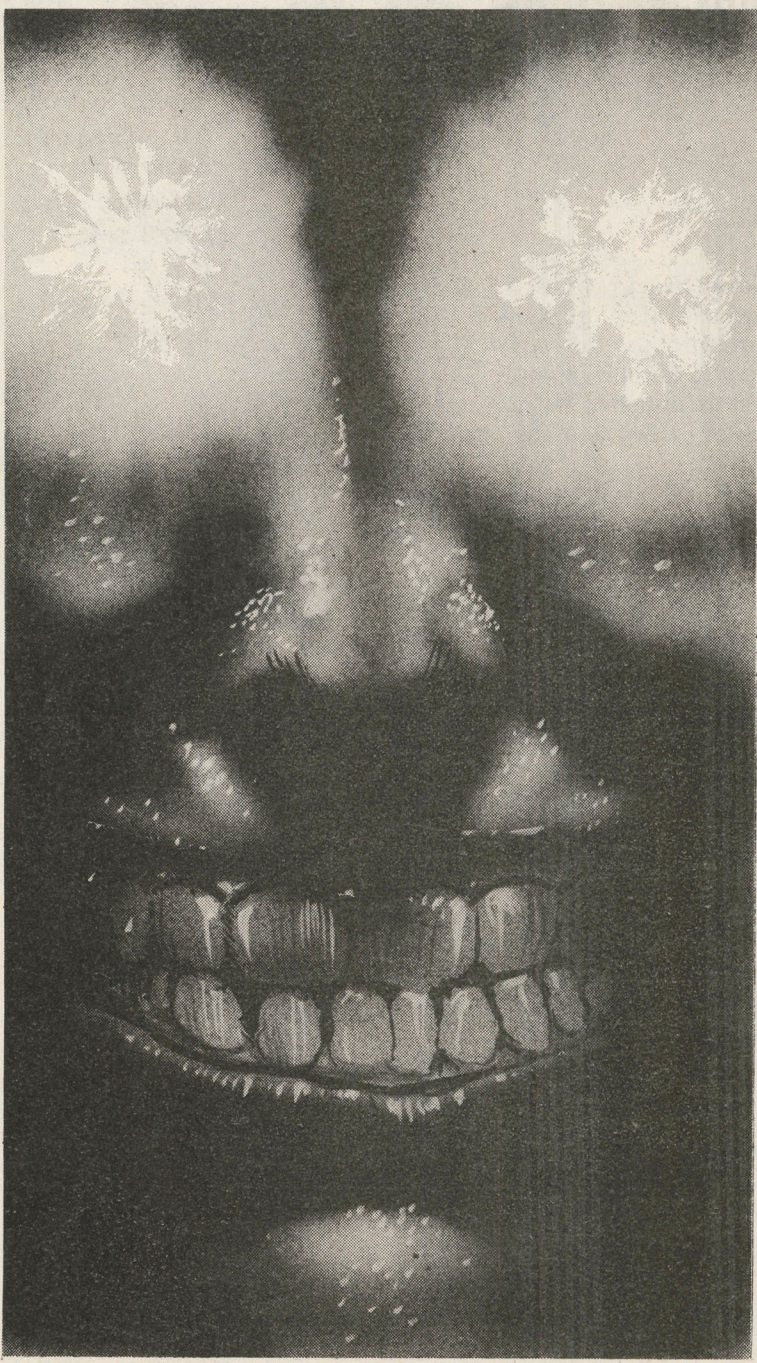
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THE FRIGHTENERS

Stephen Laws



Eddie Brinkburn didn't look for trouble, but it found him and it was big. Jailed for acting as getaway driver in a bungled service station robbery, he is quickly targeted for revenge by crime boss, Sheraton. Trapped within the walls of a high security prison, he is urged by his friend Rennie to stay out of danger's way. At first Eddie is eager to oblige, but when he learns that Sheraton has slaughtered his family, his well-being becomes meaningless; he walks around in a state of shock... and straight into his executioners' arms.

Eddie could feel the steam of the shower-room on his face like some kind of cloying death mask. The face was not his, reinforcing the out-of-body sensation he had first experienced in the Governor's office. He kept walking; the hollow tapping of his shoes on the tiled floor seemed like distant echoes — they were not his feet at all. He passed the racks of weight-training equipment that Laverick and his boys were so keen on and reached the end of the row of changing-cabinets, just as he heard the crash and clatter of the washroom door behind him. Distantly — in another dimension, perhaps — he seemed to hear Rennie shouting...

'For God's sake, Eddie. They're going to do you, man! Get out of here...'

...and then a cry of pain.

Without looking back to see what had happened, Eddie turned the corner and stopped.

They were all here in the main tiled area which gave access to the showers themselves, as he had known they would be. Laverick was sitting on a wooden bench, naked except for a pink towel around his white, flabby middle; carefully combing thinning hair to his balding pate. Laverick's boys were all here. Latham and Taylor were leaning against the cabinets, fully dressed, talking and smoking; they looked up in surprise. Beyond, Eddie could see Dunn in the showers, still soaping his body, wreathed in that cloying steam. Laverick looked up and smiled when he saw Eddie.

'Well, look who's here.' The smile broadened into something that was anything but a smile. 'Saved us the trouble of looking you up, Eddie. Very considerate of you.' He began to rise. Latham and Taylor moved forward on either side of him. Latham flicked his cigarette end to the tiled floor. Eddie saw it fizzle in a pool. From outside himself he watched them come. He was made of stone.



Frantically, Rennie had tried to reach Eddie before he could enter the shower-room. But Eddie had ignored his pleas, staring ahead and walking like some kind of screwed-up zombie or something. Eddie had pushed through the shower-room door which had crashed against the inside wall. Now he was inside the washroom, where Rennie knew that Laverick and his men would be. Eddie must be trying to commit suicide. There were no prison screws here: this was Laverick's place. The door slapped shut behind Rennie as he called Eddie's name, in time to see him turning past the changing-room cabinets into the shower area. Rennie moved forward... and then something smashed him to the floor from behind.

Rennie looked up from the cold, tiled floor, tasting salt in his mouth. Angel — one of Laverick's 'minders' — loomed over him, smiling.

'Can't get in without a tie, son. This is Mr Laverick's establishment, you know that.' He grinned.

Rennie tried to clamber to his feet. Moving quickly, Angel placed a foot on his chest and pressed down hard, pinning him to the floor. 'Now you wouldn't want to interfere would you, Mr Montresor? Mr Laverick and the lads are in there. I'm sure they'd rather you didn't interrupt them. They'll get around to you in due course,

son. Just be patient.'

Rennie looked up at Angel's grinning face.



Laverick paused, running the comb across the threads of hair smeared to his scalp, eyes still fixed lasciviously on Eddie. Latham and Taylor were on either side of Eddie now, their casual manner failing to conceal the threat and the fact that Eddie could no longer turn and run for it.

'Little bit of a commotion going on back there, Eddie? Seems to me like I heard the spade's voice.' Unblinking, Laverick raised his voice, echoes bouncing from the tiled walls: 'You got Mr Montresor back there, Angel?'

Distantly: 'Yeah!'

'Then bring him along for the party.'

Distant, but getting louder: the sound of someone being dragged like a bundle of rags along the tiled floor to the showers.

Eddie watched and listened. The dream continued. He watched Laverick look over his shoulder and smile. The dragging, slithering sound was closer now, right behind Eddie. A kick. A grunt of pain.

'Black sod...'

Laverick moved past Eddie's left shoulder, joining Latham and Taylor at the cabinets, both of them grinning. Laverick began to pick at his teeth.

Still made of stone, Eddie became aware of Rennie crawling on tiled floor at his feet, clutching his chest where the Angel had kicked him. More than anything, Eddie wanted to bend down and help him. But something told him that the time was not right yet.

'Laverick...' Rennie spat blood onto the tiles, grimacing and looking up. '...you can't do it. You can't kill him in here and get away with it...'

Laverick looked at his sycophants. Prompted by his odious smile, they began to laugh.

'Kill, Mr Montresor? Strong words. This isn't a kill, it's a bloody suicide.'

Laverick looked back at Eddie, still smiling. But now, his smile was fading. Something about the way that Brinkburn had casually strolled into the shower-room, when he must know by now what was in store for him, was beginning to unsettle Laverick in a peculiar way. If Brinkburn knew what was in store, why wasn't he hiding away somewhere; keeping out of sight, or crawling to the screws to protect him? Why the bloody hell had he just walked in like that? Brinkburn's

"Kill, Mr Montresor? Strong words. This isn't a kill, it's a bloody suicide"

**'Laverick
straightened
again, stag-
gering, a
gurgled
croak of
horror and
pain bub-
bling into a
red-mouthed
scream of
rage'**

inexpressive stare remained fixed on Laverick. He didn't seem to care.

'Anything to say?' Laverick's irritation was turning to a kind of unease.

'You can't do it, Laverick.' Rennie struggled to a sitting position. 'You're gonna have to do me as well. Nobody's going to believe in two suicides.'

'Shut your face, Montresor! A double suicide's easy enough to arrange. Lots of pipes in here on the ceilings to hang things from. Easy enough to spread the rumour that the pair of you were gay. Same business, same crime, same cell... Oh yes, the same cell: we all know what goes on in here after lights out, right lads? Terribly depressing in here for two sensitive gay boys. What else could they do but have a lovers' pact? Say goodbye to it all.' Laverick looked back at Eddie, a man standing like a statue.

'Well? Like I said before — any last words?'

Laverick took a step forward. Eddie could see the others moving in on either side, on the periphery of his vision.

Laverick's single step forward provided the trigger, the moment Eddie had been waiting for. In an instant, a series of thoughts flashed across his mind: a National Health waiting list that was too long, Tracey, the kids, two years in prison loving them and not being able to be with them. And then Eddie lunged forward to meet Laverick, head-butting him with a jarring *smack!* across the mouth. A grunt boiled up from Laverick's innards and back again as his hands flew to his face. He staggered back, bent double, blood seeping like molasses between his fingers in string-like traces. For a long instant, Laverick's cronies were frozen in place, the sudden attack taking them completely by surprise. Laverick straightened again, staggering, a gurgled croak of horror and pain bubbling into a red-mouthed scream of rage when the hands moved away from his face and he saw the scarlet, sticky handfuls of broken teeth.

You... you... Shtring him UUPPPP!

Inertia had taken possession of Eddie again. His rage and horror had been vented in that one moment of brutal violence. He stood, trembling, hands clenched at his sides, as Latham and Taylor moved in on him at last. He could see Latham's fist coming but was powerless to avoid it. The world tilted. He hadn't felt the blow at all, but now he was lying on the tiled floor looking up, and all hell seemed to have broken around him. Dazed, he became aware that Laverick was yelling...

'Don't mark him, you idiotsh! Jusht shtring the fucker up... Shtring him up!'

And now there was another high-pitched screaming and a flurry of movement. Turning, Eddie saw that Rennie, still prone beside him on the floor, had lunged upwards and grabbed Angel firmly by the balls. He was hanging on grimly as Angel contorted, hugged himself double and clawed at Rennie's unrelenting grip as he toppled in slow motion to the floor, face white and teeth clenched. Then there were hands on Eddie's neck, hauling him up from behind. The inertia dissipated as he felt his windpipe being closed and blue and white sparks began to dance behind his eyes. He lashed out backwards with his good arm; once, twice — a third time, and he had connected with someone's ribcage. Another gasp of pain and the grip was gone. Dunn was running naked from the shower towards them, slipping on the tiles and falling *slap* to the floor as Eddie swung a wild and uncoordinated punch at Laverick's flabby, white figure. Surprisingly agile for his bulk, he dodged it, towel falling from his waist to reveal shrunken genitalia, but not agile enough to avoid Eddie's flailing form behind that punch as their bodies collided. The impact flung Laverick backwards over the wooden bench, spindly legs thrashing. Eddie swung back, rage now replaced by a sickening fear in his guts. Rennie was hanging onto Angel's balls, shrugging up tight on the floor as Latham aimed a kick at his head, missed and caught him on the shoulder. Something hit Eddie in the side, pain exploding in his ribs. He doubled over as Taylor withdrew his fist, grabbed a handful of Eddie's hair and swung another punch which hit him on the ear. Unable to use his paralysed left arm, which flapped lifelessly at his side, Eddie head-butted Taylor in the ribs, grabbing him around the waist with his good arm as they crashed backwards against the cabinets.



Fisher looked back over his shoulder, checking the door. Then he looked back at the security camera screen, smiling. He turned down the sound reception until the clashing, clattering echoes were only a series of small, tinny reverberations, and licked his lips: This was good. This was *really* good. He adjusted the axis tilt on the camera and focused the zoom.

Better than television, laughed Fisher. Leaning forward, he opened the main console beneath the

camera screen, reached inside and yanked out a wire. The image on both screens sparked and died. 'Lights out, Mr Brinkburn,' he said aloud, closing up the console and leaning back in his seat. In ten minutes, after it was all over, he would report the breakdown.



Rennie clung on tight to Angel, realising that this was the only chance he had to help Eddie and himself. Resisting Angel's clawing hands on his tightly clenched fist, he could see the others laying into Eddie. The intended 'cover-up' was blown now: no gay suicide scene. Blood had been drawn and now, Rennie knew, Laverick and his men only wanted to damage and kill with no thought for future consequences. Angel's face was a ghastly white; he was making little baby noises, on the point of unconsciousness. *Come on, you bastard!* thought Rennie. *Pass out!* He squeezed harder, savagely. Angel spasmed, his knees jerking inwards into a tighter foetal position. One knee drove spasmodically upwards, accidentally hitting Rennie under the chin. Stars exploded behind Rennie's eyes; white pain and light flooded his mind. Blurring in and out of unconsciousness, he registered what was going on in the shower-room only in a series of disjointed and fragmented images, as if his mind was tuning in and out of the same television channel. Angel was now completely unconscious, the unbearable pain of Rennie's grip having sent him over. Rennie struggled to an elbow, fell into a brightly lit chasm again and rolled over...

Taylor was kneeling behind Eddie, holding him by the arms. Eddie was in a sitting position, while Latham jabbed a vicious punch at his face. Eddie, semiconscious himself, turned his head. Latham's fist scraped his jaw and connected with his shoulder. Cursing, Latham pulled his fist back, grabbed a handful of Eddie's hair and prepared to deliver the *coup de grace*...

'No...' Rennie's entreaty turned to a strangled retch...

Another hand appeared from nowhere, impossibly large, seizing Latham's whole fist as he drew back for that final punch. Latham grunted in alarm as he was pulled back with terrific force, struggling round from his awkwardly dragged position to see his unknown assailant. Rennie struggled round too, not believing, and Latham started to scream in pain as his fist was slowly crushed. A voice said...

'How much do you hate?'

Archie Duncan loomed monstrous and gigantic above Rennie, perspective distorted. Latham pawed at the huge fist which held his and Rennie heard an echoing and unmistakable *crunch* of bone as the grip slowly intensified.

'How much... do you... hate?' Duncan asked again.

Taylor flung Eddie aside and launched himself at the hulking apparition. There was a thud and slap of flesh as Taylor connected with the giant, the impetus of his charge bundling the three protagonists away from Rennie's line of vision. Another *slap!* as bodies hit the cold, tiled wash-room wall. Rennie whited out again, reaching for Eddie. Beyond, Laverick was pulling himself to his feet, chin bloody, eyes stupid.

'Eddie?' Rennie retched again and heard a *clang!* from behind.

He turned awkwardly to see Archie slamming Taylor against a pipe mounted on the wall. The pipe ruptured, suddenly enveloping the three struggling bodies in a gushing cloud of steam which billowed and swamped Rennie, obscuring his vision. He rubbed his eyes and saw Latham rolling out of that hissing cloud towards him, hugging his shattered hand. Rennie blurred out of his television station again, seeing a pair of bunion-ridden feet appearing *slip-slap* in his line of vision, feet that could only belong to a returning Laverick. In slow motion, just before the white-out, he saw one of those feet glide towards him, felt no physical connection, but knew that he had been kicked in the face.

Rennie slid away. He was flying, through clouds which hissed and boiled and asked: 'How much... do you... hate?' His mind refocused, and he realised once more where he was — still in the shower-room, not in the sky. The boiling, billowing clouds were from the broken pipe. And the words were being spoken by Archie Duncan. Those clouds were rolling apart long enough for Rennie to see...

Eddie on his knees, one good hand braced on the floor, the other hanging limp; looking up, hair dishevelled and matted with blood; a thin stream of saliva hanging like a thread from his mouth. Above him, Archie Duncan was standing in familiar pose: hands rigidly at his sides, eyes staring. There was no sign of the others.

'Do you hate?'

Breathing heavily, Eddie's face registered pain, exhaustion and then... slowly... rage.

'Do you hate?'

'Stars exploded behind Rennie's eyes; white pain and light flooded his mind'

'Yes...' croaked Eddie at last, face grimacing. 'Yes... Yes, *Goddammit! I hate! I fucking hate! Hate, hate, hate, hate!!!*'

A great cloud of steam gushed around Archie as his face spread into a broad smile: a smile revealing rotten teeth; a smile that bore testimony to some wretched madness, not humour.

Eddie was shaking, breath coming in great racking sobs. 'I... hate... *hate!* HATE, HATE, HATE!!'

Archie was leaning downwards and forwards, through the steam, reaching for Eddie. Puzzled, still stunned, Rennie saw the strangely glazed look on Eddie's white face, blood creeping down from his hairline, mingling with the sweat and the steam on his brow.

'What...?' began Rennie as Eddie reached slowly up for Archie's hand.

A spasm in the guts cramped Rennie again and he hugged himself, fighting down the bile, teetering on the rim of unconsciousness. He fought back, shook his head the way he'd seen it done in the movies and wished he hadn't when the pain crashed in a wave around the base of his skull. He looked up again: the steam was hissing and gushing, filling the shower-room in a surreal billowing of white.

'Where the hell *is* that bastard?' came Laverick's voice from somewhere in the steam. Rennie became aware of three indistinct forms thrashing through the clouds towards them, choking and gasping. 'I want them all dead! Do you hear me, Latham? Find them, Taylor...' In a matter of seconds it would all begin again, only this time Rennie knew that the great hulk in front of him would not be able to help. Both he and Eddie were finished, half-beaten to a pulp. And the great grinning giant was taking Eddie's hand, the rotten smile spreading and spreading. Rennie grimaced, expecting to hear the crunching of bone and Eddie's screams.

But something else was happening.

Something which Rennie could not explain. Eddie was smiling, eyes glazed, grin spreading. And Eddie's eyes were somehow reflecting the light in the shower-room, taking on the same maniacal gleam as Archie's. Looking from face to face, Rennie could see that both faces now held that look of glacial madness. There was a noise, which at first seemed to be the hissing of steam, but was now assuming its own identity. It was a crackling, oscillating sound which built in intensity as Rennie watched.

Something was happening to Archie's eyes.

Archie's eyes were now somehow gone, the sockets filled with a powdery white light which undulated and cast black garish shadows on his face; as if his head had become a bloated Hallowe'en turnip, lit from the inside.

'Eddie...?' began Rennie again, looking back at him.

Eddie's eyes had vanished, too. The same boiling white light was spilling from his eye sockets onto his cheeks. He was still grinning. And now, behind Archie and Eddie, Rennie could see two forms emerging from the clouds of steam beyond.

'Got them!' said Taylor. 'Got the fuckers!'

'Cream the bastards!' said Laverick through broken teeth. 'I want them *dead!*'

Rennie had time to see that one of the silhouettes was holding a length of pipe, taken no doubt from the broken bracket on the far wall from which the steam had come gushing. He watched as it was raised above Eddie's head with a hideously deliberate slowness, just as the howling, oscillating noise became too much for him. He clasped his hands over his ears, trying to yell at Eddie, trying to tell him to duck.

As the sound swelled to an unbearable pitch, there was a loud *SNAP!* as if something had been switched off. The 'snapping' had an instantaneous effect on Rennie. He felt his consciousness slipping away irretrievably. He had slid from bad dream to bad dream, but this latest dream was one he was glad to get away from. None of it made any sense as the white-out faded to a deep gulf of blackness. Archie's eyes. Eddie's eyes. The glowing light. The identical look on their faces. The noise that had threatened to burst his eardrums. He was better out of that dream. But the last part of this particular dream was probably the worst part. The noises he heard just after the loud snap and his final descent into oblivion horrified him more than anything else he had heard or seen and he was glad to be away from them.

Those horrible noises, fading to nothing as he faded away from the hellish shower-room.

Those horrible *tearing* noises; those wet, ripping noises.

But worse.

The screaming that accompanied them. The sounds of men screaming desperately and hoarsely and in mortal agony. The pleading and the crying and the animal-like sounds those men made as the ripping went on and on and on...

Rennie faded away completely to a safe place.


STEPHEN LAWS is the bestselling author of *Ghost Train*, *Spectre* and *The Wym*. His new novel, *The Frighteners* is published this month in hardback by Souvenir. Still in his thirties, Laws lives in his native Newcastle Upon Tyne where he works as a local government officer.

'Come on, you bastard! thought Rennie. Pass out!'

Dr Prescott Nagle recounts the nightmare history of Pontefract, Virginia for local boy, Cup...

GOAT DANCE

By Douglas Clegg



According to Worthy's diary, the reason for the community's move from this side of the lake to the other had little to do with an Indian attack and the yearly flooding of this area. Why would these people move their families, uproot them from perfectly good land, to move less than a mile away, and to the swampy side of the area? Even if the Indians had set the settlement on fire, as is still alleged to this day, why move to an area that was no better protected? It seems an illogical, arbitrary move, and has always disturbed me. It was illogical to Worthy's father, too, who felt a strong enough guilt to remain with his own family on this side of the lake.

The settlement's move was precipitated by that fire, but it wasn't the local Indians who set it. This fire that was set in the middle of winter.

The fire was set by the town's own inhabitants.

It was a cleansing, Cup.

You see, that winter, that fourth winter, more children died. If we are to trust Worthy Houston's account.

Eighteen children died that one winter, all before New Year's.

None of them died of natural causes.

In late November, some of the children were missing from their homes, and soon families were forming search parties. The snow in these hills gets bad — you remember the storm of '75? People of my generation talk in awed tones about the storm of '41, how people actually froze to death in the hills. But in 1754, these men searched for days, in one of the worst blizzards they had ever faced. They did not return with

DOUGLAS CLEGG's first horror novel, *Goat Dance*, is published in paperback by New English Library. The author is married and lives in Washington DC, and has recently completed his second novel, *Breeder*.

'The oldest Carson boy, Andrew, ran through the burning hay into the mob, his entire body on fire'

their children.

Now, that autumn something else happened. Tabitha Carson, the wife of Nathaniel Carson, died in childbirth. It would've been her eighth child. Nathaniel went mad with grief — quite literally. His neighbors had to restrain him one night when he went out into the snow half-naked, 'like a savage,' Worthy wrote, and slaughtered more than a dozen of the domestic animals in this stockade. It was called the goat dance, but it contained more than just goats, it was their version of the community jackpot where all the horses, pigs and chickens were corralled during the long winter. There was even a stable of sorts over there.

Worthy wrote a twisted tale about the name, goat dance, actually being derived from an Indian source, a name known when trappers lived like nomads in the valley, cohabiting areas peacefully with the Indians. This field bounded by the Marlowe-Houston House was a sacred place, indicated by the forking of the streams. It was called the Ghost Dance, and it was where the Indians buried their dead in the belief that they became one with the Great Spirit. These were Tenebro Indians — I believe you belonged to their namesake club? They were considered a fierce tribe, and would partake of a cannibalistic feast in the winter in which the spirits of the dead spoke through those who consumed their flesh. It was their Shaman test — those who survived the ordeal became men of great wisdom and religious power. At the end of the festival, the Tenebro built a great fire and cast living human beings, usually prisoners-of-war, into it. Of course, many such abominations have been attributed to Indians so that we white folks can feel a little less guilty. But even the Tenebro abandoned this place; for them, also, it acquired a taint. Something more than just the coming of the white man. Soon after, the Tenebro were hunted by colonists and the southern Indians, into extinction.

But back to those settlers. In the New Year, 1755, what is now called a False Spring occurred — but back then, it was called an Indian Summer. An Indian Summer wasn't then the wonderful hangover of summer that we see it as. An Indian Summer was a time of fear. Summer was considered a season of hard labor for people back in the 1700s, and also a time when the Indian attacks occurred. And when these bizarre changes in temperature came on, it meant that there was the possibility of Indian attacks on the

homes.

The snow melted within a week in January; water flooded the settlement.

I suppose if it hadn't been for this unusual turn in the weather, the outcome might've been different. The settlers might have cooled down; their fears rose with the temperature. They might not have acted so rashly. But that is a small-town historian's hindsight, isn't it?

The waters from this flood poured into the goat dance, and to save the livestock, men went in and brought the animals out of the enclosure to the higher ground. The place was filled with mud, and the earth gave up something in the water. Something very horrifying indeed.

Eleven children's bodies emerged. Their faces looking upward. They had only been buried a few feet beneath the ground. The water brought them right to the top.

Someone had murdered every single one of those children. And it had not been an Indian. It had been one of the town's own men.

Within the hour, according to Worthy, town-folk pointed the guilty finger at Nathaniel Carson. He was the most obvious lunatic after the animal slaughter in the fall, and small towns don't change much over the years, we all tend to look for a convenient scapegoat. He was also a sick man, physically, although the cause is unknown. Worthy believed he carried some plague, but perhaps by this he meant cholera. I suppose whether or not Nathaniel was guilty of murder doesn't really matter now. Within the hour, he was hanging from a tree.

But this didn't satisfy the people. They wanted more blood.

Carson was dead, his wife had died.

What about his children?

You must remember, Cup, that just about every family in this settlement felt they had lost at least one child to Carson's savage brutality, and then others to illnesses. Assuming that it was Carson. So, now these people are wondering: what about his own children? Why should Nathaniel Carson's name be allowed to trickle down through the years, when other names were almost snuffed out?

Several of the men from the leading families went to the house where the seven Carson children were being held while their father was hanged. Worthy says that according to his father, the settlers used the excuse of disease, that Nathaniel Carson had brought some sort of infestation upon the settlement, that all his children

FICTION FILE 1

SP SOMETOW

Horror, science fiction and historical writer SP Somtow gives FEAR's John Gilbert a taste of his new cult novel *Moon Dance*, waxes lyrical over his comedy horror film *The Laughing Dead*, and reveals details of his long-awaited sequel to the cult classic, *Vampire Junction*.

must have it, therefore. If there *was* a disease I have no doubt it was a result of 'sepsis'. A kind of poisoning of the local water through the occasional emptying into it of some kind of pathological microorganisms — the beginnings of the taint of Clear Lake. But it's only a guess on my part — based simply on the fact that an old underground septic tunnel, one of the town's first sewers, really, collided with a stream that feeds into the present lake.

But in that first settlement, the taint was clearly on the Carson family themselves.

They gathered up the children and put them in the shack that served as a stable at the edge of the goat dance. They tied their hands behind their backs. They locked them in. The ground was still wet, but the townsfolk threw dry cords of wood all around the shack. They blocked up the entrances and windows with hay.

And those people...

They set it on fire.

With those children inside, ages three to twelve. All crying for help, screaming, Worthy Houston describes the scene almost sadistically. He keeps claiming in his diary that his writing is word for word the way his father described the event — his father was a little boy when it happened.

The oldest Carson boy, Andrew, ran through the burning hay into the mob, his entire body on fire, trying to make it to safety.

But Worthy's own grandfather, Cyrus, beat Andrew Carson over the head with a club and the boy died.

The Carson name died that night in Pontefract, the Old Pontefract.

And before dawn, the entire village was on fire, and that fire was blamed on the Indians — there had been attacks on other towns in the valley, so the settlers attributed this destruction to the various warring tribes. That spring, the Indian Massacre of 1755 was launched in southwestern Virginia. This coincided nicely with the French and Indian War that was brewing over the hills. Scapegoats were plentiful then.

But of course, it was guilt that set the fire — guilt over what an entire community had done to those Carson children. They must've been out of their minds from finding their own children dead.

I believe they set their own homes on fire as a means of absolution.

This place, this side of the lake, had acquired a 'taint'.

Somtow Sucharitkul, or SP Somtow as he's better known to his fans, claims that his mother's lust for horror films set him on the path to writing the classic *Vampire Junction* and his new novel, *Moon Dance*. 'My mother would take me to these films, many times, so I grew up surrounded by horror. But I didn't start writing until quite late in life. I was about 25.'

Born in Thailand and educated at Eton and Cambridge, this naturalised American describes his early initiation into the world of horror as a 'Freudian thing', linked as it is with his mother; and, strangely enough, his two cult horror novels are based on feuding psychological theories. 'My first horror novel was a Jungian vampire novel and *Moon Dance* is a Freudian werewolf novel. I'm going through each of the classic horror images and coupling them with different psychiatric disciplines. The Gestalt zombie novel can't be far behind. I am actually working on that.'

The prolific Mr Somtow has covered zombies before, when he directed a group of fellow horror writers in the horror/comedy film *The Laughing Dead* (see FEAR Issue 8 for a set report). His move into this medium occurred through happenstance, when he urged a friend to make a low budget horror movie. 'Max mortgaged his house and financed the film with it.'

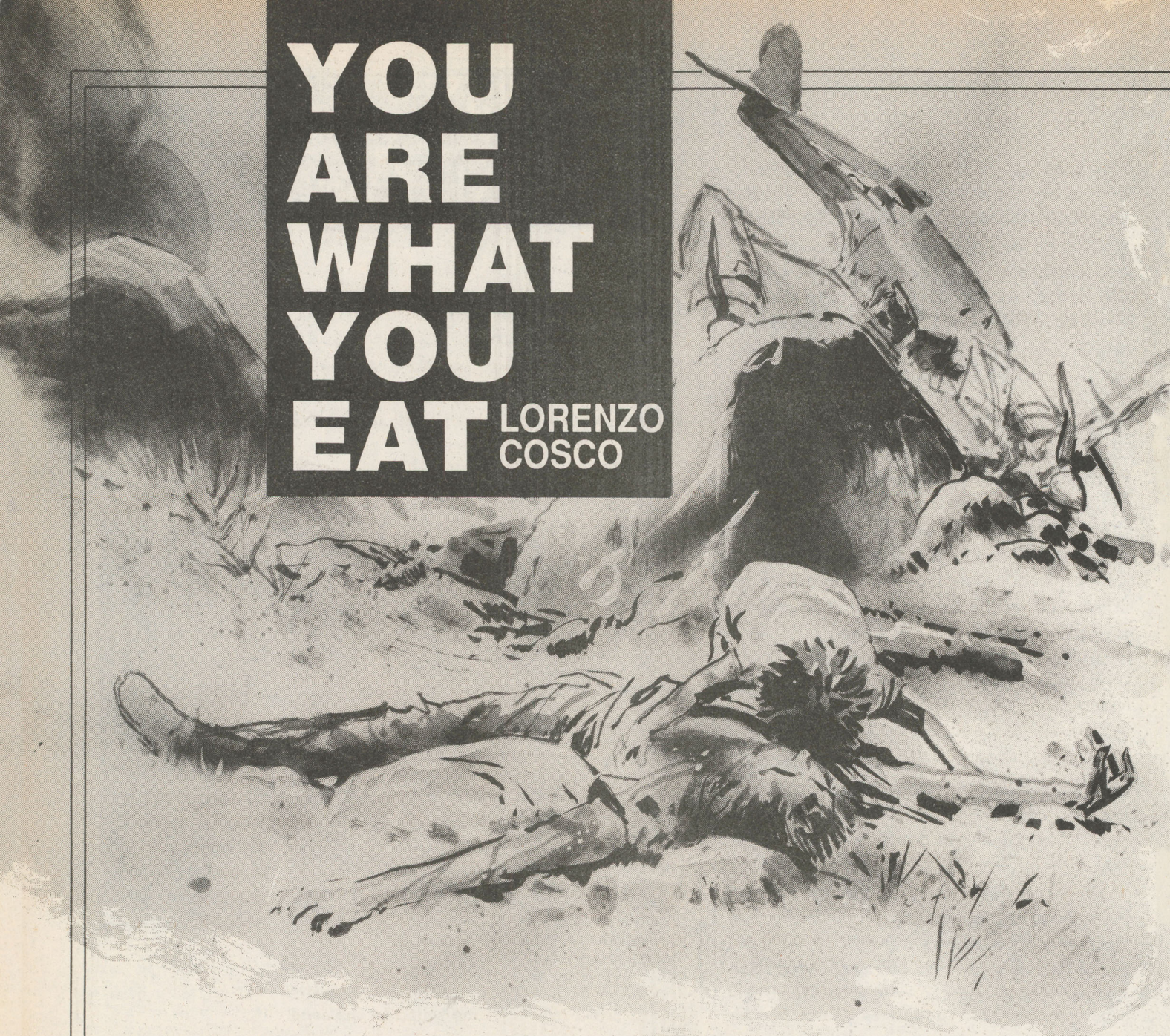
Like all low budget films, its success now depends on a distributor, and the author has had more luck with the movie's release abroad than in America. You know what they say about a prophet in his own country? 'It has been released in a number of European territories and in Japan. We just had the London premiere, at Splatterfest, which was an astonishing success. They were die-hard horror fans, so they cheered and hollered all the way through it.'

Despite the response to the movie, Somtow is still regarded as 'that cult writer' within the horror genre, but he's tried everything to



dispel the myth. 'When Berkley books bought *Vampire Junction* they said, 'You've really got to have a more pronounceable name or we can't make you a star. Make your name pronounceable and we'll make you into a star. Well I did; they didn't.'

Moon Dance (Tor, hardback) with its battle between clans of European and American Indian werewolves has, however, thrust him further into the limelight, as have his two new film projects, one of which is a 'Jack The Ripper-Mummy-Western'. He's also working on three books: 'Two of them are horror novels, one of them reads a bit like a dark fantasy, but it's really science fiction; it's coming out from Avon Books. I'm also doing the book version of *The Laughing Dead* which is really different from the film. And the third thing I'm working on, which I've just started, is the long-awaited sequel to *Vampire Junction*. It begins at a nationally televised Timmy Valentine Look-alike Contest and ends up in the jungles of Borneo. It incorporates a lot of the parts of Timmy Valentine's history that were only alluded to in passing in the book.'



YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

LORENZO
COSCO

It was the warm summer sun that decided it. The silky sheets of heat caressing his skin on the balcony. Not hot enough to stifle as it sometimes was, but nice enough to walk in. Or fly in. He looked across the expanse of land stretching to the hazy horizon; at the plush, well-ordered gardens, the ornamental fountain, its faint splish-splash tinkling in the distance like a gentle trill from a piano-concerto and, far to the left, the glinting fuselage of his private plane, sitting patiently at the near end of the runway. He'd worked hard for that. Grafted, and fought all comers until finally his accountant had nodded the okay. That moment had given him more pleasure than even his most intense orgasm.

Orgasm.

He thought of Darlene, his ex-wife. The plane

had rendered him more joy than that bitch ever had. The memory of her sour face, her ever-complaining voice made him grip the gleaming white wood of the balcony handrail in anger. You can give a woman everything and she'll still pounce, like a ravenous tiger, upon any ill-judged word or look, she'll gouge pieces of your soul with her claws over the slightest, pettiest, most infantile, least significant...

His mind slammed shut like a door in a gale; it was a subconscious reflex he'd developed over the years to prevent his bitterness taking over from positive thought. Even now, she had the power to inflame his deep, barely-repressed resentment. He tipped his head back and took a long, slow draught of the dry air, filling his lungs to capacity before expelling it through pursed lips, and with it exorcising all malevolent emo-

tion. This was to be Joe's day, and nothing was going to spoil it. These few days of custody during the school holidays would not be ruined by dwelling on the past.

If he had anything to thank Darlene for, it was Joe. Now six years old, the boy was his pride and joy. In fact sometimes it was only the thought of providing for his son that kept him going, especially when tricky decisions needed to be made for the Company.

A noise drew his attention indoors. Joe was up. Now he'd tell him that their flight into the desert was definitely on.



The propeller beat the air like a giant whisk, noisily churning the atmosphere into a whirlpool of excitement. Joe sat strapped into his seat grinning uncontrollably, his mop of unkempt, brown curly hair blown back by the artificial breeze forcing its way through the open window. Then, with a press of the accelerator, the plane moved off, zooming into the air like a soaring hope. Only the rattling protestations of the loose bolt in the engine-cowling marred a perfect scene.



They wore their shades as token resistance to the sharp sunlight as expertly he piloted the aircraft out over the parched ground far below. The drought-stricken, dead trees and the arid acres of sand bore testament to the area's name. Not for nothing was the place known as Death Valley.

'How far are we going, Dad?'

'As far as we want to.'

'Can we go over those mountains?' Joe pointed to the jagged hills in the distance.

'Sure.'

He pulled the joystick back and piled on the revs to climb. Except the machine didn't climb. Its climbing days were done. A loud crack echoed through the cockpit like a sudden pistol shot, and before anything could be done the aircraft started its long descent, the ground appearing to close at an alarming rate. Like a bagged partridge, the plane plummeted to earth, the ethereal symphony of its stuttering engines accompanied by two screaming voices.



He groaned. Or at least he thought he did. His

ears picked up no sound. Perhaps there was no brain-space left for hearing. Perhaps the pain had taken up every cell. He tried to move his arms. Nothing. His legs. Nothing. His head. A fraction, before the agony taunted him into giving up. Only his eyelids had mobility, and even they were almost stuck together. He didn't need many of those brain cells to work out that congealed blood was doing a passable impersonation of glue. Trying to ignore the crushing rack of withering torture, he concentrated on opening his eyes to more than a pair of narrow slits.

It was dark, but the sun was just beginning its eternal daylight shift far on the horizon. He had no idea how long he'd been lying there.

At the limit of his vision a shaft of dawn radiance glinted on a hulk of twisted metal, causing his weak eyes to send searing messages to his brain. The sudden exacerbation of agony made his back arch.

The plane. He'd been thrown through the windshield. That explained the bloodied face. And the broken bones.

Joe.

His feeling of abject helplessness became more acute when he thought of his son possibly lying in the same position, racked with pain and unable to move as the sun rose steadfastly to continue its frying of the Earth's surface.

Maybe he was dead. They could have been here for days.

He was reflecting on this, dredging up blurred images of what had happened, when his reverie was disturbed by a scraping sound in the sand close behind him. His heart, already working overtime against the pain, increased its pace twofold. Whatever was approaching had him at its mercy. All he could do was lie there like a turkey on a butcher's slab.

The noise came closer. And closer.

He had a sudden mental image of a crocodile stalking. A crocodile? he thought, half-laughing. In Death Valley? Am I delirious, or what?

It was almost touching his head now, slithering in a relentless rhythm.

A snake?

His dulled senses became alert for the slightest hint of a hiss or rattle.

And then he saw it. The sleeve. The familiar sleeve of a shirt he'd bought for his son a week before. Twelve dollars fifty. Joe was crawling by, dragging a blood-soaked leg in his wake.

Relief didn't come into it. Joe was alive! And mobile. He saw the back of the boy's skull as he

"Only the rattling protestations of the loose bolt in the engine-cowling marred a perfect scene"

pulled himself past, digging his fingers into the dusty, loose sand. A red mulch spread from his skull almost down to his waistline, the trickle of bright crimson indicating its source at a six-inch long gash flapping away like an open envelope.

He tried to speak, but nothing would come out. All he could do was hope that Joe would turn around and see that his father was awake and, more important, alive.

But Joe didn't seem interested in his welfare. Instead, he ploughed his way over to where his father's arm was resting and bent down.

What the... ?

It took every ounce of courage, but he had to know what was happening. Grimacing with inner torment, his whole body on fire, he turned his head a fraction more than it wanted to go.

And then wished he hadn't.

His mind whirled with the horror of what he saw. Joe was crouched down and... it had to be a dream, a nightmare... Joe was... Please God, let me wake up...

Joe bent over his father's arm. Eating. Gnawing at the bulbous, glass-scarred, lacerated flesh. And worse, there were bite-marks plainly obvious all the way up the arm, jagged-edged caves of raw meat torn open by sharp teeth.

How long had this been going on?

Some of the craters had traces of green pus along their rims. It could've been days and days. Nothing stayed fresh in this heat for long.

He tried to move his son's feast away, but only succeeded in making the limb twitch. Joe looked up from his repast, showing his face to his father for the first time. Like a madman, his eyes were ablaze from some inner source. He was chewing a succulent mouthful, ignoring the bloody sinews hanging from his bottom lip.

'Hello Food-man,' Joe said pleasantly, spitting out a spray of masticated meat and skin before doubling over once more to continue, seeming to ignore any trauma induced by his actions.

And trauma was being induced. In spades. Unable to move, the only respite from the dread vista was to close his eyes firmly and risk them being stuck together.

So he watched, sick with horror and despair as Joe took his fill.



He lay there watching the sun rise once more. Three days he'd survived. Three days of being the only food source. Three days of being the main

course. Three days of lying there, as his arm was eaten away.

Parts of the bone were showing now and some insects had joined in the banquet. He was growing weaker. Loss of blood was at last taking its blessed toll.

The man who had everything a person could wish for was praying every minute for death.

Soon Joe would appear, ploughing a well-worn path through the sand towards breakfast. He would wish the Food-man a good morning before ravenously getting stuck in, picking off the insects first and studiously avoiding the gangrenous areas.

He heard the slithering.

Why doesn't anybody come? Someone should be out looking. His son needed help, he was obviously deranged. The crash, the cut head, the loss of blood, lack of food, something had triggered him off.

Joe came closer.

His father was past self-pity now. All he wanted was a merciful death. An escape.

Joe appeared, scanning the arm for an untainted section of flesh.

Not for the first time, Father cried, a tear forcing its way through the duct, a dreg of valuable body-moisture leaving forever. Joe saw it and smiled.

In his ever-weakening state, Father thought for a second that his son was going to kiss him and felt a glimmer of emotional warmth deep inside. But it was shortlived. Joe leaned over and licked the tear, savouring its saltiness. He grinned.

'Thank you Food-man.'

And then his teeth tore into his father's cheek, ripping the stubbly skin away in an attempt to get at more of the tasty liquid, causing the remaining amount of blood to pump freely through the new outlet, making a red oasis next to his face.

The morning sun dimmed as his life flooded away. He felt himself slipping into eternal sleep. And it felt good. He watched as Joe chewed and spat out a section of his features.

Something sprang to mind suddenly. He was dying that his son might live. Joe was taking all he had left to offer. Joe was helping himself to what he considered his by right.

As the world started to swim and darkness closed like a sepulchre door, he had a final thought.

The kid was just like his mother.



LORENZO COSCO is 34 years old and lives near Telford in Shropshire. His short story, *You Are What You Eat*, is his first published fiction. He is currently working on a novel/film script entitled *The Chameleon*.

"There were bite-marks plainly obvious all the way up the arm, jagged-edged caves of raw meat torn open by sharp teeth"

No idea can succeed except at the expense of sacrifices; no one ever escapes without a stain from the struggle of life.

Renan

SACRIFICES

By F W Steel



My knife was performing its final atrocity, the deftly wielded blade delicately poised to peel back the flesh, to lay bare its inner secrets, when the doorbell rang.

Such was my concentration, my total absorption in the act of slaughter, that the sudden unwelcome intrusion — rapping as it did the breathless silence around me — cut through me like a chainsaw, metal teeth scraping my nerve-endings raw. And in that one exquisite moment of discovery — the spurting surge of adrenalin as the pulses race and the heart triple-beats — the incredible jolt to my system, coming as it did like a lightning-bolt, carried me to the very pinnacle of a pleasure so intense that it was almost sexual: the ultimate orgasmic high.

A hair's breath behind, my body succumbed to its fine-tuning, betrayed by the specious messages speeding along neural pathways, and my hand danced a spastic jig orchestrated by my own rogue reflexes. Momentarily beyond my control — jerked into life by the stinging lash of the

strident bell — the knife twitched spasmodically, the gleaming blade shearing through pale flesh, the gaping rent a travesty of the neat incision I had intended to produce.

Shit! If Jack the Ripper had been distracted at such a crucial moment — if, in the consummation of his unholy desires he had been discovered by some unwitting voyeur — his scalpel, I had little doubt, would have practised some new and unexpected surgery on the intruder.

A murderous urge to inflict similar misfortunes on whoever had chosen to distract me from my current preoccupation flared through me, hot as magma, and my fingers involuntarily tightened around the knife's polished handle. Then the feeling diminished — anger and frustration quenched in the cooling balm of reason — and I let the knife slip from my grasp and reached, instead, for a crumpled rag.

It took a full twenty seconds to cleanse my hands of the sticky residue of my labours — it would not do to greet my visitor, unwelcome as he or she was, red-handed — before I went to

'The knife twitched spasmodically, the gleaming blade shearing through pale flesh'

'The painting writhed with murderous mayhem and acts of unspeakable savagery'

silence the persistent summons.

'I hope this is worth it!' I snapped testily as I wrenched open the door.

My caller, smartly dressed, sombre, a man of indeterminate age and profession, coolly appraised me, his gaze finally lingering on my hands. Despite my ministrations, spider-webs of crimson still etched the life and fate lines of my palms.

'I see I've caught you at work,' he observed wryly in accented, but flawless, English. 'May I come in?'

'It's a little... inconvenient,' I said tautly. The creative juices which fuelled my work, now momentarily stanchied, were beginning to cool and curdle, denied an outlet.

'I believe that you will find it to your advantage, Monsieur — or should I say *Mister?* — Waxman.'

'How do you know who I am?' I said sharply. 'More to the point, how did you find me here?' Here was Jean-Claude's apartment, situated just off the Boulevard Saint Michel, which I was occupying, rent free, for a three months working 'holiday'. That anyone knew I was here — much less *who* I was — presented a double intrigue.

'My employer is a person of some influence,' he replied, as if it explained everything at a stroke. 'He has eyes and ears everywhere.'

For one perilous instant my imagination — robbed of its prime means of expression — taunted me with a bizarre vision of his all-seeing, all-hearing employer, his corpulent body implanted with auditory and ocular orifices: a hundred blinking eyes embedded in wrinkled flesh, a hundred fleshy appendages protruding from his porcine torso...

And then I exorcised the spectre and said: 'You'd better come in.'



He invested a few moments in a study of my latest creation — even marred by the unsightly gash slashing my victim's navel, my artwork still possessed a certain raw power — while toying with the palette knife I used for some of my more expressive works. 'This, I take it, is your most recent canvas?' he mused, tapping the still wet paint with the tip of the blade. *Was that a trace of disdain I detected?*

'**T**errorclaw,' I said defensively. It was to be the cover art for James Krane's latest pulp nail-biter, another clotted-blood saga of mar-

itime horror in the same vein as his previous paperback success, *Octopoid*. Modesty aside, I attributed the impact that this particular addition to the ranks of eco-horror had made on the bestseller lists to my own accomplishments on the cover. I had also supplied the somewhat over-ripe artwork for the inevitable sequel which had slithered in its wake, *Octopoid Unleashed*. 'From fathomless depths the horror returns', read the blurb embellishing the second of his tentacled terrors.

To my intense irritation my visitor wandered through the apartment as if he held the lease in his own name, scrutinising the progeny of my creative endeavours. In truth, it had been a productive few weeks, my output had been prolific. In addition to the *Terrorclaw* cover, I had also completed the artwork for Harry Andrew Krantz's *Night-Spawn* trilogy — *Night-Spawn: The Devouring*, *Night-Spawn 2: The Consuming* and *Night-Spawn 3: The Feasting* and I had heard that there was the possibility of a fourth in the pipeline, *Night-Spawn 4* (as a perverse joke I had thought of suggesting to his agent that he entitle his latest gastronomic horror *The Enema*, but self-preservation had prevented me). The roughs for Colin Jordan Smith's *magnum opus*, *Salem Revisited*, littered the work surfaces, and half-finished sketches for Hunter Jackson's *Demonwood Rising* series were tacked to the walls.

'You appear to have been keeping yourself gainfully occupied during these last few weeks,' my visitor observed.

'It keeps the wolf from the door,' I admitted. I could have added that this sort of work — my bread-and-butter — was somewhat less than lucrative: ginger-beer money which was barely sufficient to support my champagne tastes.

'All very interesting,' he ventured, 'but it's a great pity that talent such as yours should be squandered on such trifles.'

Stung by his criticism, I said: 'Admittedly, it's not great art, but I happen to like it.'

He sniffed dismissively. 'Trash,' he said bluntly. 'Extremely accomplished trash, I hasten to add, but trash nevertheless. Your artistic gifts could be put to far better use... which is precisely why I am here. I have an offer — how do they put it in your country? — which you cannot refuse.'

'Not interested,' I replied, still nettled.

'Please hear me out before you elect to kill off the Golden Goose,' he suggested quite reasonably. 'We — that is, my employer and myself — have

long been admirers of your work. Rather, should I say, of your potential, since your portfolio so far hardly does justice to your undoubted talent. My employer wishes to secure your services — for a handsome fee, I would add — and provide you with the opportunity of channelling your energies into something far more fulfilling. Something that will bring a new dimension to your work, open up new avenues... *Interested?*

'Flattery won't buy me.' A small lie. Like any artist, I craved a modicum of recognition — and a smattering of flattery leavened with the promise of adequate remuneration was more than sufficient to capture my interest. 'How much did you have in mind?'

'How does twenty-five thousand dollars, American, sound to you, Mr Waxman? That's about a hundred and sixty-six thousand French francs. Plus a special bonus on completion of the work.'

'I wouldn't sell my soul for a dollar less,' I said, gambling on the generosity of my prospective sponsor. 'I'd be more interested for, say, thirty thousand?'

What price life without a few risks?

My visitor, to his credit, was unperturbed. 'We have a deal then?'

'You've just bought yourself an artist,' I informed him.



'The particular canvas my employer wishes to commission is to be very special,' my surrogate benefactor had announced once the bargain had been struck. 'There are certain specific conditions which must be adhered to with regard to the subject matter — and, I must warn you, it will require your fullest commitment. In return, you will not only receive the figure that we have agreed on — plus a little extra — but also all of the materials you require. These will be supplied by my employer so that you may begin immediately. You have precisely two months in which to complete your commission.'

And he was true to his word, for the very next day I was in receipt of a consignment of paints of every conceivable hue, plus a stretched and primed canvas of impressive proportions — it was, at a conservative estimate, nine feet by six feet — and an array of silken brushes, thinners and other good things, a Pandora's box of artist's materials: the tools of my trade. I had a devil of a job setting the canvas

up, it entirely dominated that part of the apartment which I had taken over as my studio, and it was not just its size which proved problematic. The light angling in from the huge picture window had to be perfect if my task was to be accomplished with the degree of precision stipulated in our contract. Which leads me to the major problem I was confronted with: the subject.

As if to match the size of the task to that of the canvas and the agreed fee, D'Estang, my employer's envoy, had ensured that I would earn every cent's worth by establishing the ground rules as soon as he had apprised me of the subject: the Gates of Hell. My instructions were detailed and exacting, and I was to follow them to the letter.

'Before you apply brush to canvas,' he informed me, 'you must study these particular paintings in detail and absorb their very essence. In terms of scale, content and effect they will form the basis of your own conceptualisation of the subject, you understand? Your own work must capture their distinctive qualities, their essential features: it must mirror the intensity of vision which each of these artists has achieved. It must be, if you will, a distillation of all that they contain. Is that clear?'

He handed me the pictures which would, if I had read him correctly, form the blue print for my work. They were all, without exception, paintings which I had previously culled for nuggets of inspiration: dark and brooding, both in intent and execution. There was *Dulle Grete*, Brueghel the Elder's stark and horrific allegory of war, a scene of nightmarish imagination depicting Mad Meg, an armoured harridan brandishing a sword, cutting a swathe through a hellish landscape and inciting madness and destruction on every side. The painting writhed with murderous mayhem and acts of unspeakable savagery: a world in chaos populated with imps and monstrous fish, and presided over by the jaws of Hell. In similar fashion, Hieronymus Bosch's personal visions of purgatory — rendered in shades of ochre, brown and orange as befitted the subject — portrayed souls in perpetual torment, bodies torn, burnt, dismembered, branded, abused and abased by a menagerie of cavorting demons wielding whips and pikes and all manner of edged weapons. Such was the power of these paintings — from *Hell* to *The Seven Deadly Sins* to the rendition of Lucifer's dark domain in the triptych *The Garden Of Earthly Delights* — that you could almost taste the carnage: the bitter

'Satan sat at my elbow while I worked'

**'There is
real menace
here, my
friend, an
atmosphere
of intense
evil'**

ashes of death and destruction, the coppery taint of freshly spilt blood, the sulphurous fumes of fire and brimstone.

There were others: Austin Osman Spare's darkly poetic attempts to map the shadowy terrain of nightmare and the elemental forces which lurked there, behind the veil; Max Ernst's *The Eyes Of Silence* with its grim, surrealist imagery; Yves Tanguy's weirdly-lit prehistoric dreamscapes, barren but for the monstrosities inhabiting them.

All in their way striking, strangely prophetic, intense and disturbing.

'Absorb them,' D'Estang advised. 'Breathe deep of their mysteries and discover their hidden truths. Use them as a mirror to hold up to your own work. Translate their revelations into your particular style and make them your own. Do you think you can manage it?'

My eyes scanned the reproductions while my mind grappled with the larger problems, the broader perspective. 'I'll need to work at it,' I said finally. 'But thirty grand is a lot of juice; it should lubricate the creative cogs nicely.'



Satan sat at my elbow while I worked.

His slitted amber eyes viewed my trials and frustrations with casual indifference and a regal aloofness, a disconcerting trait of felines the world over.

I followed D'Estang's instructions scrupulously, studying the paintings in their different aspects, immersing myself in their style, form and content, striving to see how I could transmute a variety of nuances into a synthesis of styles in order to create a single unified vision. No easy task, but I worked at it relentlessly, chewing it over in my mind as a dog chews at a piece of gristly meat, gradually worrying it into a vaguely acceptable shape, a more palatable texture.

It took four days to reach this stage; two more to conceive a viable construct, an outline framework which could be developed further; an additional day to bring it into sharper focus.

Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* provided the central motif. A still from the 1925 film suggested an image large enough to explore the ideas I was conceiving, a tapestry broad enough to embrace the concepts I was nurturing. The black-and-white photograph showed a factory of fabulous proportions, a futuristic colossus of awesome

symmetry, a clanking, steam-breathing behemoth wreathed in smoke and fumes, balefully dominating the scene like some mechanical monster, some heathen Moloch. In the foreground — dwarfed into insignificance by the towering dimensions of the beast — a milling crowd of humans swarmed around its lower reaches like teeming black beetles: human fodder to feed the metallic guts of this voracious beast.

It was perfect. The scale was grandiose, the monumental effect I wanted to create encompassed within that one still. It was exactly the outline I needed.

It had taken six days to arrive at this juncture: six days to reach the very beginning. On the seventh, I began in earnest.



In addition to the overall effect I had to contrive, D'Estang had insisted on certain other features which would have to be incorporated; had, indeed, provided me with everything I would need in order to accomplish this. Manuscripts and texts, ancient and modern, were scattered throughout the studio in random disarray, piled high in corners, curled over the coffee table, littering the floor. Many, I suspected, were first editions, almost beyond price; others — their covers scarred and torn, their pages wrinkled and stained — interred the secrets of long dead races, an ancient wisdom in their mildewed leaves.

I was to draw inspiration from these texts, D'Estang explained. More — I was to ensure that certain specifically defined elements were worked into the painting. These he painstakingly marked with torn strips of paper inserted at the appropriate place; they protruded like lolling tongues from bone-dry mouths.

It was an enormously complex task he had presented me with. Each of the strictly prescribed elements had to be woven into the whole to form a seamless tapestry, and the steps I took towards Hell's Gates ran through some pretty strange and tortuous country. What I was creating, it appeared, was a map which spanned the Age of Magic, a visual chronicle charting the development of necromancy, demonology and eldritch occult practices from the dawn of recorded time. Hieroglyphics from the Egyptian *Book Of The Dead* and magical symbols from the *Book Of Spirits* intermingled with Cabalistic signs from the ancient Grimoires — the spellbooks of medieval magicians and wizards — and words of

power from the sixth and seventh *Book of Moses*.

Illustrations from the 1801 edition of Francis Barrett's *The Magus* and Collin de Plancy's *Dictionnaire Infernal* provided a host of devils and demons to stand as sentinels at the Gates. The works of Aleister Crowley — notorious black magician and self-styled 'Great Beast' — Gerald Gardner and Alex Sanders, both practitioners of witchcraft, were plundered for further incantations and mystic runes.

Making sense of such disparate parts — attempting to marry the traditions of Oriental and Eastern magic with those of the West — was like trying to create a recognisable picture with a hundred mismatched pieces from a dozen jigsaw puzzles.

I had rapidly lost all sense of time. I worked and slept — a few hours snatched here and there — and worked again. When I thought to eat, I shared a croissant or two with the pigeons congregating on the balcony; but often as not it was Satan who reminded me of my responsibilities, oiling and twining around my legs to let me know he was hungry.

But the painting was all that really mattered. It assumed the stature of a one-eyed Cyclops, hypnotising me with the single orb of its being, channelling my energies towards a single point. I was held in its thrall.

It was only when D'Estang next paid me a visit, three — or was it four? — weeks after our first meeting, that I became fully aware of the degree to which I had succumbed to self-neglect. I was haggard and lethargic, my body wearied by overwork and lack of sleep, my spirits blunted by self-imposed isolation. It was understandable, I suppose, that I should lash out at him verbally when he chose to remark on the apparently slow progress I was making.

'Hell fire!' I railed savagely. 'I haven't slept in two nights, haven't showered in a week! Christ! I can't even remember when I last had a proper meal!'

'No need for petty blasphemies, Mr Waxman,' he said mildly. 'You are being well paid for your work. However,' he relented, 'I can see that you require something more. Anything you need, Mr Waxman, and it shall be yours. Just tell me what you desire.'

'A shower, a square meal, clean underwear — a few of life's basic commodities. I have fairly simple tastes, D'Estang... I'd like to eat, grab a few hours sleep... is that too much to ask?'

He smiled knowingly. 'Leave it with me, Mr

Waxman. I am sure that we can meet with such modest demands.'

When he left, at last, the Gates of Hell beckoned.



The doorbell presaged the sealing of D'Estang's promise.

He was accompanied by a slight, waif-like creature, a Eurasian beauty with exquisitely chiselled features, high cheekbones and almond-shaped eyes with more than a hint of sensuality smoking behind the darkly mirrored irises. She had about her an aura of other-worldliness — a transparent, oriental tranquillity subtly blended with a bamboo-like resilience, a gentle subservience melded with ice and fire.

'Evangeline will attend to your needs, Mr Waxman. She will be there when you need her and be inconspicuous while you work. She will release you from the everyday drudgery of existence. Her presence will allow you to devote one hundred and ten percent of your energies to your work. The canvas must become your *raison d'être*, Mr Waxman, your entire world...'

And, indeed, it had, for the next thing of which I was aware, many hours later, was Evangeline gently tugging my sleeve, leading me away from the painting which had come to dominate my existence.

'M'sieu should rest now,' she quietly urged. 'You must build up your strength.'

And she softly smothered my resistance. The meal she had prepared reanimated an appetite which had been sorely neglected. Afterwards, luxuriating in warm, sudded water, she bathed me from the tips of my hair follicles to the soles of my feet; and having banished the lethargy which had weighed me down like a dead skin and aroused in me other desires I had sublimated through my work, she proceeded to satisfy them in more intimate and inventive ways, using her own special magic.

In the morning, in the aftermath of a full night's sexual athletics which should have left me physically drained and creatively impotent, I awoke with a preternatural vigour coursing through my veins and a resurrection of the spirit firing my artistic batteries. Evangeline completed this transformation by taking a pair of scissors to my unkempt hair, and then tidily brushed up the trimmings while I shaved. When, in haste,

FRANK STEEL was born in Cumbria and now lives and works in the Midlands. His first excursion into the pages of **FEAR** was with *Hosts* (Issue 12), a psychological horror tale of modern-day werewolves. *Sacrifices*, his second story to be published, ventures into the realms of occult terror.

'My world had become a nine-by-six landscape inhabited by demons, and I was now a part of it for all eternity'

'What price salvation now, when my body had provided its own small betrayals?'

I nicked myself with the cut-throat which was Jean-Claude's preferred shaving kit, she staunched the flow of blood, gently dabbing at it and expertly mopping it up with a bathroom sponge, then kissed the wound to take away the sting.

'I see that M'sieu is as red-blooded in the flesh as he is in the bedroom,' she said with feigned coyness, and whoever my phantom benefactor was I had cause enough silently to sing his praises for the gift of my new companion. She possessed an uncanny awareness of my needs, both physical and emotional, and my work progressed with a renewed intensity and rejuvenated power.

When, some days later, Jean-Claude dropped in to pick up some things — a casual stop over as he was en route to Madrid — he viewed my endeavours with a mixture of revelatory awe and undisguised dismay.

'You know, Phillippe, I have never seen such passion, such fire in your work before. It is — how can I say this without causing offence? — disturbing... It has a darkness to it, a — a —'

'*A je ne sais quoi?*' I supplied, joking.

'No,' he said sharply, his expression serious. 'What I see in this painting is too grim, too turbulent to lighten with humorous words. There is real menace here, my friend, an atmosphere of intense evil.'

'But it's the best I've ever produced,' I objected. 'Can't you see that? Sometimes, I swear, it's almost as if I'm tapping into some cosmic consciousness, a pool of ideas — and I'm the lightning conductor which earths it, captures it on canvas.'

'Well, Phillippe, wherever you are getting your ideas from, I would have a care. We have a saying in my country: '*A force de peindre le diable sur les murs, il finit par apparaître en personne*'. If I was you, I would not take it lightly.'

I dismissed his comments out of hand, but later, standing before the painted horrors I had created, the faint light of evening casting deeper shadows over the nightmarish scene, dipping it in the blood of a fiery sunset, his words surfaced like rapacious sharks, their sickle jaws clamping down on my composure and tearing apart my peace of mind with razor teeth.

If I was to have been honest with myself, the old French proverb he had quoted had set up a resonance which was as malignant as it was unexpected: it bit deeper than I would have imagined possible.

Roughly translated, the proverb went: 'If you

keep painting the devil on the walls, he will by and by appear to you in person...'



Time became fluid. Hours slipped through my fingers, unnoticed, days blurred, one into another. The studio was my world now; it existed in its own dreamless sleep, divorced from any intrusive realities, cushioned in the eye of the storm.

In no longer dined with the pigeons: they had long since flown. Satan, too, had followed their retreat, renouncing his vigil and slinking off in search of other diversions. Only Evangeline remained constant... only she and, of course, the painting.

As it grew, so it took on an ethereal form and magnitude of, and beyond, itself; an immensity which was more than merely the sum of its constituent parts. No longer was it just oil on canvas; that barrier had long been breached. Now it possessed a virulence that was all its own, a mutation of the flat surfaces which transformed form and colour into something more than mere artifice. There was, within it, a vital stirring like bacteria a-swarm in a life-inducing broth. The thick paint seemed to find its own contours, to seek out its own place in the scale of things, to flow with its own currents.

Ideas fermented, took shape, thrived and multiplied, each brush-stroke a kiss of life, each splash of paint the germ of creation. I felt its vibrancy through my brush, smelt its rich, fecund odours, tasted its potency.

It was nearing completion: I could sense its birth-pangs thrumming in the air.

Of what consequence were sleep and dreams and far-flung realities? They were all as one now. I painted with a frenzy that was light years beyond my first tentative daubings, each stroke a symphony in the making, each lick of paint a cosmic chorus.

I dreamed that D'Estang once drew me from my reverie, as unwilling as a snail from its shell, and smoothed over my complaints with bland compliments.

'My employer has a small indulgence he would ask of you,' this rapist of dreams purred. 'He would take it as a personal favour if you could oblige him in this matter. Instead of the usual artist's scrawl, he would prefer a signature of a more intimate kind: a likeness of yourself cunningly crafted into your own masterpiece.'

Such a small favour: and, in its own way, a

FICTION FILE 2

NICHOLAS ROYLE

singular honour, a tiny stab at immortality. How could I refuse?

On a whim, I gave myself a cameo role as the victim on a pagan altar, a small sacrifice to the Powers of Darkness. A touching irony, I thought. Hadn't I been after all, a willing victim to this extravagant creation these past few months? My world had become a nine-by-six landscape inhabited by demons, and I was now a part of it for all eternity.



I came half-awake dreaming that Evangeline was adding her own delicate touches to the painting. In my dream she was clothed in flame, a fire princess of inordinate blazing beauty. That was the baited hook which drew me to the brink of awareness.

The apartment was bathed in blood, awash with fire.

No dream this, my senses cautioned, but they played me for a fool. Though acrid fumes invaded the apartment, the air was iced; though leaping flames painted the studio walls there was no corresponding crackle, no hiss and spit of blistering wood. Only the slow, tumultuous thunder of rock grating against rock, the sound of huge gates being ponderously pushed open...

Why, then, with such horrors abroad, was my body robbed of all volition? Why were my limbs paralysed, as if pinioned? Why did the soft contours of my mattress which once had moulded itself to my frame now push harsh, unyielding knuckles against my spine and steep my body in a biting Arctic chill?

There was but one answer. I had the lore of the ancients at my fingertips; my reading had equipped me with the knowledge of centuries, the arcane secrets of magicians and magic-workers through the ages...

And what little it took to ensnare one with spells! A few wisps of hair, a drop of blood, a smear of semen... A few bodily fluids, so casually exchanged, so carelessly spilled... And all so remarkably potent in the casting of spells and weaving of enchantments!

What price salvation now when my own body had provided its own small betrayals?

What hope of absolution with Hell's portals thrown wide and Armageddon in the offing?

What chance of silence with my screams already rebounding from the corridors of infinity, reaching out for Hell-born eternity...

Nicholas Royle is Britain's most successful young writer of short horror fiction, but his rapid advance as an author in what some publishers dismiss as a dying medium provides no assurance that he will make it as a novelist or screenplay writer. Is he living proof that brand name and packaging are more important to publishers than a writer's skill? John Gilbert discovers some disappointing truths.

The short story is a dying art form, according to authors who make their money from the more lucrative field of novel writing. After all, there are few fiction magazines on the market and publishers prefer bestselling blockbusters to the scanty sales generated by anthologies — no matter how big the names on the covers.

But there are still some writers of short fiction who are not only good at what they do, but also enjoy their work. North London based writer Nicholas Royle, whose fiction has appeared in issues one and four of **FEAR**, is one of them. 'I get enjoyment out of writing short stories because it takes less time, and I've got very little time because I've got a full time job. The last thing I feel like doing at the end of the boring day is coming home, sitting at a desk and writing. A short story I can do in two weeks, and so I've soon finished it and can take a look at it and think, 'That's good', or, 'That needs more work'.

'A novel obviously takes much longer; for me it probably takes longer than for most people. It took me a year to write *Counterparts* which is a novel, albeit an unsold one, and so far it's taken me almost a year working on the second one called *Saxophone Dreams*.


'Whereas I like writing a story and finishing it, writing a novel is more exciting in a different way because it's continually changing. You have an initial idea, you start working on it and you bring in new strands, and different ideas start to merge together and you find it's changed from your original conception.'

'I've had some trouble selling *Counterparts*, largely because it's, apparently, not commercial. A lot of it is set in Eastern Europe; this puts people off. There is a character in the book who mutilates himself in



his sleep. Maybe it's the particular nature of his mutilation, but nowadays it shouldn't be a problem. Clive [Barker] gets away with it all the time, and various other people do; but maybe it's because I'm not a big name.'

His latest project, alongside a television screenplay called *The Abstainer*, which was co-written with Mark Morris (see **FEAR** 16), is a horror anthology called *Darklands*. It looks to be exceedingly commercial although it will be mainly composed of stories by new writers, and, although the format has yet to be fixed, could include a one of his own stories. In the meantime, 'the plan is to sell *Counterparts*.'



'Like a confident mistress teasing a lover, or a whore a stranger, she continued to undress, slowly, provocatively'

Midnight Meeting

PAUL PINN

Her colour, that of luminescent milk; her skin, the powdery texture of chalk, with a delicate tautness. Brown hair, a supernatural cascade over her shoulders, touching her wasp-like waist as a child might swiftly touch the flames of a fire. Alert blue eyes, sometimes mocking in their shine, standing guard over an angelic nose that in turn compliments a refreshing mouth of happy curvature.

Enough.

Frozen within the memory of my mind's eye she is, perhaps, no more beautiful than in real life; and just as beautiful as the form she takes when she ceases to resemble a human being.

We first met on a late-night southbound express veneered with dirt from cities and crowds. Her presence in the grime and graffiti-ridden compartment of the train was that of a red rose floating on a cineritious river streaked with benzene and flecked with the bloated hoar of dead fish.

How mistaken I had been.

Even that sordid train could not have epitomised

the decadence that lurked beneath her innocent naiveté.

At first I found myself scanning her physical embodiments like an imposing television camera operated by a lusty technician. My interest must have been obvious, for she turned a little from the window and smiled at me.

The substance of teenage dreams.

Embarrassed, I returned the smile and looked out of the window. It was coated with a fine brown dust. My eyes were drawn back to the young woman. She offered me a cigarette which I accepted, then asked me for a light. I graciously obliged.

'This train doesn't stop for the next hour and a half.'

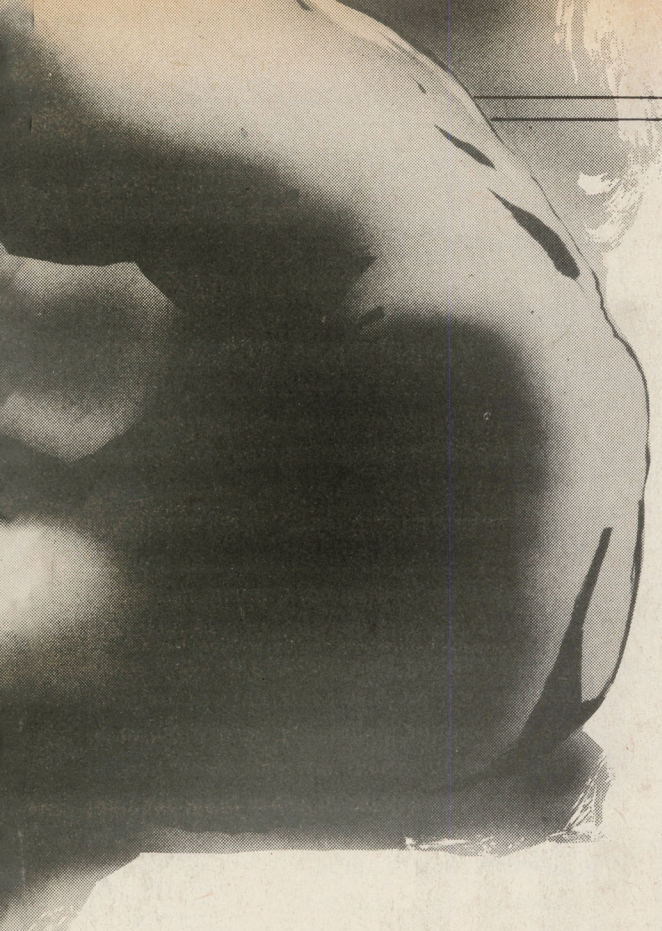
The words flowed lightly, as if the soft voice had arisen in the slender throat of a sunlit naiad sitting on a rock by a silvery spring.

Seductive.

Again she smiled.

A siren.

She dropped her cigarette to the floor, ground it out, then casually removed her jacket and put it on the seat beside her. Small rounded breasts were visible through the thin cotton of a pale blue T-shirt.



And all the time her eyes held a mocking glint that was naggingly familiar to me yet remained out of reach of my memory.

Like a confident mistress teasing a lover, or a whore a stranger, she continued to undress, slowly, provocatively. With a mixture of curiosity and surprise I sat and watched, momentarily spellbound.

Lean thighs, fine slender calves, petite feet with a hint of perversity suggested, perhaps, by the minute creases on the skin around her ankles or the possible hardness of the skin on her heels.

She knelt before me and caressed my groin. She need not have bothered for I was already aroused. Her face approached mine. A quick kiss on the mouth, lips cool, fleetingly sensuous.

'Why don't you take off your jacket?' she suggested.

I wrestled clumsily out of it. My sweater followed, then my shoes, socks, trousers, the bizarre situation confusing my thoughts, her sudden hard and more desperate tone urging me on without clear forethought of what I was getting myself into. It didn't matter, for beneath my confusion there existed deep within my soul a core of impregnable power whose periodic and irrepressible hunger always had to be sated, regardless of the circumstances at the time. Human weaknesses mattered little when the time was right for the power to stir from its slumber and force its energy into my consciousness.

Already I could feel it.

A hand down my underpants, stroking, with-

drawing. She leaned back in her seat, her knees dark with dirt; it added an attractive touch of decadence to her body.

Instructions. Like a downtrodden subservient, I obeyed. I pushed myself over the seat edge, legs either side of her body. The erection pushing through my underpants embarrassed me and seemed to amuse her. There was something slightly fiendish in her manner. For a few seconds we sat looking at each other, rocking slightly with the train. She wore lace panties, blood-red and edged with black.

She bent forward and down. Her head bobbed, the regular movement synchronised with that of the swaying train. My hands circled her neck; I dismissed the temptation to squeeze and instead ran my fingers through her hair. Without prior warning she stopped with a backwards flick of her head, and removed my underwear. Feet and toes started to massage my penis and testicles, an erotic sensation.

Child-like toenails were painted red. Floor dirt had soiled her feet but for some unfathomable reason this aroused deep feelings in me. Feelings never before encountered.

She ceased the massage, stood before me and slowly slid her panties down her legs. Pubic hair; a neat wedge, curly, not too thick. She sat down, lifted her legs until her feet were level with my face. I pulled the panties over her feet, sensing the coldness of her toes. Soles and heels black with commuter soot.

I kissed the bridge of each foot, worked upwards to her thighs. Her groin emitted a sweet smell, somewhat indefinable, perhaps flower scent or the aroma of an expensive French perfume. I lowered my body into the aisle, passed a cursory yet cautious glance over her vaginal region. It bulged slightly as if yearning for some form of contact, the lips like two small rolls of creased satin, the clitoris barely visible beneath a few wisps of hair. The tip of my tongue flicked over the cleft. Honey. The sweetness of taste and smell, the smoothness of her organ upon my tongue, all combined to produce a greedy eroticism in my mind.

Occasional murmurs. Intensification of arousal. Twisting and jerking. She gripped my head, pushed it further into her groin. Secretions. Saliva. The dirty soles of her feet rubbing my back and shoulders. Frantic movements. A heaving, a yielding, a cry of freedom not quite human.

I slumped back and looked at her. She epitom-

'Slowly she turned to look at me, her face a devilish grin, unruly hair matted like amber flames burning on the periphery of Hell'

**'To have
ripped her
apart and
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delicious'**

mised the cheap alley-whore that had just had the rare pleasure of enjoying sex with a stranger. Her hair was a storm shower flowing over breasts, arms and shoulders. Droplets of moisture hung like dew on her feathery triangle, her lips glistened like a mirage on a hot and humid summer's day.

She jerked into life, pushed me onto my back in the aisle. I felt grainy filth on my skin and my feet rubbed through cigarette ash. I remembered that this was a no-smoking carriage.

With the daintiness and speed of a swallow she lowered herself over me. *Soixante-neuf*. Moans of pleasure. A wet salubrity. A conjoined frenzy resulting in paroxysms of gratification, warm and salty, and bitter-sweet.

We relaxed, submersed in a lingering pleasure, faces soaked, hair sodden. I could feel her tongue. Slowly she turned to look at me, her face a devilish grin, unruly hair matted like umber flames burning on the periphery of Hell. Her eyes seared with ice-cold passion. For just a second she looked like a hungry, snarling dog.

She drew closer, licking her lips. Closer still she came, her now emotionless face only a few inches from mine. She placed her hands behind my head, buried her fingers in my hair, pulled my face to her bosom. Rapaciously, I grabbed one of her breasts and sucked harshly on the nipple. The other I squeezed hard. She let out a long guttural groan, a combination of pain and pleasure, yet strangely lupine.

I raised my eyes and looked at her. With head tilted back, eyes closed, mouth partly open and slender neck straining, she reminded me of a very happy childhood memory: curling snugly up to my mother and feeling the warmth of her winter coat. Or in another form, stroking her slender —

I looked at the girl's neck.

The sight stunned me. My heart pounded madly. I focused all my attention on her neck. There was nothing to choose between it and that of my mother's. There had been a change in the girl. She sensed something and lifted her head, facial skin taut, nose sniffing the air. Her eyes suppressed some kind of wildness, something savage and canine.

The power within me shifted its emphasis and stirred in a way I could not immediately grasp.

Perhaps to allay whatever it was she thought was troubling me, she embraced me and we kissed hungrily, falling back on the damp, grey-black floor. Fervent probings explored palates,

teeth and gums. Her tongue seemed strangely long.

I placed my hand on her soft mound, let my fingers explore further her spectral-white body. She lifted her feet and placed them on the edges of the seat. Vagina. Fingers. Violation. An automatic piston movement whilst I surveyed her body, wondering whether my suspicions would prove to be correct.

Her flat stomach was like a shimmering plain of snow, her ribs just visible under tight skin. Skin that almost imperceptibly glowed with a pale opalescence, like silver-white moonlight.

Moonlight!

I glanced at my wristwatch. There was not long to go before the power within would fan out and fill my soul, mind and body. And when it had consolidated its hold, so I would become one with it, to do whatever it required.

I tasted blood but smelt sex.

I turned my attention back to the present, having almost forgotten what I was doing.

Smoothness: the word shot through my mind like a bullet. I laid my free hand on her stomach, gently stroked her skin, my finger-tips moving across her body. It was not her skin that was so smooth but the very fine down that completely covered it. Everything fell into place. I suppressed a grin. The cunning bitch was going to be pleasantly surprised.

She cried out in a pained manner. The time had almost arrived.

An expression of helplessness crossed her face. A cub. It would take her longer, consequently the pain would be greater. She had yet to come to terms with her uniqueness although, given time, she would learn to enjoy her periodic excursions into another level of existence. I would make sure of that.

Her eyes flashed savagely at me. I could see that her teeth were now different, slightly more pointed and fang-like. I've no doubt that blood was all she could taste and smell. My blood.

She spoke: 'Make me come, make me come — now.'

Her muted screams had nothing to do with any sexual pleasure and served only to send a wave of vexation through me. To think that I was to be her next victim! To have ripped her apart and consumed her would have been simply delicious. However, the power within was taking a different course. One geared to propagation. And survival.

I ceased my fingering, glanced at my watch —

two minutes to midnight — and sat cross-legged on the seat looking down at her. She tried to stand, but managed only to crawl up to the opposite seat. She gave me a puzzled look as I smiled enigmatically at her.

The moon was full and glowing beautifully. My companion could not see its cold splendour, sprawled as she was by the window on the opposite side of the train, any appreciation for nature blocked by her growing agony.

She began to writhe and contort in pain as her body started to change. In order to give the young woman some degree of privacy and to maintain my surprise until the last possible moment, I unscrewed the two light bulbs in the compartment and threw them out of the window. The change was always, without exception, completed by midnight, which was now just a minute away. I knew that within the next few seconds the train would enter a tunnel from which it would not emerge until the other side of that decisive hour. (Yes! I had travelled that route before, for it was profitable).

The train sped into the tunnel, blocking out the moonlight and plunging us into pitch blackness. For a second or two every noise ceased, then her vocalisations filled my ears, altering with the various pangs and tortures she was suffering. Her skeleton reorganised with a sound like splintering wood under which bubbled a stew of twisting muscles and flesh. Internal organs modified, the skull remoulded and the skin stretched and thickened with fur and the noise of human hides flapping in a primeval breeze on which my ancestors would have sniffed death and victory.

One day, in the far future, I knew that that sound would once again dominate the landscape. In the meantime, the power strengthened.

The young woman had not been transformed many times; the more one changed the less painful it became. And it occurred more quickly. I endured my change in silence.

And then one reality gave way to another: it was exactly midnight.

She growled in anticipation of a kill. She now had forty-two teeth and intended to use every one of them on me. I remained silent as she snarled several times in confusion; an unexpected smell was assailing her nostrils.

The train shot out of the tunnel and moonlight partly bathed the compartment. I look at her; she glowed radiantly, was truly beautiful. She sat on the seat looking across at me in stunned amaze-

ment.

Her shocked eyes glowed like jewelled fires as she rose and stood as still as stone, five feet long and aesthetically structured. The coat was pure white as my mother's had been, the face was that of a canine Venus, a wolfish Helen of Troy. I arose and crossed over to her seat, my seven feet of body taking up the rest of the space on that side.

We licked each other's faces. I nosed about in various places. I had not been wrong. She was a magnificent creature, ideal for the revised purpose. She stepped down into the aisle and I followed. She knew what had to happen, that it had to happen immediately. No time-consuming mating rituals for us; we were of a different breed.

I climbed onto her back and made myself comfortable. Copulation. Fast and intense. The beginning of a merger. I stayed in that mounted position until she relaxed. And we finally became as one. And soon there would be more. And later, many more, until one day the sound of human hides flapping in a breeze would no longer be a distant dream.

The dream gave way to a more pressing matter.

As I — we — would not be changing back until much later, it was important that we left the train before it reached its destination. My usual trick was to open a window and jump out as the train slowed at a junction several miles further along the line, my isolated residence being just an hour's easy lope away. Unfortunately things did not go as planned, both windows refusing to budge. Even with my mate's assistance they wouldn't open. Angry, I snarled and snapped; it was a ridiculous situation. Then I remembered the emergency stop chain. I leaned up and hooked my paw around the red chain and pulled it down. Nothing happened. I growled and howled in disgust, my mate joining in. Suddenly we both stopped in mid-howl — of course, what fools! If there were any passengers in the adjoining compartments they would probably be wondering what all the noise was about. We cocked our ears close to the walls and listened. Sure enough, we could hear human voices; they sounded panic-stricken.

They made us feel *very* hungry.

The train abruptly skidded to a halt throwing us a little off balance. Someone had obviously pulled the chain that for us had failed to work. We heard a door opening and within seconds the crunching footsteps of people outside. What luck! A way out after all.



PAUL PINN lives in Bristol with his suffering soulmate and a mistress called Word Processor. He has always written stories, some published in long-defunct fanzines. He likes the darkly bizarre and things foreign. After a period overseas, he is now seeking homes for a freaky spy novel and lots of short stories.

'Her skeleton reorganised with a sound like splintering wood under which bubbled a stew of twisting muscles and flesh'

FICTION FILE 3

KATHY GALE

Kathy Gale, the dynamic senior editor behind the recent relaunch of Pan fantasy, horror and science fiction, tells Mark Westerby what makes a successful list.



Cynical publishers often say that a book sells because of its packaging, but editor Kathy Gale believes readers aren't that dumb and that good fiction has them coming back for more.

She came to Pan after a successful two-year stint at Hodder and Stoughton where she, 'edited science fiction, fantasy — and specifically for NEL because they hadn't had a very strong list in the past and they needed somebody who would build it up for them again. After 18 months there I felt I'd achieved that. Then the guy who had been my boss at Hodder and had been named the publishing director at Pan, rang me up and said, 'We have a few gaps in the Pan publishing programme. And I said, 'Let me guess, science fiction, fantasy, horror, crime, thrillers... all the genre stuff'. And he said, 'Absolutely, and we're looking for somebody to fill that gap'.

'I've always quite enjoyed working in places where they've not been doing a huge amount in the field they're putting me in, so that as soon as you start building up the list it makes a terrific impact.'

So how does an editor build a list from scratch? 'The first thing you take into account is the kind of company you've moved into. Pan has a good reputation with the trade, so one of the first decisions was — were we to set up a new imprint, like Orbit or Legend? It was a fairly easy decision to make that we should maintain the name Pan.'

Personality is also important, as it would be foolish to take books which you could not fully support into the marketplace. 'It's a matter of seeing what's around at the time. Obviously, you have to make a number of big buys to establish the list, get some interesting authors. It's also very much a matter of going out to agents and saying, 'Pan is going to be very big in these areas, authors will be treated extremely well, we have the best sales force', and getting the big submissions.'

Editors keep an eye out for what could be future trends, because the books they are buying now will not see print for some nine to 18 months. 'It's a sad thing to say, but you have to look at the areas that are selling well, and you have to publish to suit certain kinds of media. For example, humorous fantasy sells extremely well; so when a humorous fantasy writer came along who was writing quite good stuff it seemed natural to buy that author. Similarly, with Melanie Rawn: buying an author who has been cast as the new Anne McCaffrey and has been doing extremely well in the States.'

Gale's future eye has also been working overtime, with several new writers and collaborations in its sight. 'In terms of authors, we're launching Eric Brown in this country. We're doing a collection of his short stories and he's currently writing a novel. We have a new fantasy writer from the States called Rosemary Bernstein with *Steerwoman*. We have an author called Graham Joyce, who's written *Dreamside*. It's a wonderful dark fantasy about a group of people who are experimenting with their dreams.'

Added to that, Isaac Asimov and Robert Silverberg are collaborating on a series of novels which expand some of Asimov's short stories, and *Fantasy Tales* cofounder David Sutton takes over the editorship of *The Pan Book Of Horror*. Each author's title is treated as something special, from cover design right down to interior artwork — such as Dave Carson's illuminations in *Dark Voice*. 'The kind of marketing money and coverage that we get will be indicative of the kind of backing our authors will get in years to come.'

Kathy Gale is obviously banking on success.

'What's the ma'er?' a coarse voice shouted, presumably belonging to the driver or guard.

'I don't know,' replied a frightened young girl. 'There are some terrible noises coming from the compartment next door. Sounded like wolves.'

I murmured and slunk into the aisle, ready to leap out if the door opened. My she-wolf hunched herself up under the window ready to pounce. Our eyes met and agreed on a bloody indulgence.

The dialogue outside continued.

'Wolves?' said the coarse voice in disbelief.

'That's what it sounded like,' confirmed the girl. 'I don't know, perhaps some maniac is in there killing someone.'

'Sounded awful,' added a male voice.

'Don't like the sound of this. Got yer iron bar handy, Jack?'

'Yeah. Probably some pissed-up lager louts,' replied a younger voice. 'Can't imagine any wolves on this train.'

'Nah, wolves, as if there's gonna be any of them on 'ere. Okay Jack, open 'er up, let's 'ave a look.'

As the door opened I leapt out, fixed my jaws around a horrified face, knocked the body to the ground, crushed its facial bones, ripped apart its skin and sucked in the flesh before tearing the pulped remains from the neck.

I thrilled as human screams sought refuge in the night sky and my partner growled with a bloody snout, part of the second man's entrails hanging from her mouth, her front paws still curled in the remains of his abdomen. We gorged until a silent terror had replaced the earlier screams and only bones and inconsequential slivers of skin and flesh remained before us.

I scanned the carriage windows. Faces peeped through dirty glass. I looked up and down the length of the train. A few heads peered cautiously from open windows. I made for a pair two carriages along, the heads quickly disappearing, the windows sliding shut. I jumped up scratching at the windows, smearing blood on the glass and snarling savagely. Then I returned to my mate, laughing as only wolves can. I pulsated with the ecstasy of the kill. I felt stronger than I had ever known. I nuzzled my mate and sensed the power within cast out tendrils into the night.

Together we bounded across the countryside, the noise of human hides flapping in a primeval breeze playing in our ears. I smelt death and victory.

The turning point had come.

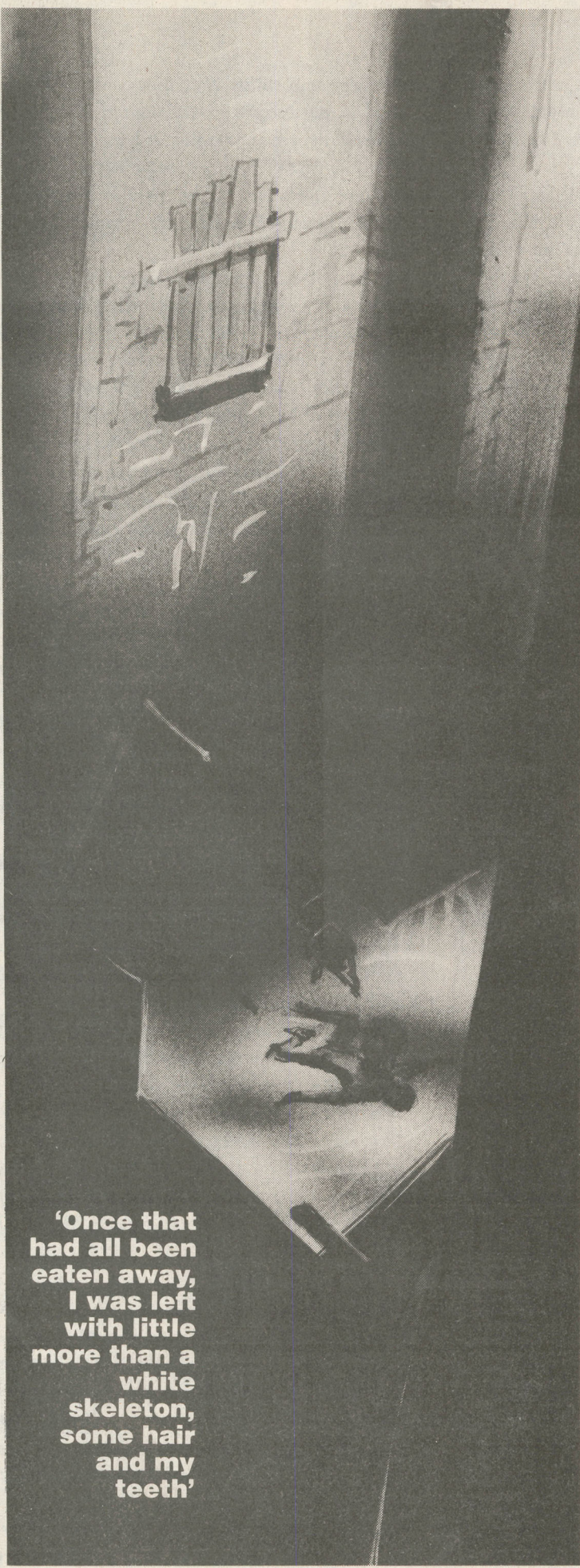
PLAGUE OF HEARTS

By Mark Eyles

I had been dead for some time when I realised that the future was not going to be as easy as I had anticipated. Dead and eaten away in the corner of that dismal yard, fog-slicked cobble stones beneath my prostrate form, sheer stone cliffs rising above me, punctuated by boarded windows. Being dead afforded me the time to examine the yard in the minutest detail, an enterprise that I would previously have expected to weigh me down with bone-numbing tedium. With my new perspective, I found that every scrap of offal, the crumpled urine-soaked news-sheet, every noisome grain of quietly erupting putrescence was filled with wonder. Hard to believe but true: the slow deterioration of this yard, this claustrophobic landscape, was rich with wonder.

A pale grey pall of light filtered down from above, through the archeological layers of the buildings as they struggled upwards towards the sky where they expected to find a sun. Each level a history in itself, each level full of its own peculiar customs and corruptions. Perhaps I'm giving you the idea that the city was evil. Evil to have killed me? Evil to decay with no splendour? Evil in its vices? No, the city was not evil; evil implies some choice, some volition. Was the planet evil to turn on its axis? Was my flesh evil to have hung onto my bones for so many years? No, the city was not evil; it was a force.

I thought of the city as being like coral: formed by a mob of small creatures, polyps, living together and growing their bone homes around themselves until they are living in great, sweeping, graceful condominiums. They have no choices.



**'Once that
had all been
eaten away,
I was left
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more than a
white
skeleton,
some hair
and my
teeth'**

They breed and die, breed and die until something upsets the balance and they only die, leaving a gutted tomb in remembrance of the great days of their empire.

Similarly, this city wherein people have bred and died for generations was finally dying. The blood was leaking from a wound in its side, a wound torn open by diseased fingers. A plague carrier who knew only that he was living and that the world was his toy, to infect, to consume with his breath, his life. This was no longer of concern to me. I had been claimed by Death. At least, I thought I had. I was not quite sure what should have been happening.

Let me try and describe my body to you. Hard to know where to start, though; there was little enough of it left. My skin had been the hors d'oeuvre, my muscles and fat provided the next course, something to take the edge off the hunger so that the delicacies to come could be more fully savoured. My organs had been a delight, each one with its own distinctive flavour, and bathed in a sauce of congealed blood and saffron fluids. Once that had all been eaten away, I was left with little more than a white skeleton, some hair and my teeth.

Fortunately, I was dead before I was consumed so I didn't feel any pain. However, I had found it disconcerting watching my genitals being ripped off and eaten. I fancied I could feel a tickling sensation as my eyes were scooped out. I didn't let any of this worry me too much, none of it was of further use to me, someone else might as well get the benefit.

There was just one minor detail which was bothering me. Why was I still here? Surely I should have passed on already? Where were the Elysian fields? Had a mistake been made? Was I bound for fiery torment? Was I waiting until a suitable body could be found for my reincarnation? The last thing I had expected on dying was for nothing to happen. Did this always happen, or had I been singled out for special treatment? Should I be pleased, or fearful? As I lay in the yard I realised that the single certainty had been removed from me, extracted like a troublesome tooth. I would not die; that experience common to all mankind, after being born, was lost to me.

The bastards; they had taken away my humanity. The shit-eating bastards had stolen the only certain thing from my life. They had also stolen my lover, my soul mate, my lady. *Shit-eating bastards!* I had hoped they were going to die quickly, but now I fervently wished they would

live long — and suffer. Now that death no longer loomed in my future I found myself stripped of my humanity. I had transcended the mortal coil and found myself trapped somewhere between earth and the angels. Perhaps I was an angel myself? All would become clear in time, of that I was certain.

The light remained unaltered, draped like a muslin shroud over the yard, drifting down from a cluster of glowing lights many storeys above my current position. I remembered being closer to those lights, sitting on a terrace near to their unearthly, (unsunly? unmoonly?) glow. Sipping cold, milky coffee through the skin which had formed across the mug, avoiding the dead fly stuck to it. What had the fly died of, why had it attached itself to the skin of my coffee while I had been inside answering a call? I could have understood a live fly sipping the drink, but why had this fly landed there to die? A sylph-like form stepped out onto the terrace to join me, bringing a lightness with her. I forgot about the fly as the sylph settled onto my lap.

Although my skeleton didn't move I seemed to be able to twist my head round. No, that's not what I mean. I was able to look around as though I still had my eyes and head and neck; though the skeleton didn't move, the skull continued to muse over humorous anecdotes encoded in the bricks of the wall on the far side of the yard. I could hear and sometimes smell things in the yard, but I was unable to touch anything. I felt as though I was paralysed from the neck down, but this didn't cause me too much discomfort since I had no body! I admitted to wondering why only certain of my senses had passed on with me into this after-life. Or was it more of a before-death? I seemed stuck between the two.

The sylph-like figure I was thinking about, that was my lover, Lue (short for Luella). The terrace led into our flat, into the lounge. Being dead cleared the mind; I could picture the flat as though I was in it, instead of being a clutter of bones in the corner many levels below. The lounge — pale blue walls painted with plants and clouds — filled with a sofa and communications centre, even a few books, real books. The kitchen, canary yellow with a methane burner and water tub. Hanging from strings stretched the length of the kitchen were dried herbs, strips of dried meat, long brightly-coloured sausages of vegetable protein.

The bedroom — that was my favourite place. A hideaway from the world. Not that I didn't like

'The blood was leaking from a wound in its side, a wound torn open by diseased fingers'

the world, it had fed and clothed me, provided me with a mate; but sometimes I had to retreat, to get my bearings before venturing out again. The bedroom contained our bed, a wash-stand of white-painted wood on which a chipped porcelain pitcher and bowl stood, a trunk full of the clothes we shared and a mirror which covered most of one wall, giving the illusion of space to this small box of a room. Our bed was loaded with a quilted black silk counterpane on which a dragon had been embroidered in silver and gold thread. Under the counterpane I could see Lue lying as I had left her. Blood stains almost invisible against the black.

If I wasn't dead I would have wept for Lue, for her milk-white skin, grey-blue eyes and short brown hair. I could see her as she was that night on the terrace, with the coffee cooling. Better to think of her then than as she was after the Strangers called at our flat. On the terrace with Lue on my lap, we were busily kissing, one of my hands slipped up the front of her shirt, my fingers defining the outlines of her small, sharp breasts. Her breath coming fast, hissing in and out as her arms tightened like encircling snakes, pulling me hard against her. Still wrapped in each other, we stumbled for the bedroom, collapsing onto the silver and gold dragon. Lue rolled onto her back with her shirt rucked up under her arms; our hands scrabbled to free ourselves of constricting jeans. I was leaning over her with my tongue distracting us both. Then there was a terrible, passion-quelling noise.

Even dead in the yard I was still feeling love, still feeling aroused, though I had nothing left to be aroused by any thoughts of sweat-slicked bodies entwined. From now on I had only the xylophonic rattle of skeletons to look forward to.

The noise was terrible, like an explosion or gunshot, louder than I would have imagined, as the door to the flat was kicked open and four figures, all dressed in scarlet, burst into the bedroom. I leapt from the bed, my saliva leaving a shine across Lue's breasts and stomach; she had pulled her shirt down with one hand and trousers up with the other. I punched at the figure nearest to us; my fist had hit a face, a man's sneering grin. His head jerked back.

Lue managed to kneel up on the bed and fell towards a shorter figure. Everything was happening with nothing said, just hard breathing and grunts. I had swung a knee up into the groin of a scarlet figure squeezed in the confined space between the bed and the mirror. As the figure fell

forward slightly I threw up both arms, fists tight. The woman screamed as I struck her bosom. This was like a signal, the four figures went berserk. Strangers were like that. They attacked at random, but always waited until you had inflicted some pain before they killed you. These four Strangers, two men and two women, bore their scars like trophies. Teeth missing from one, another with only one eye, the girl I had hit had a hole through her cheek which had not healed, a scabbed wound that she poked her tongue through absentmindedly, enjoying the pain.

The fight lasted maybe ten seconds. At the end of it, Lue was on the bed screaming with a knife embedded to the hilt in her stomach. A woman was still holding onto the hilt, blood dripping from her nail-raked face onto Lue's neck. Lue's hands were locked around the woman's neck, but she didn't have the strength to do serious damage; her legs thrashed feebly, each movement increasing her pain. I had been hit on the head with a truncheon and was only semiconscious. The bedroom kept on fading in and out, the sound of Lue screaming drifted around me like thick smoke. Then the screaming stopped abruptly. I managed to look up and saw the Stranger woman slowly moving the hilt of the knife which was sunk into Lue's entrails. Round and round she moved it, round and round with the quiet sound of bloody meat being cut. With Lue's hands still holding loosely onto her neck, she leant forward, blood dripping off her chin, and planted her mouth on Lue's, her eyes watching hungrily as death crept up on her.

I tried to stand, but something had happened to my neck and none of my limbs would obey me, though I could still feel them. I was forced to watch passively as the Strangers crowded round to enjoy Lue's death. I tried to scream but only managed a hoarse rasp. One of the Strangers looked round, smiled. I closed my eyes to blot out the scene and listened to footsteps crossing from the bed. Rough fingers pulled at an eyelid, yanking it upwards so that I could see. Then, just like in a cartoon, the man produced a packet of matches and used four of them, two for each eye, to prop my lids open. Tears poured helplessly down my cheeks, my heart banged at my chest, trying to escape, unable to burst. I watched as they watched as Lue died.

During the struggle Lue had lost control of her bowels. The Strangers laughed as they pulled down her trousers and gathered up handfuls of shit which they threw at each other. The woman

'I had found it disconcerting watching my genitals being ripped off and eaten'

who had held the knife withdrew it from the wound and licked it clean. I was praying that insanity would run away with my mind and that I would be spared the sight of the Strangers playing with Lue's sweet body. Insanity, death, unconsciousness are luxuries which were denied to me. The horror I felt, the real horror was that I could stand to watch what was happening. Strangers are concerned with the moment of death, so after opening up Luella to inspect her organs, after cutting free strips of skin to make arm bands, after taking it in turns to plunge their heads into her body to lap up her blood, they turned their attention to me. The woman I had hit neatly pulled the quilt over Lue, straightening it out, then pressing it firmly over her so that it moulded to the remains of her body.

They looked at me with gore dripping down their faces, and I died. Something had finally stopped working, the system had closed down. I don't know what happened exactly, but as the Strangers approached me a pain swept down my left side. It felt as though a mixture of molten lead and razor blades was being forced through me under high pressure, shredding and burning every nerve-ending it came into contact with. Then the pain vanished and I knew that I had died; the room swam before my eyes, the Strangers roared with animal rage and human disappointment when they realised I was dead. They lifted my body, ran out onto the terrace and, with a four-throated scream, threw it over. I fell, expecting to be plucked away at any moment, whisked off to the realms eternal.

That was how I ended up in this yard. A skeleton with no purpose, only memories. I wasn't a skeleton when I landed here, I still had all my flesh. A little worn in places perhaps, but still my own flesh, flesh I had grown from before my birth, skin which had fitted like a glove. In the city, flesh is a commodity, something of value in almost any condition. By the time it was found, mine wasn't fresh enough for transplants, but it was still palatable without needing to be cooked. Sushi flesh on a bed of rice, except rice was off. Fresh off the bone, tender and succulent. The children of the People Tribe, a tribe that wanders through the city, oblivious to other people, found and stripped me. The People Tribe consider themselves the only true humans left, all others are only for their convenience. We are all less than human — animals, beasts of burden to be eaten when we get too old to be of further use.

The children found me when they were out

foraging. Ten of them, found me and ate me. They didn't even bother to cut me up, they just tore the food from my bones with their sharp little teeth, their little hands digging into my chest and coming out with fresh, dripping prizes. They were chattering amongst themselves, giggling as they exposed my innermost secrets. I had occasionally wondered what my skeleton looked like, now I was given the opportunity of finding out. Has anyone else ever seen their own skeleton? Parts of it certainly, but to have your whole skeleton exposed. I was rather proud of it once the children had stripped it clean, it shone satisfyingly white. They sat around contentedly when they had finished, burping and scratching. The youngest ones snoozed off in a huddle while the two oldest, they must have been nine or ten, a boy and a girl, proceeded to inspect each others' anatomy, remarking in their high-pitched voices the differences, poking, prodding and tickling.

I enjoyed having the children around, in spite of their deplorable eating habits. They brightened up the yard with their chatter and games. I didn't have any children of my own when I was alive, but I still felt some paternal feelings towards this group of miniature cannibals. Now I am alone, apart from the occasional rat, and even they are losing interest in gnawing my skeleton; they don't seem to be making any headway with it at all, though it is very clean now. Rain has started, large droplets of oily water falling from the upper levels, the dead levels where the plague carrier had struck first, running through crowded shopping malls, through parks open to the clouds, through streets of the rich and well-to-do, and with every breath sending messages of death, with every breath committing murder most foul.

Before I died, I was a Plague Hunter. My job was to track down and capture carriers of illness, the infectious plagues who threatened the city. Some of them were poor lost souls, others ran amok, diseased berserkers trying to take a million souls with them to their own sick hells. Plague hunting was a difficult profession, you had to be ruthless and you could not mix in ordinary society. Apart from the fear of infection, there was the fear everyone felt of being approached and told they had a proscribed disease. I had to 'remove' the violent plagues, I used a powerful rifle for this and tried to carry out the removal from a distance. The innocent plagues were retired to a terminal station where they could die in peace. I didn't deal with ordinary illnesses, you

'The woman who had held the knife withdrew it from the wound and licked it clean'

understand, only the killer infectious ones which could destroy the city.

The plague I was hunting before the evening when the Strangers arrived was the one who had taken out the upper levels of the city. All of the Plague Hunters were after him; Lue was working with me on this one, we were getting close, we had tracked him down to an area not far from our flat. Too late to mourn for the city now. Death has this trick of altering the perspective you have on things. Take this yard, I would never have had the opportunity in life to lie here and really get to know it. I would never have appreciated

the beauty of decay, not decay that gives birth to new life, but decay itself. The dissolution of life, of rubbish, of death. The yard stretched out around me full of its own drama. I watched as the raindrops splashed, sending ripples through the puddles, circular messages crisscrossing until they dashed themselves against the cobbles and tried to travel back towards the centre, confused. A foot landed in the puddle, destroying the harmony of wet patterns.

The foot was dressed in a silver boot. Silver: government agency that would mean. Only a civil servant would dare to dress like an escapee from *Flash Gordon*. I looked up. He looked like a spaceman, with his silver suit and helmet. Behind him stood a woman in an identical suit.

'This one is in a real state. Are you getting a reading?' the silver spaceman said. I guessed at refuse collection, possibly police. I listened for more clues.

'He still seems to be intact, I'll plug in and run a system check.' The woman leaned forward over me and plugged a lead into my skull. She had nice eyes, warm and brown with long lashes, that was all I could see of her face.

'He's not still alive is he?' The man squatted down. Everything went black for a moment; when I came to the woman was speaking: '...out. We can salvage him. According to the readings, he should be able to see and hear us.' She turned towards me. 'Hello fella, you'll be right as rain in no time. Lucky they fitted that preserver when they replaced your skeleton. You Plague Hunters certainly are lucky.'

Preserver? What was the woman talking about, and why was the man grinning at me inanely? I remember when I became a Plague Hunter they had to replace a certain amount of me, install anti-infection devices in my bones and so on, in fact replace most of my skeleton; it was the only way I could survive contact with the plagues. That was why Plague Hunters stuck together, it was how I met Lue, convalescing after the surgery. But I remembered nothing of the surgery itself; they knocked you out during the whole process. One minute you were lying in bed waiting for the procedure to begin, the next moment, actually a month later, you came round with it all completed. Had they done something to me to stop me dying? If that was the case, then Lue must be alive still. Luella would have survived. My mind buzzed with an accelerating exhilaration that lifted me out of the yard to soar



'Death has this trick of altering the perspective you have on things'

in the sun.

'He was an early, experimental, full skeletal transplant.' The woman was speaking again, talking to her colleague. 'They used only to replace the bones in the limbs with artificial bones, hollowed to contain immune-boosting bio systems. According to the lettering on the skull here he was one of the first, maybe the very first successful full skeletal transplant. You're looking at history, George.'

'So how come there's still something living in there?'

'Last ditch preservation circuit, it sealed off the brain when he was near death, separated it from the rest of the body and preserved the higher centres, even switched to its own monitoring system. Induced visual, audio and smell, through the sensors located here on the top of the skull. They look like hair, but actually they house sensors which are then decoded here.'

She was pointing somewhere round the back of my skull. I wanted to shout at them but couldn't. The woman was getting quite animated now, talking about my skeleton, my brain. I was an exhibit to her, a specimen. At least the children had treated me as if I was human. What about Lue? What had happened to her?

The spacewoman knelt down on the cobbles. I realised now that she and her assistant worked for the Plague Control Agency. Her eyes gazed out of her helmet at me.

'I'm going to close you down now. When you awake you'll be back in one piece again.' The light went out again, and I was plunged into darkness for no time at all.

Glorious, golden illumination burst into my eyes. I closed them, put my hands up shakily to rub them. Then opened my eyes again. Sunlight, blurred, was gushing through a window in front of me. Pink hands hovered between the window and my face.

'Erra,' I croaked, 'erra.' A young girl's face appeared, a nurse.

'Quieten yourself, sir,' she shouted in my ear. Then I noticed that the quiet I had known in the yard was gone. Blood rushed through my ears, my nervous system sang its high-pitched television whine. I tried to move my legs, they stirred weakly beneath the blankets wrapped around them. I was trapped in a body, a new body. Back from the dead, except that I had never died. A tear of self-pity trickled from one stinging eye. I blinked, blinked again, I had to remember to keep blinking or my eyes would dry up and with-

er. I had to be responsible again, responsible for my body, responsible for my life. I knew that I would have to wait for my death all over again. Wait for the end. But where was Luella? With her restored, I would be able to face the world again. Together we would be able to keep going.

'Luerra, Luerra...' I was starting to dribble down my chin. The nurse dabbed at the spittle with a tissue.

'Now, now, sir. There's no need for that. The director will be here to see you soon. You're quite a celebrity, you know. The first person to have been rebuilt from a cranial preservation unit. Now rest, you'll be feeling a little odd for a while until you get used to your new body.'

'Wer thu fuks Luerra?' I tried to ask.

'Luerra?' The nurse interrogated the terminal alongside the bed. I looked around the room, a private room in a state-of-the-art medical facility. A window looked out on the sky, so it must be on the top level of the city, perhaps even in a castle or tower, reaching up for a mile or more above the smog, since the sunlight looked so harsh. The nurse was speaking again; I dragged my attention towards her. I was feeling weak and my body wanted to sleep, the clarity of my pseudo-death was gone now.

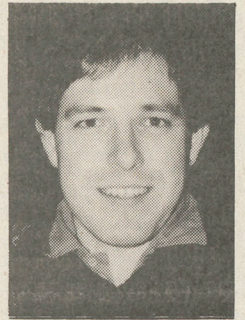
'Luella. That's who you mean, isn't it?'

I nodded.

'I'm afraid she died when the Strangers attacked your apartment.' The nurse lowered her eyes, I started to weep uncontrollably. 'I'm very sorry, Dr Kildem.' She looked back at the screen and after a few minutes spoke again: 'If it's any consolation, the Strangers who attacked you all died very shortly afterwards due to their contact with the two of you. They were found in your apartment. They had caught an as yet unidentified strain from you which resulted in acute fear of the beating of their own hearts. So fierce was this loathing, so acute the fear that they all tried to remove their hearts; all four of them succeeded in tearing themselves open, thrusting their hands into their chest cavities and grasping their hearts before they died.'

I sank back towards welcome oblivion as the nurse finished. As I drifted sleepwards, Luella's face appeared before me. She was speaking, her ruby-lipped mouth forming the words carefully: 'We are the plague bearers. It is we who have infected the city. We are death and disease.'

The nurse had stripped off her blouse and bra and was working between her breasts with a scalpel.



MARK EYLES has, since 1980, set up and run two leisure software companies and a holography studio. He has worked as a freelance games designer (*Aliens* and *Back To The Future*) and writer. He is currently working on his third novel, a computer-animated video and is drawing comic strips.

'Only a civil servant would dare to dress like an escapee from Flash Gordon'

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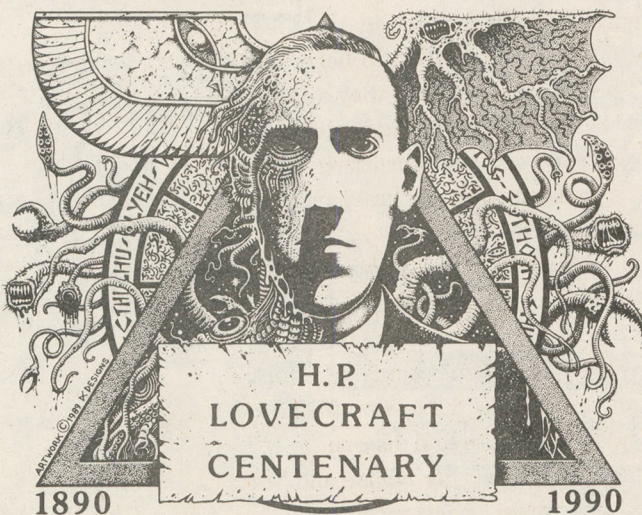
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FEAR

Reviews

OFF THE SHELF

David Barrett weighs up the evidence in a bunch of new factional mystery books.

John Spencer, author of *Perspectives: A Radical Examination Of The Alien Abduction Phenomenon* (Macdonald, £12.95, hardback), is a long-time UFOlogist, and his new book explores a large number of UFO and abduction accounts.

Spencer is a UFOlogist of the more serious type; following in the footsteps of Jacques Valee and, to some extent, Carl Jung, he is prepared to examine all sorts of different theories of what UFOs might be, including the entry of alien radio waves into our minds, other intelligences coexisting with us on Earth, the little people, past or future time travellers, spiritual visitations, or other self-

sustaining urban myths. He even considers physical aliens from outer space, though this, he implies, is not the most likely explanation.

Perspectives is valuable for its balanced approach, but if you want to get much of its balance and many of the theories in a readable novel, try Ian Watson's *Miracle Visitors* (Gollancz, £3.50, paperback). This doesn't claim to be anything other than a novel; it starts with a student remembering, under hypnotic regression, his meeting with aliens when he was a schoolboy; it has close encounters of every kind, and even a flight to the far side of the moon in a converted Ford Thunderbird. Though Watson has an occasional tendency to throw in chunks of semi-indigestible exposition which

get in the way of the otherwise action-packed plot, with *Miracle Visitor* he has probably produced the best UFO novel you're likely to come across.

ELEMENTAL

Fact is mixed with fiction in Kim Stanley Robinson's romp, *Escape From Khatmandu* (Unwin Hyman, £12.95, hardback). Kidnapped yetis in hotel bedrooms, the sacred hidden valley of Shambhala (Shangi La), a quick hike up Everest, a Tibetan tulku, or reincarnated holy man, and a network of ancient secret tunnels under Khatmandu and half of Tibet and Nepal: all the myths of the mysterious Orient are here.

The four novellas that comprise this book make very easy reading. The quality of detail, and Robinson's acknowledgement, indicate that the author has done his bit of trekking and climbing around Khatmandu and Everest, and the narrative is so casual it reads at times like a journal scribbled in a sleeping bag after a good night's drinking and conversation. It's a fun read — though there are serious issues here.

Rob Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* and *Lavondyss* also make you ask serious questions. They're finally out in a uniform paperback edition (Grafton £3.50 and £3.99). The books' premise is that in the heart of Herefordshire there is a wood where Britain's deepest myths exist. Holdstock's storytelling is beautiful, his description awe-inspiring, his characters intensely believable, and it's utterly impossible to sketch out the plot in a review. You're going to have to read the books.

Finally, if you're interested in the esoteric, look at the range of titles from Element Books. One of the latest, Kenneth Meadows' *Earth Medicine* (£9.95, paperback), focuses on some of the teachings of North American Indian shamans. It's a useful

SCARRED BEHEMOTH

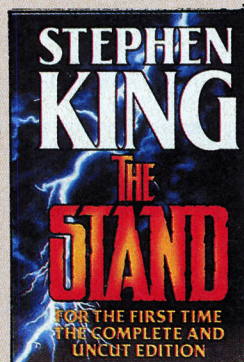
THE STAND

Stephen King
Publisher Hodder and Stoughton
Format HB, £14.95
Category Horror

Facts first: The Complete And Uncut Edition of *The Stand* has 150,000 words missing from the 1978 original with an additional 25,000. Add to this Bernie Wrightson's 12 black and white illustrations and a new preface in which King explains his reasons for publishing this behemoth, and you get approximately 400 extra pages, making it a 1007 page book.

The story additions include a short initial chapter on how Captain Tripps was inaugurated, a 'maniac' called The Kid, more information on Trashy, Randall Flagg and a bumper, if not more hopeful, windup to this tale of 'dark Christianity'. There also appears to be one Woodchuck joke I missed first time around, I wonder if the real fans will spot it!

Whilst I was not particularly inspired with the opening in which Charlie LaVon, wife and



baby go AWOL from the secret research centre, I quickly got caught up with Larry, those characters Nick, Stu and the rest of the gang. The 'new' parts of the book are difficult to spot — mainly because it's so large — but many of the Vegas characters, who choose evil and technology as their watchwords, appear much earlier than in the original.

I was inspired more by the expansion of characters such as Trashy, Larry and Flagg than the addition of others such as The Kid who, to my mind, hark back to the Eighties style of horror. I do not believe the

author is stuck with that has-been style, but *The Stand* is scarred because of it.

The message of the book has also altered, if only by degree. When I first read *The Stand* it seemed to show that humanity would stumble back after a disaster, only to go forward, making the same mistakes again, clinging to the same technology, the same weapons. This uncut edition balances the account to show that some sections of humanity may take account of the lessons learned but, quite literally, sink back into the bog as a result. Whichever way you look at the novel, King's message is clear, and not very pretty.

Some critics believe that King won't use a word where a page will do, but I am pleased to see that he has at last put out this expanded version of what is one of his finest books, despite occasionally bloated character analysis and descriptions. The additions are for the most part neatly done, add flavour to an already stunning story, and provide more examples of King's ability to turn a unique phrase. One for the collectors, I think; but still, I raise my glass.

John Gilbert

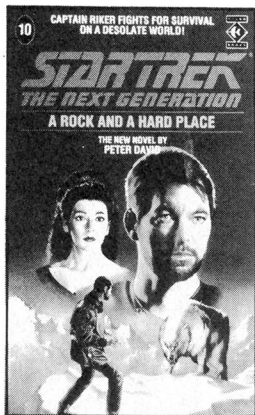
introduction to the philosophy behind Indian beliefs, particularly about being in tune with Nature, but I'm always a little sceptical when a book tells me that because I was born at a certain time my animal totem is the woodpecker, my plant totem the wild rose, and my musical vibration F natural. On the other hand, the personality traits I'm supposed to have are uncannily accurate.

STAR TREK THE NEXT GENERATION: A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

I know many die hard Trekkies will disagree with me when I say that I prefer *The Next Generation* to the original *Star Trek*, but I feel that Mr Shatner and co are getting just a little too old to go chasing Klingons and the new series is good fun. What's more it's generating its own fair share of new novels, with Peter David's *A Rock And A Hard Place* (Titan, paperback, £2.95) being the very latest.

The story begins with the new Enterprise receiving orders for Commander Riker to take temporary leave so he can investigate Paradise. This misnamed planet has a terraforming colony which has fallen badly behind schedule.

Riker's replacement as First Officer is Commander Quintin Stone, and according to all the captains he has served under he



is unorthodox in his interpretations of Federation rules. Everyone thinks he is a space case (ie mad). Commander Riker on the other hand has troubles enough of his own; the natural suspicion of Paradise's small, closely knit community and the very real threat of wild, genetically engineered creatures take all of his diplomatic skills to negotiate. The way the novel flicks between Riker's troubles and those caused by his replacement on the Enterprise works very well. But as is often

WATCH THE SKIES

THE DAY THE MARTIANS CAME

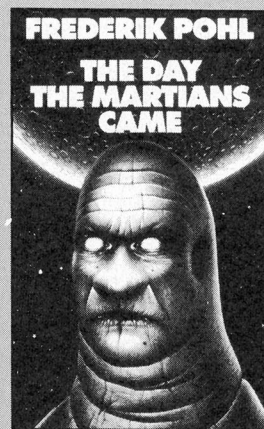
Frederik Pohl
Publisher Grafton
Format PB, £3.50
Category Science fiction

Short story collections never seem to sell that well, and certainly publishers frequently try to disguise such books as novels. Frederik Pohl's latest, *The Day The Martians Came*, is no exception and like Orson Scott Card's recent *Folk On The Fringe* is presented as a novel. In fact, it's a collection of ten short stories, seven of which have previously been published — one dating back as far as 1967. Yet Pohl has actively worked to make the 'old' short stories fit in with newer pieces which link everything together, culminating in a final chapter which incorporates all the major characters previously mentioned. *Martians* really could pass as a rather episodic novel, and it is a rewarding hybrid.

What holds it all together are the aliens, seal-like creatures which appear to be rather stupid, and the wry, satirical

tone which Pohl adopts. After the fairly serious recounting of the disastrous Mars expedition, Pohl examines the impact of alien contact on Earth. Probably the funniest tales are of a Hollywood screenwriter (inspired by radio news and Edgar Rice Burroughs) and a South-East Asian country with a very weird government. The latter uses the aliens only as something to get things going, much like 'Too Much Loosestrife', an involving and intelligent tale of a Vietnam vet hooked on heroin.

One of those written specifically for the collection is 'The Beltway Bandit', a provocative piece on the various private consulting firms working within the Beltway around Washington DC. This is fairly pointed satire, telling of 'consultants' who hustle for contracts to do studies for government. Their 'high power research studies' mainly consist of rewriting other people's work with bland new conclusions, as well as checking other consultants' work. Such pointless waste becomes dangerous when people are grabbing contracts and pretending to be important and are too busy to point out design failures. For example, the



catastrophic Mars ship design — and the real Challenger shuttle disaster.

On a more humorous note, there are the psychics in 'Saucery', some people living in a cult and a Soviet defector, once a rocket scientist, now stranded in Greece and working as a tour guide. The sheer variety of the short stories, their cynical bite and the quality of the writing make this a well above average book about alien encounter. Some of the linking pieces are a bit weak, but overall this is good fun with some serious things to say. If the aliens ever do arrive, this is what it'll be like.

Stuart Wynne

the case with Trekkie novels the author is more interested in his own new character, Stone, than with the established crew. Nevertheless, the book delves into the darker side of human emotions, making a welcome change from the TV series which usually has to be more upbeat. This certainly isn't a bad book, and I thought it was up to the standards of the average episode — which is a good enough recommendation, I'm sure you'll agree!

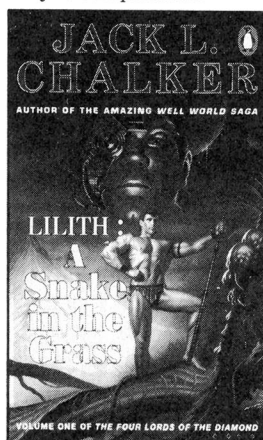
Mark Caswell

LILITH: A SNAKE IN THE GRASS

Renowned for his long running, often humorous chronicles such as *Soul Rider* and *The Well World Saga*, Jack L Chalker does not surprise with his latest project *The Four Lords Of The Diamonds*, of which *Lilith: A Snake In The Grass* (Penguin, paperback, £3.99) is the first book.

It's a tale of five worlds, four of which comprise the Warden system, and the odious creatures who live there. According to Chalker, Charon looks like Hell, Cerebus is a real dog, and Medusa is a planet

upon which anyone with a mind to live must have rocks in their head. Each alien world is ruled by an Overlord and they're all interested the fifth planet, Earth, working out just what the natives are like and whether they're conquerable.



The inhabitants of Earth are just as curious about their interplanetary neighbours, but they are not having much luck in their spying efforts as nobody ever returns from the Warden system.

One man, however, intends to have the answers, and more. Cal Tremon plans to install a unique spy on each of the planets and monitor progress as they try to overthrow the Overlords and

bring control of the alien worlds under Earth's jurisdiction. Sounds very colonial.

There are no prizes for guessing why there are four books in this series, and the way in which the structure of the story is likely to go, but Chalker's fans will be pleased with yet more of his James Bond-type antics. I don't think I could ever be a fan, but then I'm not into that type of quick-fire with little depth science fiction.

Bob Rachin

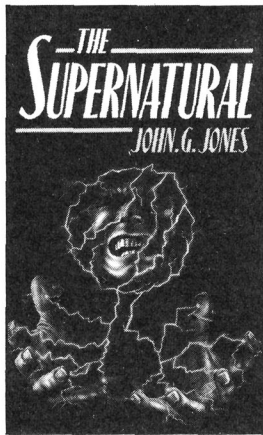
THE SUPERNATURAL

In John G Jones' *The Supernatural* (Sphere, paperback, £3.99), Lance Sullivan is an unlucky crook. He's pulled a con on the wrong person and now has a price on his head; a price that a blood-hungry hit man wants to collect with a bullet.

In an effort to escape the grave and perhaps with the million dollars he needs to buy off the hounds, Sullivan flees to Australia where he encounters a man whose desire for supernatural power teaches him a lesson that most people know by habit, that money can't buy everything, and that there are

worse things than constantly being on the run — worse things, even, than death.

It all sounds like a recipe for yet another standard horror novel, but John G Jones rises slightly above the formula with a well blended mixture of contemporary plot and eternal evil. The novel bears an uncanny resemblance to Clive Barker's *Damnation Game* and includes elements of *The Frighntners*. Stephen Laws' soon-to-be-published novel, but this author is adept at scare tactics, and has ensured that the book is a page-turner.

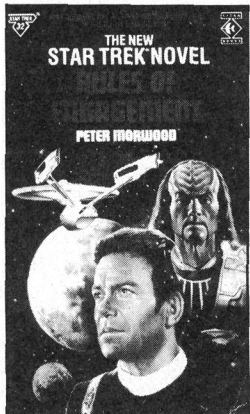


The Supernatural may not win prizes for its originality or depth, but Jones has the makings of an efficient thriller writer. Good Sunday afternoon reading, while you're waiting for the chicken to go down and football to come on the television.

Mark Westerby

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Peter Morwood's *Rules Of Engagement* (Titan, paperback, £2.99) plunges the familiar *Star Trek* cast into the troubled waters of Neutral Zone diplomacy. Fans will remember the Zone was set up by the god-like Organians, whose limitless powers ensure even the Klingons respect it. Dekkanar is a strategically important planet within the Zone which has enjoyed a substantial Federation presence, until now.



Led by the radical Phalange for Dekkan Independence (PDI), the natives have turned against their former protectors. Captain Kirk is to watch over the politically delicate and very dangerous evacuation of Federation personnel. Naturally the Klingons are out to exploit the situation, with an independent-minded Captain Kasak aboard an experimental warship.

Of course, none of the main characters can die, but Morwood cleverly develops a real sense of tension by setting his story in the interesting time between *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (which concludes with Kirk regaining command of the Enterprise) and *The Wrath Of Khan* (which begins with Kirk deskbound again). Maybe Kasak will inflict the humiliation which has Kirk kicked upstairs...

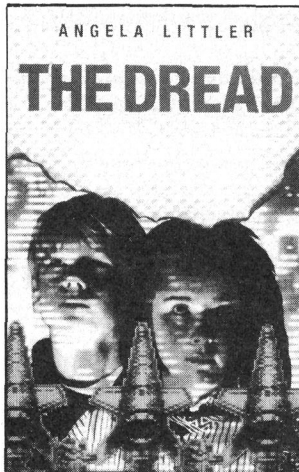
Unfortunately, apart from this, the novel is unremarkable. Of course the PDI behave badly, but we know it's Kasak who's the real enemy and we never really sweat over their antics until too late. What's more, their motives are never fully explained; unlike the complex society described in the *Cloud Miners* episode, the terrorists here are shadowy demons made of cardboard. Kasak is a bit more interesting, but not much. As for the final confrontation

between Kirk and Kasak, it's definitely a damp squib. *Rules* provides some nice embellishments to the *Trek* universe along the way, but as a story in its own right it never takes off.

Stuart Wynne

THE DREAD

Proof positive that real horror can break the age barrier and settle in almost anywhere, as Angela Littler sets down a diary of dread, written by a 14-year-old girl in 1988 and entitled *The Dread* (Simon and Schuster,



TROUBLE AND STRIFE

LORD OF THE CROOKED PATHS

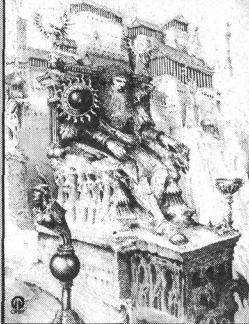
Patrick H Adkins
 Publisher Orbit
 Format PB, £3.50
 Category Fantasy

The battle between Greek gods is the subject chosen in Patrick H Adkins' latest fantasy. It's a classic novel in one respect, and that is because the main characters are the elder and younger Greek gods. The story also sounds somewhat familiar but, although Adkins retells one tradition of creation, he does it as if his tale was fresh, and in a very palatable way that contemporary audiences will appreciate.

Mount Olympus was inhabited by gods long before great Zeus ever held sway. Their undisputed ruler is Kronos, a wise, though often judgemental and ruthless god whose name is a word which is at the root of time and can, in certain contexts, mean 'timeless'. One god, however, defies his command, and that is Proteus, the Titan who is to bring the fire

"A MOST ENTERTAINING FANTASY STORY, WITH A GREAT DEAL OF ORIGINALITY."
 JULE ANDERSON

LORD OF THE CROOKED PATHS
 PATRICK H. ADKINS



of knowledge. He teams up with the dark god Thanatos, lord of death, and their experiments spell almost certain disaster for Kronos's new creation: Man. At times, Adkins' narrative slips into hyperbole and florescent language but fortunately he tells a straight tale, resisting the temptation, pursued by other less adept fantasy writers, to cover every paragraph with flowery description. For that reason, I enjoyed the book. It's an old tale well told, and many medieval storytellers made their living in such a way; so why should I protest?

John Gilbert

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paperback, £2.99).

The year was certainly one to remember, particularly for those of you who live in Kent and can remember October's terrible hurricane. It was around this event that Littler based her fictional child's eye view. Eve is a girl who suddenly begins to feel the stuff of fear, dread.

There is no reason for such feelings, her life is not particularly woe-inspiring, but she cannot rid herself of this amorphous sense of impending doom. Nor can she tell her mother or her friends, she does not think they would understand; until, that is, her computer addict companion Adam reveals that he's been

having the same weird feelings as she has. Furthermore, his computer has been malfunctioning in ways even he cannot understand.

The story unwinds in roguish, Roald Dahl-ish manner. As each day unfolds, we are treated to new revelations and observations regarding Eve's deepening depression, until we learn that her feelings have a truly intergalactic interpretation.

Unlike many other children's books, *The Dread* reveals that children can feel deep unease which they cannot be 'jollied' out of. Author Angela Littler shares Roald Dahl's interest and enthusiasm in the mysteries of

childhood, and these shine through in this book.

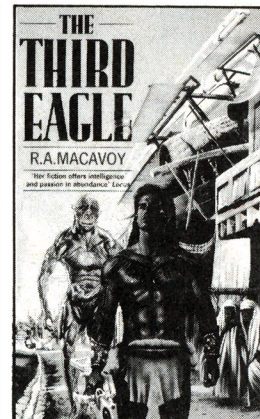
Bob Rachin

THE THIRD EAGLE

At first sight, you might believe that R A McAvoy's newest science fiction novel, *The Third Eagle* (Bantam, paperback, £3.50) was an ancient aboriginal tale with a barechested, broad shouldered Indian as the hero. In some respects, you'd be right, but you would also be looking to the Earth instead of the stars which is where, ultimately, this story unfolds.

The hero in question is Wanbli, a youngster who has just come of age and, as is the desire of every warrior, has left his home world behind and is in search of adventure in space.

He drifts from ship to ship until he encounters an Earth colony ship called Commitment. The ship's name quickly establishes relevance as Wanbli learns his true purpose in life, a



purpose that could destroy the stability of his homeworld.

Fans of RA McAvoy's six other novels, including the *Damiano* trilogy, *Tea With The Black Dragon*, and *Twisting Rope*, will be acquainted with his genius for turning out gentle, colourful, well-crafted fantasies and may be surprised by this dive into the realms of science fiction. Regular readers, never fear. The subject matter might have changed — and there's no reason why a writer should not move on to new topics — but the

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GOOD OMENS

Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman

Publisher Gollancz

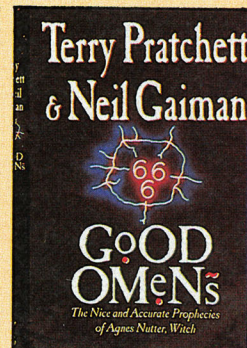
Format HB, £12.95

Category Humorous fantasy

Hilarious Pratchett magic tempered by Neil Gaiman's dark, steely style; who could ask for a better combination?

Gaiman admitted in a recent **FEAR** interview that he conceived the *Good Omens* storyline and tempted Discworld author Terry Pratchett into the proceedings. The fantasy starts with a bang — though I'm sure such an apocryphal tale should end with the bang — when the nuns at a less than saintly hospital deliver the Adversary, Destroyer of Kings, Angel Of The Bottomless Pit, Great Beast That Is Called Dragon, Prince Of This World, Father Of Lies, Spawn Of Satan and Lord Of Darkness into the hands of one Deirdre Young, instead of the American ambassador's wife.

The resulting mayhem is farcical in one sense for the reader, and in another, not so funny, sense for a twee little demon called Crowley. He's whooping up the twentieth century after a particularly dull time in the eighteenth and nineteenth, but he can see the importance of adhering to Hell's



plan for the boy. After all, there's no such thing as a good demon.

At first I was annoyed that the terrible twosome could tear apart one of my favourite film trilogies — *The Omen* series — but they've done so with a certain clever reverence for the genre. Each character is wonderful: from the appallingly normal Mr Young (the unwitting adoptive daddy to the Anti-Christ) to the bumbling Satanic nun Sister Mary (who thinks that Damien or Wormwood would be an ideal name for the new boy), and the supernatural presences of dipstick demons Crowley and Aziraphale.

Initially I was unsure about the teaming of Terry Pratchett with Neil Gaiman, but after giggling at least once on every page of *Good Omens*, I can only hope that they do it again some time.

John Gilbert

LOST CAUSE

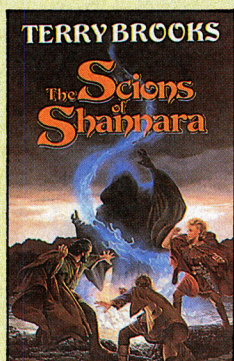
THE SCIONS OF SHANNARA

Terry Brooks
 Publisher Orbit
 Format HB, £12.95
 Category Fantasy

Back in the murky past, when elves were elves and dwarves were dwarves, a man wrote a book called *The Sword Of Shannara*, chronicling the adventures of Shea, Wil and Brin Shannara. There followed two more such novels, *The Elfstones Of Shannara* and *Wishsong Of Shannara*, which carried their story forward.

The Shannaras and their Druid companion Allanon are long since dead. Three hundred years have passed, the elves are gone, the leathery dwarves have been reduced to slavery and the homely Southlands are reduced to dominions of the dread Federation. A hero comes, however, in the form of Par Ohmsford — descendant of Shea, Wil and Brin — who receives disturbing dreams from Allanon.

Par escapes the watchful eyes of the Federation's Head Seeker, and is taken in by Cogleine, another who has links with the Ohmsford name, who tells him of yet more dangers to the Four Lands, not least in the form of the mysterious Shadowen. According to Brooks' they are, 'an aberration... a magic that grew out of the use of other magics, a residue of what has



gone before'. Tolkien's ring wraiths perhaps?

As Par becomes acquainted with his fate, Cogleine travels East and West to find companions for his quest as he'll need the help of both elves and dwarves if he is to drive out the new evil from the land.

Brooks' *Shannara* stories take place amid a Tolkienesque setting with many of the same creatures with which the Ring Master peopled his lands of Middle Earth. While the series was entertaining when it first began, I doubt that any but those still interested in the traditional images of fantasy will be interested. The genre has moved on but, unfortunately, with this series, Brooks has not moved with it. His other magic kingdom novels are witty and exciting; genre conventions do not matter in a spoof. But here, where the author is trying to be serious, his cause is lost.

John Gilbert

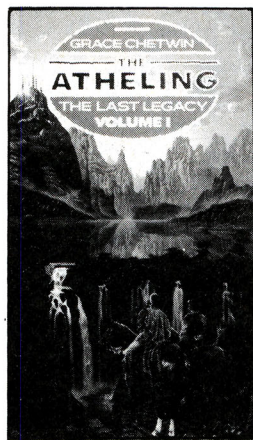
glowing texture and style of his work remains. I, for one, continue to be enchanted.
John Gilbert

THE ATHELING

This is the first part of an intriguing tetralogy by Grace Chetwin, *The Atheling* (Corgi, paperback, £3.99) is set on two parallel worlds, the fate of one determined by the other.

Earth year 2047 sees the planet engaged in limited nuclear war. While one man, Pitar Ellisen, tries to save civilisation from the escalating armed conflict, another tries to come to terms with his own life. This prince, Hisikastor, whom myth calls The Atheling, holds the key to the salvation of both worlds, but only through a personal transformation, rather like that achieved by some of Earth's greatest prophets, can he hope to stabilise the conflicts that threaten to spill over from one world to the next.

Chetwin has produced a tasty introduction to what is likely to



be a zappy, complex, richly peopled SF epic. She's taken the high tech Armageddon scenario and layered it with a simple, yet powerful, set of philosophies, the like of which set series such as *Dune* and Anne McCaffrey's *Dragon* novels apart from hard science fiction. A promising start to an ambitious project by a writer whose novels to date comprise four tales for young people.

Mark Westerby

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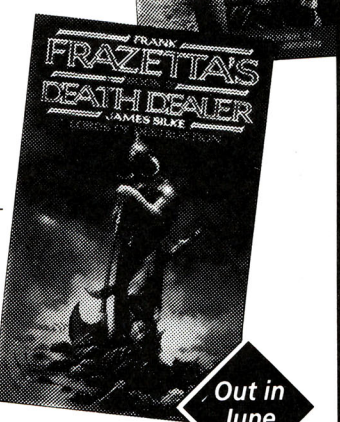
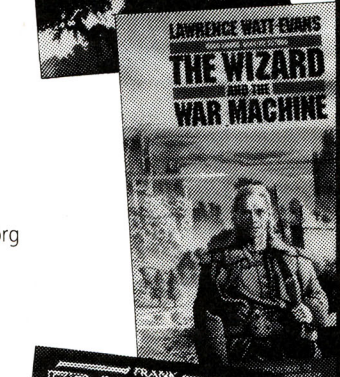
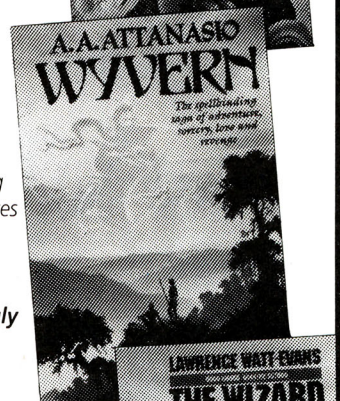
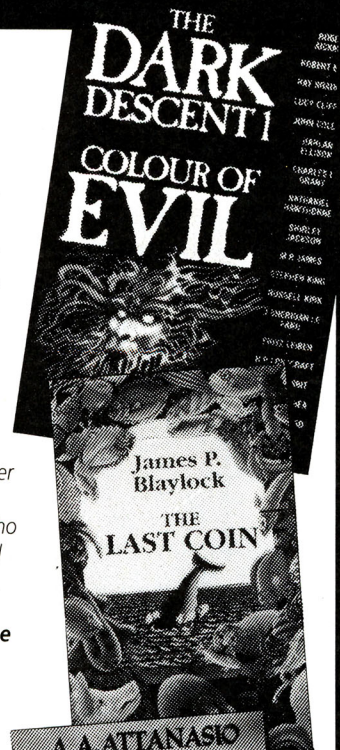
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GRAPHIC

Warren Lapworth watches the wildlife to bring you more comics reviews.

CLIVE AGAIN, AND HELLRAISER TOO

The second book of Epic's *Hellraiser* presents five tales of Barker's Cenobites and Lament Configuration, wandering from South American prison to Louisiana leper colony to Manhattan art gallery. Art varies from functional to excellent, *The Pleasure Of Deception's* visuals (by Bill Koeb) are particularly good. But stories... None rises above the mediocre and *Writer's Lament* is a waste of time. And at £3.40 (import), this is pretty much a waste of money, too.

PATROL VS PALE

I must admit that, although I've intended to a number of times, I have not until this month picked up DC's *Doom Patrol*. Issue 32 (80p) puts the Patrol (Mr Steele, Crazy Jane and Rebus) up against the Pale Police. These assassins draw the thumbprint of their intended victim on their otherwise blank helmets, wear a costume with a broad smile across the chest, and speak only in anagrams! (We-ird!) This issue is only one part of the Decreator (the Anti-God) story, and although character artwork is of an unsavoury, chunky nature, Grant Morrison's plotting is jocular and intriguing.



BLOCKBUSTING ALIEN WARFARE

Dark Horse have no subtlety, no restraint! Following the success of their *Aliens* and more recent *Predator* movie tie-ins, *Dark Horse Presents* 36 (£1.25, import) introduces their new title featuring both alien life forms. Excellent illustration by Phill Norwood (pencils) and Karl Story (inks) and a brief scene-setting of *Predator* creatures exploring an Alien-inhabited world all really whet the appetite — *Aliens Vs Predator* is a series that I for one am not going to miss.

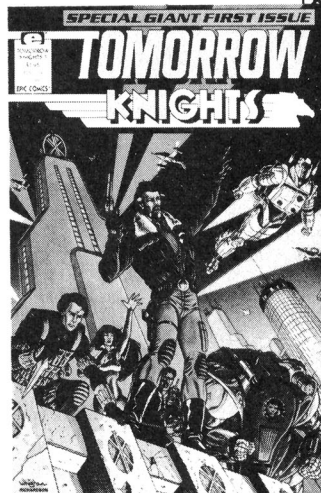
The other two parts of the comic, *Delia And Celia* and *Heartbreakers*, are much less exciting, but the former presents a pleasant prehistoric world for the girls to explore, while *Heartbreakers* shows *Aliens* influence in its grimy future combat.

KNIGHTS WITH A ROUND TABLE

The scenario to Epic's latest title, *Tomorrow Knights* (£1.25, import) is hardly original: following a nuclear attack, a world peace treaty is formed, enforced by the United Corporate Council, a private company. Assassinations, blackmail and guerilla warfare become commonplace in a world where all-out war is impossible, and struggles between sub-corporations prevent UCC from world domination.

Starkweather Ltd is a six-man freelance mercenary company, aka The Tomorrow Knights, whose first missions involve a hijacked aircraft, a Disney waiter robot, raunchy videos and a skirmish with the local corporate army, the Reamers, via a bar-room brawl.

Naturally for this first issue, most of the story is scene-setting, a collection of unspectacular happenings which familiarise the reader with characters and the future world. Certainly there's enough to arouse interest (I'll be tuning in for the next few issues), and clearly defined, well-coloured visuals help the story's flow. This enlarged premiere issue (I hesitate to use Epic's 'giant' term) is well worth checking out.



FROM RAISER TO BLAZER

Whatever has happened to John Constantine? He hasn't been quite the same since he left the capable hands of Alan Moore, in his *Swamp Thing* era, for pastures new in *Hellblazer*. But in the latest issue of his book (No 29, price 80p), he doesn't even delve into the occult/supernatural, instead Constantine is stalked by an ageing psycho, complete with kitchen knife. The story isn't helped by the scruffy, malformed drawings and tired use of colour. I expect much better of writer Jamie Delano and sincerely hope he recognises the naff error of his ways.



"I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN, TOM. KINDA LIKE THE FIRST TIME YOU GET LAID, RIGHT? DID I EVER TELL YOU ABOUT THAT? I WAS AT THIS PARTY, SEE, AND--"

"OH, BROTHER ..."



THE STORY CONTINUES IN ISSUE #1 OF ALIENS VS. PREDATOR!

ETA ILL BATMAN



GARBAGE IN, GARBAGE OUT

As *Gotham By Gaslight* took us back to the Gotham and Batman of fifty years ago, so now *Digital Justice*, the latest Knight graphic novel (Titan, £14.95) journeys a hundred years into the future. Gotham is being run by the Net, a giant computer system that controls all functions — including law and order — of what has become a megatropolis. James Gordon, grandson of the Commissioner we know from present-day Batman, is one of the few remaining human cops and he runs into dead ends while investigating the strangely frequent occurrences of servocops (police robots) going rogue.

To discover the facts, Gordon operates above the law as the Batman (what a surprise) and, with a skateboarding friend aspiring to be his Robin, is taken to the Batcave by a remote-controlled slave vehicle. This 'Batcraft' is a slave of the Batcomp, a powerful computer program which ultimately must combat the omnipotent computer virus at the head of the Net, named after the villain who created it — The Joker (yawn).

The only remarkable thing about *Digital Justice* is that its illustrations were created entirely on Macintosh II computer (by Pepe Moreno). It's certainly an original look and one which has improved greatly upon the visuals of Epic's *Crash*, a computer-generated Iron Man graphic novel released a few years back, although panels are often repeated, text and size the only alterations. Plot is weak, taking elements of *Tron*, conventional Batman, *Blade Runner* and cyberpunk in general to produce a tale which is both predictable and, in its conclusion, disappointing. Novel, stimulating and flashy artwork is simply not enough.

EIGHT PRONGS ARE BETTER THAN THREE

Leicester-based Trident Comics open the fifth issue of their mono anthology title (£1.75, and boringly named *Trident*) with an appealing prologue to a multi-part story, *Saviour*. It introduces the concept of the lost *Devil's* bible, a collection of evil teachings that in Lucifer's hands could destroy Jesus and heaven. It's clear that *Saviour* will have the hero, Pete, trying to find this 'bible' before the Earthly incarnation of the Devil does — let's hope later art isn't as crude as it is in some panels of the prologue.

Lowlife (part five) continues a stylishly drawn but flat SF story, and while *Into The Mirror* never really goes anywhere, its brash and square (literally) art is good. *Dom Zombi* tells little in the first surreal part of the adventures of... Dom Zombi, *Untitled* would have best been un-included, and *Lateral Organisms* is little better, despite its sweet explanation of evolution. *Light Brigade* chapter six, is amusing 'Gothic cyberpunk satire' (if you'll excuse my description) but it is confused by four styles of artwork. The eighth part of *Trident* tells too little of *Bacchus* to attract attention; decide for yourself whether that little lot is worth your money.



SMOOT POINT

The 21st century, Earth, its people and colonies are ruled by the Resource Management Board, and space travel is eased by faster-than-light Smoots Drive. *Open Space 2* (Marvel Graphics, £3.50, import) gathers four stories of this future situation. *Biosphere* by F Paul Wilson is a neat interpretation of a typical 'stranger in a strange land meets an even stranger alien' short story, but Charles de Lint's *Policy* is literally too down-to-earth — a virtually identical story could be set on present day Earth. *Bottom Line* is marginally less guilty of this, being a future *Miami Vice*, drugs and all, but the dreary *Armada Operation* is what really drags *Open Space* down, a cliched SF tale that becomes a bind to read. Art is of a consistently high quality throughout this collection and is what makes it just worth the asking price.



ROMERO DIRECTS THE DARK HALF

Stephen King teams up with George A Romero, Medusa follows its Society success with Misery, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles offset New Line's Nightmare On Elm Street troubles and Sean Connery plays it the Brando way. FEAR's John Glenday has the latest.

Anne Rice's *Interview With A Vampire* has finally been turned into a screenplay by Michael Christopher whose first script fed Jack Nicholson all those juicy lines in *The Witches Of Eastwick*. His most recent project is an adaptation of *Bonfire Of The Vanities* by Tom Wolfe, an as yet unreleased movie starring Tom Hanks. It remains to be seen whether Rutger Hauer, Rice's preference for the role of Lestat, is chosen for the lead part in *Interview*.

Robocop 2 is complete and has been certified a PG 13 in the US. The low certificate comes as a surprise to the filmmakers, as well as everyone else, because the violence surrounding the character, although toned down from the first film, is still present. Perhaps by virtue of Robo's exposure on television (via an animated series) and through comics, America has become desensitized to the very violence that Robocop is there to stop. As for the future, the scripts for *Robocop 3* and *4* already exist.

Stephen King is in for another good year at the movies. Not only is Rob Reiner's version of *Misery* destined for the screen sometime soon, but George A Romero plans to direct *The Dark Half* later this year. Romero has to finish production chores on Tom Savini's *Night Of The Living Dead* remake before he can start the script, but no doubt King will be happy to work with the director after their successful teaming on the *Creepshow* movies.

Out of the new crop of King movies, we are likely to see *Misery* first, when it is distributed by those nice people at Medusa.

PUNISHER SOLDIERS ON

As New World/TransAtlantic at last prepare to put out *The Punisher* this summer, Dolph Lundgren and Jean Claude Van Damme team up in *Universal Soldier*, a story of

futuristic mercenaries. Andrew Davies directs. He last held the reins on the Gene Hackman movie, *The Package*, a spy thriller we have yet to see, and *Code Of Silence*. Filming commences at Pinewood later this year.

More on *Highlander 2: Michael* (*Scanners*, *Watchers*) Ironside has joined the cast as chief bad guy alongside love interest Virginia (*Dead Can't Lie*) Madsen. It's good to see Ironside in the type of role he can make his own, although he is probably fed up with playing the villain. In this sequel, he's cast as the head of an evil corporation, destroying the world's atmosphere and damning the consequences.

Connor MacCloud (Christopher Lambert) becomes aware of the threat to the Earth and resurrects Ramirez (Sean Connery, collecting a cool three million dollars for ten days' work) to do battle with Ironside and avert global disaster.

Filming is taking place in South America, so the destruction of the rain forests is likely to figure heavily in this ecology-based fantasy.

TWOHY FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

Alien 3 has yet another new director. *Elm Street 4* man Renny Harlin has fallen by

OF MICE AND WOMEN

THE WITCHES

Starring: Angelica Huston, Mai Zetterling, Rowan Atkinson, Bill Paterson, Jasen Fisher
Director Nicolas Roeg
Distributor Warner Bros
Cert 12

Ronald Dahl is one of those rare writers whose work fits neither genre nor age group — it's dark and witty enough to appeal to the older reader, yet has a fairy tale quality which offers instant appeal to children. His books are ideal for translation to

film but, despite irregular outings with the *Willy Wonka* movies and *Danny, Champion Of The World* (the latter was sourced with television money), no major film distributor has committed to a big budget Dahl movie. *The Witches*, directed by

Nicolas Roeg and produced by Muppet master Jim Henson, is about to shine a little light where others have not dared. It took several years to get this project off the ground, but Roeg has chosen, almost without fault, a cast and crew who have produced a creditable result.

Dedicated, I suppose, to all those who believe in the ugly sister school of witches, it describes the horrors inflicted upon young Luke (Fisher) when he travels to England for a holiday with his



Mouse trapped: *The Witches*

the wayside, finding himself entangled in the webs of movies such as *Die Hard 2* and *Ford Fairlane*. The way is now clear for Vincent Ward to step into his shoes, having gleaned experience from directing the visually impressive *Navigator*. He will direct a David Twohy script, as previously reported, when filming starts at Pinewood in September.

Twohy makes his directing debut in *The Grand Tour*, an SF movie starring Jeff Daniels. The story is set in small town America, where a group of visitors from the future turn up to witness a great catastrophe.

Tim Burton has added Alan (Catch 22) Arkin, Anthony M Hall and *Lost Boys* mum Dianne Wiest to the cast of his latest movie, *Edward Scissorhands*. After *Edward*, Tim will revive *Beetlejuice* and

grandmother Helga (Zetterling), a witch-wise old woman who is recovering from a slight stroke.

Their hotel has been taken over by the Royal Society For The Prevention Of Cruelty To Children, a group of beautiful, philanthropic women, headed by the oddly alluring Angelica Huston. Luke begins to suspect that these so-called do-gooders are not what they seem and his worst fears are soon confirmed. Trapped beside the stage of the hotel's conference room, he watches as Ms Huston, the Grand High Witch, peels off her human guise to reveal a long nose, humped back and decidedly itchy bald head. She then berates the other witches for allowing the children of England an easy life, and unveils a potion which will turn said kiddies into mice.

The first victim is a tubby boy guest at the hotel, and he's closely followed by the unfortunate Luke. Eventually the boys wriggle out of their predicament, but not before the series of hilarious adventures culminates in a most disgusting banquet.

Angelica Huston is the toast of this incredible fantasy movie, but Rowan Atkinson — as the put-upon hotel manager — and Jason Fisher should also be commended for their performances. The special effects, whilst interesting, are not always up to scratch.

The Witches may not be your run of the mill fantasy film (it's certainly not a horror film) but it's sure to have the genre pundits talking for some time to come.

John Gilbert

then... *Batman 2*. (There are rumours that nobody else wants to do it).

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Movie took \$25 million in its first three US days of business, and proved a bigger opening than *Lethal Weapon 2*. New Line (the filmmakers) breathed a sigh of relief as the empty coffers were replenished. The fifth *Nightmare On Elm Street* movie caused more damage to the company than expected and a hit film was sorely needed, according to some reports. Now the Turtles are a hot item, and you can expect to see them in at least another three movies.

Troma again win the turkey for stupid title of the month with *Nymphoid Barbarian In Dinosaur Hell*.

SEQUEL STOP PRESS: 976-*EVIL 2* is on the cards, as is *Society 2*. But don't expect Robert Englund to direct the former. He's too busy with the *Phantom Of The Opera* sequel and *Nightmare 6*. Also look out for *Moontrap 2: The Pyramids Of Mars*.

PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

Starring: Robert Englund, Jill Schoelen, Alex Hyde-White, Stephanie Lawrence
Director Dwight H Little
Distributor Castle Premier
Cert 18

You could hardly describe Robert Englund as the definitive Phantom Of The Opera, but he brings to the role of Erik Drestler — architect, musician, madman and genius — a style and technique which seems to suit today's audience. Although the producers of this operatic fandango have nothing to do with Englund's other big screen persona, Freddy fans may be pleased (or not) that the characters have something in common.

Christine Day (Schoelen), a young musical student in New York is about to undertake an audition for a very important show. She chooses as her party piece a full-bodied little ditty written by the infamous Erik, so-called Phantom Of The Opera. Alone in the music library, she sings the first few bars, and resurrects the monster's memory, as phantom blood wells up from the musical notes on the score sheet.

Christine does not, however, meet the Phantom until the following day when, during



Nightmare time: Robert Englund as the Phantom

her audition, she stumbles into a mirror, falls backwards through 120 years of history, and into a waking dream. She becomes a little known understudy to the famous diva Carlotta (Lawrence) at an unnamed European opera house.

Her talents soon come to the fore when her musical angel, whom she believes has been sent by her late father, gruesomely forces the diva out of the show and has Christine installed in her place. Happy ending? Never. Christine denies her love for Erik, who kidnaps her and holds her in his subterranean fortress. Her boyfriend Richard (Hyde-White) attempts a rescue but

is apparently killed in the attempt; Christine, meanwhile, transports back to the present day.

I won't spoil the shock ending — which neatly sets up the central characters for a sequel already in the works. As the Phantom, Englund shows a certain ominous presence, and the gore fans should be easily pleased by the sequences in which he sews pieces of skin — a nose, a cheek — onto his decaying face. I suspect, though, that Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical production, now shooting at Pinewood, will prove more bankable and probably more memorable.

John Gilbert

NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 5: THE DREAM CHILD

Starring: Robert Englund, Lisa Wilcox, Danny Hassel
Director Stephen Hopkins
Distributor Enterprise Pictures
Cert 18

It's unbelievable, but New Line has found a tenuous new storyline on which to hang a dozen more Freddy features.

Robert Englund only makes a few more appearances in this film than Pinhead does in *Hellbound: Hellraiser 2*, but that doesn't stop the rest of the cast talking about him all the time. As Nancy is dead, along with the rest of the Elm

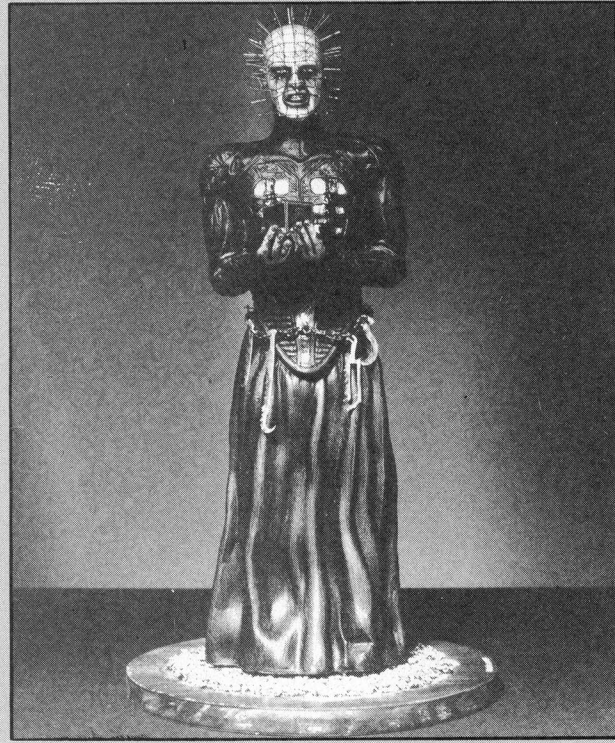
Street kids (whose sell-by dates expired in *Dream Master*), it's now up to Alice and boyfriend Dan to get the clan going again.

While Alice becomes pregnant, her boyfriend dies messily in an auto accident as he dreams that he's become a monstrous bike, and we learn that their child-to-be is now prey to Freddy's nightmares. Our bogeyman is weak, but intends to re-energise himself by entering the foetus and being reborn.

Freddy's mother, the saintly Amanda Krueger, intends to put a stop to his plans once and for all and warns Alice of his designs and tries to give her the strength to fight him. Alice's baby, a bruised waif of a boy, also pops up occasionally to offer encouragement or just to look sullen.



**PRESENTS
HELLBOUND
HELLRAISER 2**



Stick pins in your very own *Hellbound* doll! Yes, we have 30 micro-detailed scale models of Pinhead, with the flayed skin, blood-encrusted leather, even the torture tools and Lament Configuration box that have turned him into one of horror cinema's most notorious antiheroes. All you need to add are the pins and the paints. First you've got to answer our diabolical little puzzle, three of the trickiest questions we could ask, but they should be easy for Pinhead fans:

1. Name the novella behind the two *HELLRAISER* movies
2. Give the name of Kirsty's father as featured in Clive Barker's novel (not in the films).
3. Name the actress who played the female Cenobite in the first movie.

The questions are tough, but not just anyone can own a Pinhead doll. To enter, write the answers on the back of a postcard or sealed envelope and send it to: **Hellbound Compo, FEAR, Newsfield, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1JW.** All entries should reach us by 17 June 1990. As usual, no employees of Newsfield, **FEAR**, or 20.20 Vision may take part — aaahhh!



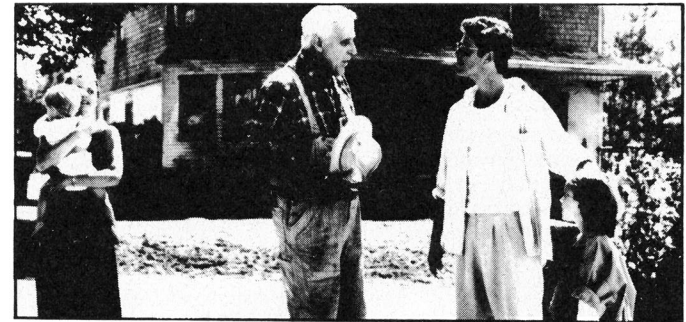
Elm Street 4: Englund In more familiar guise

Englund is not at his best in this film, but there are some effects sequences that make the viewing more palatable. Also the scenes featuring the lunatic asylum may resemble some of the worst set pieces of the *Freddy's Nightmares* television show, but it's almost a thrill to watch for Englund's face appearing on screen amongst the gaggle of inmates.

The ending? Well, it's much the same as the others in this series, and the juice generated by the feeble plot would not keep a gnat alive. Still, how many gnats go to the cinema these days?
John Gilbert

PET SEMATARY
Starring: Dale Midkiff, Fred Gwynne, Denise Crosby, Blaze Bredahl, Miko Hughes, Brad Greenquist, Susan J Blommaert
Director Mary Lambert
Screenplay: Stephen King
Distributor CIC Video
Cert 18, 90 mins
Rental

The history of Stephen King on film has not always been a happy one, with — in this reviewer's opinion — the best being *Stand By Me*, ironically based on a short story and not even a horror film. But as King is not principally interested in gore for its own sake — he writes about people and their environment, and character development is held to get in the



Pet Semetary: meeting the neighbours

way of action film plotting — a short story is probably the best vehicle.

Interesting, then, to see what the man can do as screenplay writer of the novel he once described as his gloomiest. Predictably, it's the closest any King film has stuck to the original, in plot terms, and even the necessary short-handing of the family relationships that make the horror all the more tangible in the book has not been ruined in translation. The intractable descent into hell is all here and — with one or two missed opportunities — director Mary Lambert has made the most of it, and with little fuss. It's taut, well signalled and readily avoids the camp silliness suffered by so many horror films by sensible under playing from the excellent cast. I still long, however, for quintessential King horror on film.
Roger Kean

SUSPIRIA

Starring: Jessica Harper, Stefania Casini, Alida Valli, Joan Bennett
Director: Dario Argento
Distributor: Entertainment In Video
Cert 18, 94 mins
Rental

Dario Argento's 1977 horror classic has long been championed by aficionados of the genre, and its release onto video will undoubtedly garner a new generation of fans for the Italian master of the slasher film as 'art'. A baroque vision of Hell set in a German ballet school, the film sees the arrival of Suzy (Jessica Harper), a new student at the Frieburg Tanz Akademie, where the horrific murder of a former student has just taken place. As the murders mount up, Suzy's curiosity concerning the nature of the teachers at the school begins to grow.

Suspiria's flamboyant theatricality, garish colour, art deco sets and ear-splitting soundtrack render it a truly unique cinematic vision. From



Suspiria: return of the bloodsoaked nighties

its breathtaking opening scenes, where Suzy's frail figure is seen battling against the elements to the final shot where she emerges grinning triumphantly from the blazing inferno, Argento draws his audience into a hermetically sealed world of devilish symbolism, disjointed dialogue, maggots, bats and blood-drenched nightdresses. However, *Suspiria's* reputation as a modern masterpiece is seriously compromised by its weak narrative, which serves to underline the pretentious aspects of its stunning set pieces. Though Argento's technical confidence and flair are indisputable, this film seems simply to be an excuse for a display of pyrotechnics, and it is debatable whether these alone will stand the test of time.

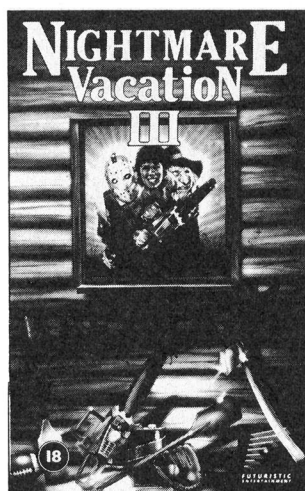
Patience Coster

NIGHTMARE VACATION 3

Starring: Pamela Springsteen, Tracy Griffin, Mark Oliver, Kim Wall
Director Michael A Simpson
Distributor Futuristic Entertainment
Cert 18, 75 mins
Rental

There's hope yet for this intentionally slapstick spoof series on slayer serials. Angela, the holiday camp killer, makes her third outing and it's the best of the bunch, although no doubt not to everyone's taste.

If you saw the second segment you'll remember that Angela, a camp counsellor — and mass murderer — has escaped from Sleepaway Holiday Camp where she killed a bunch of wrinkly teenagers and has gone to the big city to make plans. Number three starts with a young girl doing an obligatory strip in her bedroom, before going out and getting run down by garbage truck, ably driven by Angela. (A classic case of shreddie — see last issue).



Our angel of destruction transforms into the spitting image of this girl and, as she's picked up by a New Horizon Camp bus, we know that more trouble is on the way.

New Horizon turns out to be ye ol' Sleepaway Camp, now run by a peace-and-bimbo-loving man whose wife probably starred in all those whiter-than-white Seventies toothpaste commercials. They've brought together two groups of kids, one from the

rich section of society, the other from the poor, with the intention of turning them into one happy, nature-loving group. But they don't bank on the ministrations of our Angela, who only needs the slightest excuse to bump off the cannon fodder kids —

starting with a junkie news reporter who ends up snorting cleaning powder.

I wouldn't mind if the makers of this film were attempting to be original, but have they woken up to the fact that even spoof slasher movies can be clichéd?

John Gilbert

THE LAND BEFORE TIME

Starring: Gabriel Damon, Candy Hutson, Helen Shaver, Pat Hingle, Judith Barsi, Will Ryan
Director Don Bluth
Distributor CIC Video
Cert U, 66 mins
Rental

As this is a children's cartoon film, the story is simple. Littlefoot, a 'Longneck' dinosaur (colloquial prehistoric term for a Brontosaurus), faces a tough time. The plant life which his species lives on is growing scarce, and then the 'Big

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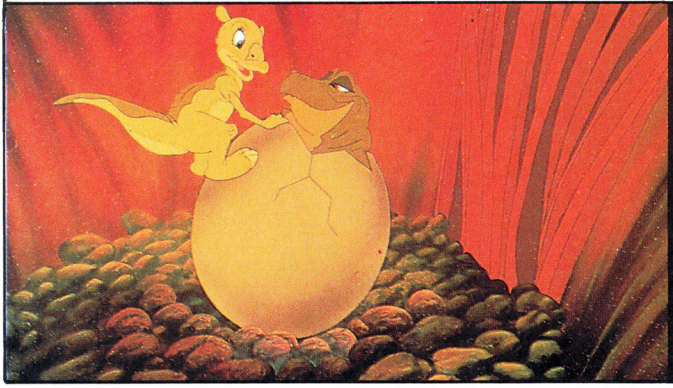
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Littlefoot meets a new friend

Earthshake' makes him homeless and separates him from his family. He begins a long journey to the Great Valley, a green fertile place, 'a journey toward life.' Facing the dangers presented by terrain and creature alike, particularly Sharptooth (the local Tyrannosaurus), he befriends Cera, Ducky, Petrie and Spike, dinosaurs of various types who accompany him.

It's perhaps *too* simple, a

basic tale that even the kids may find lacking in twists. With main characters designed by (and characteristic of) ex-Disney animator Don Bluth, it extols cuteness and sentimental values; this mood is accentuated by James Horner's sweeping soundtrack. But thankfully the film's brevity prevents *The Land Before Time* from becoming sickeningly 'nice'.

Of interest to few adults and of only passing interest to children, this cartoon flick is

something of a dinosaur (groan).

Warren Lapworth

TOO BEAUTIFUL TO DIE

Starring: Francois Eric Gendron, Florence Gerin, Randy Ingermann, Giovanni Tamberi

Director Dario Piana
Distributor Colourbox
Cert 18, 91 mins
Rental

A young model learns her body is her fortune but that it can also be a liability when she is raped by a model's agent during a jacuzzi party. Crashing out of the party, she's later found in her crashed car. At first everyone believes that it was an accident, but then other people who were at the party start to die in horrific and quite magnificent ways.

The stylish, video promo feel of this production almost

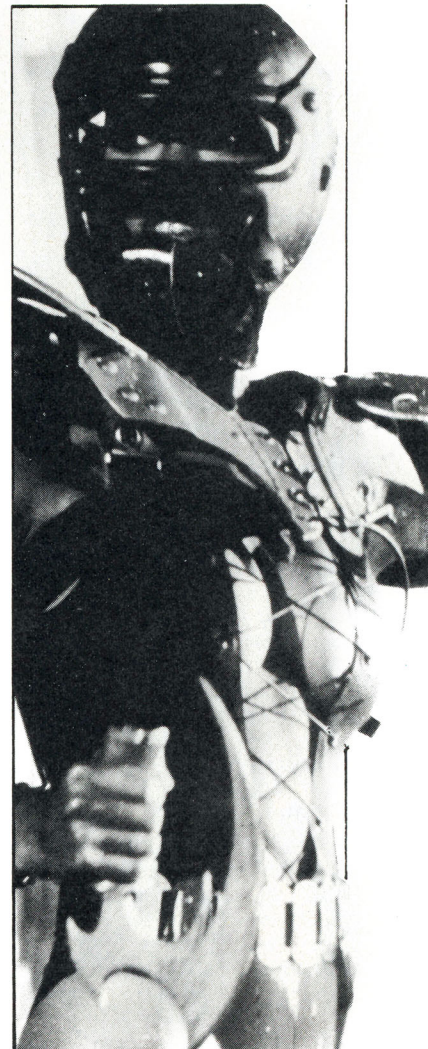
enables me to forgive a so-so ending which weakens the film. After a dozen twists during which we discover that a new model is the dead girl's sister, and the murderer is caught on film, we discover that our psycho has a lust for perfection similar to that of the lead character in *The Stepfather*, except in this film the desire is directed towards beauty and not at the family.

The designers of this erotic thriller have obviously worked to get the best out of the human bodies as well as out of the sets. Background music provided by outmoded bands such as Huey Lewis And The News and Frankie Goes To Hollywood is well chosen, and compliments the bizarre sets, costumes and moods.

There's a lot of ferocious posing by the stunningly beautiful models, but that does not inhibit the smoothly paced action and generally believable plot. Immaculately conceived and executed, *Too Beautiful To Die* contains elements which will please connoisseurs of thriller films. It's bound to be a hit.

John Gilbert

Too Beautiful To Die: 'The Fridge' was never like this



BORN IN FLAMES

SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION

Starring: Brad Dourif, Cynthia Bain, Jon Cypher, William Prince, Melinda Dillon, Dey Young, Tegan West

Director Tobe Hooper
Distributor Braveworld
Cert 18, 93 mins
Rental

The year: 1955. The place: a hydrogen bomb testing site beneath the Nevada desert, USA. Two of the guinea pigs in this nuclear experiment are Brian and Peggy Jones, a young couple who, following their return to the surface, receive the happy news of the impending arrival of their first child. This, in the opinion of the US government, shouldn't have been allowed to happen, but nevertheless Peggy gives birth to a baby boy, David, perfect except for a prominent birthmark on his hand. Brian and Peggy are promptly consumed in self-generated infernos.

Skipping forward 34 years, Sam — who, despite the name, is the Jones' child — has an unpleasant birthday, receiving the news that one of his friends has died from spontaneous human combustion (SHC). Sam also burns his finger on a flame apparently generated from



Brian and Peggy succumb to a burning passion

within himself. After treatment, his doctor dies of SHC, his birthmark grows, and his left arm spurts fire. With assistance from his girlfriend Lisa (her parents are also victims of SHC), Sam begins to unearth the corruption at the root of his life.

Apparently attempting to cash in on fiery deaths before the sequel to Cronenberg's *Scanners* arrives, *Spontaneous Combustion* is insufficiently over-the-top to carve its own niche and lacks the sophistication to make up for this. No sympathy for the characters is felt, particularly for the vomit-inducing 'goeyness' of Brian and Peggy — their glowing death is the

most welcome and pleasing part of the whole movie. Sam, our supposed hero, is less unpleasant but Brad Dourif's often crude portrayal means you'll never care how badly he's been deceived.

The special effects are pleasing and often spectacular but only in the manner that expansive pyrotechnics can easily provoke 'oohs' and 'ahs' from audiences. From laughable early scenes to the sick amount of bodies going up in flames in the latter section of the movie, it's only grim fascination for SHC that keeps you going. Me, I'd rather settle down in front of an open fire with a good book...

Warren Lapworth

BOX OF TRICKS

PUPPET MASTER

Starring: Paul Le Mat, Jimmie F Scaggs, Irene Miracle, Robin Frates, Barbara Crampton, William Hickey
Director David Schmoeller
Distributor Entertainment In Video
Cert 18, 86 mins
Rental

Yale professor Alex Whittaker (Paul Le Mat) has dreams which foretell the future — but his visions only give him a partial picture of what is to come. Together with three other psychics, he is summoned to the Bodega Bay Hotel where, it is rumoured, the master puppeteer Andre Toulon has discovered the secret of eternal life. But the hotel harbours other strange secrets in the shape of five

killer puppets, all of whom, inexplicably, have murderous designs on the prescient guests.

Selling itself with the tag line: 'This is *not* Child's Play', this low budget, direct to video release compares very favourably with the well-received, though somewhat two-dimensional Tom Holland directed movie. Brimming with ideas (one of the more hysterical of which takes the shape of a glamorous research scientist whose particular 'skill' is to detect and experience the various, mainly sexual, activities which have taken place upon different pieces of furniture) and with nods in the direction of Cronenberg and Hitchcock among (I suspect) many others, this film is an intriguing mix of sly humour and existential hokum.

The puppets themselves



sparkle with inventiveness and their own special talents provide a sinister mirror for the various skills of the psychics. Each one is designed to kill in a different way — Tunneller bores holes in people with his head, Leech Woman regurgitates killer leeches, Pin Head strangles his enemies with his huge hands, Blade has a hook for one hand and a razor-sharp knife for the other, and Jester is the brains behind them all. Other ideas blatantly ripped

The razor-sharp Blade, or is he the Puppet Master? Answers on a postcard...

off from *Child's Play* — including the low-level tracking shots and the original movie's central theme of a human soul entering an inanimate object — are thrown into the melting pot of a minutely detailed plot. When you've worked out what it all means, let me know.
Patience Coster

HELLBOUND: HELLRAISER II

Starring: Clare Higgins, Ashley Laurence, Kenneth Cranham, Doug Bradley, Nicholas Vince, Barbie Wilde
Director Tony Randel
Distributor 20.20 Vision
Cert 18, 90 mins approx
Rental

It's difficult to totally demolish this *Hellraiser* sequel — it looks gorgeous and some of the sequences and one-liners are excellent — but the movie promises so much and then ultimately fails to deliver.

Nevertheless the much underrated Kenneth Cranham gives a wonderful performance as a new surgeon cenobite and Clare Higgins also turns in a good demonstration of evil. My favourite segment, however, is the final part of the summoning sequence, in which Channard's dumb child prodigy, Tiffany, solves the Lament Configuration and calls the boys — and girl — in blue leather.

The cenobites will continue to enthrall me, but Randel's handling of this affair, which concentrates on look rather than logic, can for this very reason be equated with the second *Nightmare On Elm Street*. Also, far from reinstating slashed sections from the theatrical release, the BBFC have ensured that the video remains roughly the



Kenneth Cranham, Cenobitten in Hellraiser 2

same, with one major cut where the Channard cenobite amputates a patient's hand.

Fans of *Hellraiser* are likely to want a copy of this sequel in their video libraries and it's worth the cost of rental for fans who missed out on the big screen release. In the final analysis, however, it's one of those movies that depends on

personal taste. Two camps formed when the film first went on show: most people thought it was worse than the original, but some believed it to be better; I think, on the whole, that I must still register my vote with the former group.
John Gilbert

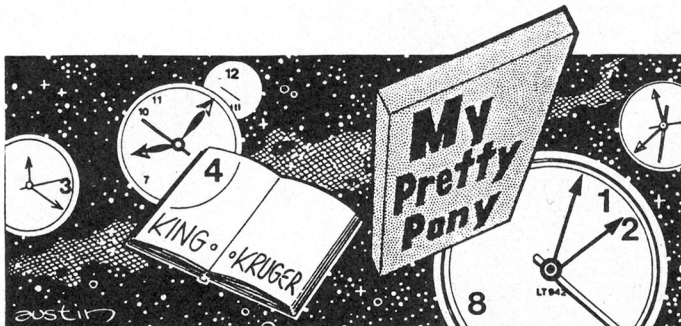
SLEEPING CAR

Starring: David Naughton, Kevin McCarthy, Judi Aronson, Jeff Conaway, Ernestine Mercer, John Carl Buechler
Director Doug Curtis
Cert 18, 84 mins
Rental

An American Werewolf In London star David Naughton plays the victim again as Jason, a mature journalism student who moves into an eerie railroad sleeping car.

The car is just about all he can afford after separation from his bitch of a wife, but Jason does not realise that this piece of rolling stock has a checkered history. It was once owned by The Mister (Buechler), a railway engineer who was dismissed from service after his goods train careered into a passenger train. Bent on revenge, he took young people back to his sleeping car and did away with them before he himself died in mysterious circumstances. Now his wife (Mercer) keeps the carriage clean and as it was before his disappearance.

On his first trip to the car Jason gets the shock of his life when he lifts the covers off an ancient sofa-bed and finds The Mister lying there in all his rotting glory. The journalist takes the apparition to be a figment of his imagination, but soon he's having



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Sleeping car

nightmares about murder, the lights flicker at odd moments and a tape of an ordinary freight train, bought by Jason's girlfriend to lend mood to the sleeping car, starts to replay the accident.

Unknown to Jason, his friends are also being systematically killed within the trailer. First his girlfriend's ex-beau (Lundquist) is slashed and dumped in the nearby swamp and then his ultra-hip tutor is folded up in the sofa-bed after being bound up by its spring wires.

Jason invites the help of neighbour Vincent Tuttle (McCarthy), a strange old man who practices white magic, but even he has no power over The Mister who can only ultimately be banished by

Jason's love.

The Sleeping Car is an auspicious start to Castle Home Video's Summer Of Horror. Naughton and Conaway ham it up in the lead roles, and special effects creator John Buechler is wonderful as the engineer. An excellent effort by all, even the photography on occasions rises above mundanity with the inclusion of several stunning, flickering montages.

Castle Home Video have picked a fast and furious opener and from the look of their product list the good times for horror fans are here to stay. I'm glad to see that some video companies still have faith in the low budget end of the market.

John Gilbert

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 Director Mark Lester
 Distributor Vestron Video
 Cert 18, 91 mins
 Rental

The sequel to Mark Lester's *Class Of 1992* only goes to prove what educationalists have known for some time; that we won't have to wait until the year

2000 for society to start on a violent downward spiral.

Lester poses the theory that such social breakup will start with the young, at school, and in his view of the future the processes of law and order in some American schools, notably Kennedy High in Seattle, have broken down. The schools are run by rival gangs, and police have abandoned their patrols of the surrounding areas, labelling them Free-Fire Zones and warning decent, honest citizens to stay away.

The new head of Kennedy

COLLECTABLES COLLECTABLES COLLECTABLES

FEAR casts a critical eye over a handful of video sell-through titles...

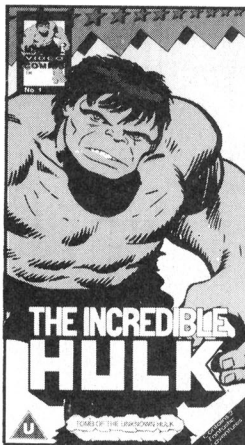
Leisureview Video are distributing a series of Marvel superhero videos, each at £7.99 and comprising two stories, beginning with *The Incredible Hulk* and *Spider-Man and his Amazing Friends*. The Hulk, still in his green form, stars in *Tomb of the Unknown Hulk*, where he faces Doctor Octopus (who

suitable energy. Over-the-top voices (particularly that of Doc Ock) and sound effects all add to the fun, and ensure that these videos will amuse children, Marvel fans and 'sensible' adults alike.

Warren Lapworth

BAT HISTORIES — VAHROOM!

The Batman craze continues unabated in the sell-through market with two more offerings of Batlore. *Batmania* from K West Video (45 mins, £7.99), not to be confused with

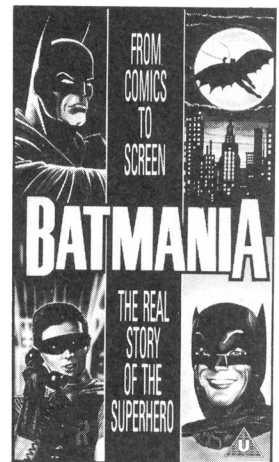


really should be battling Spider-Man), and in *Prisoner Of The Monster* where he searches for a tropical tribe who can cure him of his destructive self. Spider-Man, Iceman and Firestar speed through *Triumph of the Green Goblin* (should be the Hobgoblin by now, but never mind) and *Crime Of All*



Centuries (which stars Kraven the Hunter, who just may have been alive when this cartoon was in production).

Backgrounds are as simplistic as the stories are camp, but characters are designed and animated with



K-Tel's *Batmania!* reviewed two issues ago, charts the history of the Caped Crusader from his debut in Bob Kane's comic strip, through early movie serials (nice clips!), the famous Sixties TV series to today's dark incarnation in graphic novels and *Batman — The Movie*. Loads of detail (what a pantheon of guest-starring villains in the Sixties!), loads of clips, great fun: definitely one for Batfans.

Channel 5's *Batman and Robin and other Superheroes* (51 mins, £9.99), a tad overpriced, is an overview of all the US heroes to make it to the screen, both in animated form (great *Superman* clip from the Forties) and live action. Overlaps are unavoidable on the *Batman* front, but the clips from other serials are quite jolly. Worth a look for serious superhero fans.

Oliver Frey

High (McDowell) wants to instill a little discipline, so he hires three new teachers, expertly programmed in history, chemistry and PE and all forms of discipline. These androids are controlled by the incredibly strange Dr Forrest, an albino computer/weapons scientist played with savage appetite by Stacy Keach. We know what sort of education Forrest wants his robots to give the kids, but it takes the release of one Cody Coe (Gregg) from prison and his re-installment at the school to get the action rolling.

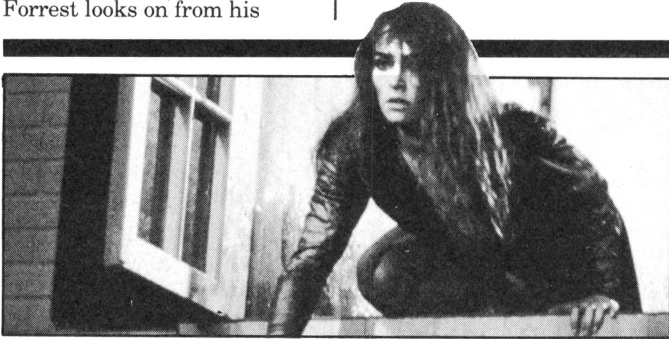
Cody is an ex-Blackheart gang member and tries to stay on the straight and narrow, even trying to date McDowell's daughter. Soon he discovers that the teachers' methods of punishment are more extreme than anyone can imagine. As Forrest looks on from his

control room, his pets systematically slaughter offenders.

Coe declares outright war, uniting the gangs and taking on the teachers at a special night school. But even he has not realised that these androids are ex-army models, with inbuilt, incredible-looking weapons.

This sequel starts off in cliché mode, as we are shown the wrecked cars and wire fences of the Free-Fire Zone, but it soon develops into an enjoyable romp with clever, sometimes startling special effects which make you forget that the school on the rampage plot was used up in the original movie. I hope they don't make yet another sequel, but this one is immensely satisfying.

John Gilbert



Oozing verve and venom: Joanna Pacula in *The Kiss*

THE KISS

Starring: Meredith Salenger, Nicholas Kilbertus, Joanna Pacula, Mimi Kuzyk, Sabrina Boudot, Shawn Levy
Director Pen Densham
Distributor RCA/Columbia
Cert 18, 94 mins
Rental

Young Amy's lively birthday party ends in tears when her mother dies following a road accident. Six months later her aunt Felice visits out of the blue, bringing her unusual belongings and eating habits with her. She comes to retrieve her cross, passed on to her sister in the Belgian Congo, 1963, at the start of the train journey where her aunt made her a witch, via 'The Kiss'.

Being a witch, Felice naturally doesn't look too kindly on people who stand in her way... and she shows it. Amy's friend Heather is killed in an 'accident' involving a cheap necklace and a shopping mall escalator, and Amy discovers her sunglasses in Felice's suitcase. Amy smells a rat — and the (very) wild cat that undoubtedly belongs to the witch — but her father falls under Felice's spell, and

her doubting neighbour and amiable but hopeless boyfriend aren't much help.

This may sound like contrived nonsense but in actuality *The Kiss* is a highly entertaining, well-shot and well-directed movie. Not as much is made of the witchcraft and occult elements as could have been, but it's still a refreshing reworking of the age-old 'bad guy/gal kills interfering characters from afar' ploy.

It's helped along considerably by a fine cast. Meredith Salenger as Amy plays the most endearing and cute heroine I've seen in a long time, and Nicholas Kilbertus is a traditional unintelligent father weary of his overexcitable child. Felice herself (Joanna Pacula, occasionally overacting in the role) is smug, confident, oozing verve and venom.

The effects are few, consisting mostly of the vampire cat, which often appears to be a glove puppet and/or stuffed feline, but I've seen worse. The final scene uses most creative visuals and is over-the-top and drawn out — a quite disappointing climax — but hopefully it will allow a sequel.

Warren Lapworth



BLAKE'S 7

Most fans of the late Seventies/early Eighties BBC SF series will be fully aware of the four videos now available, and will have bought them all by now. But for those still in the dark, *The Beginning*, *Duel*, *Orac* and *Aftermath* each offer two hours of the adventures of Blake, Avon, Vila, Cally, Jenna and Gan aboard *The Liberator* — for only £9.99.

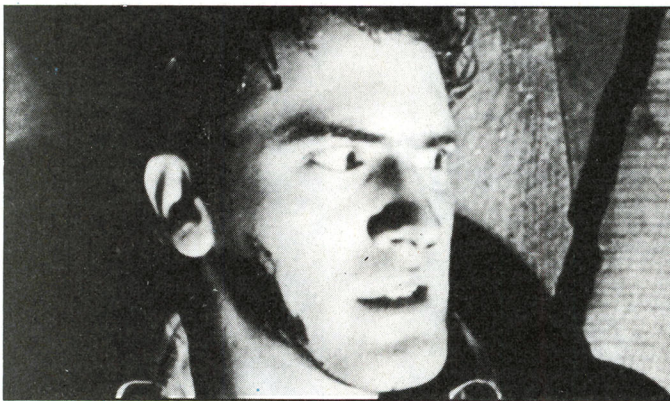
The cheap sets, props that

appear to have been made on *Blue Peter*, and bit-part actors often raise a snigger, but the tales of the seven versus the foul Galactic Federation, personified by Servalan and Travis, are enthralling (with the exception of the last half hour of *Aftermath*). This classic TV programme truly deserves its cult following, and all four videos should be snapped up by anyone with a science fiction interest.

Warren Lapworth

DEAD, BUT NOT BURIED

After a six year absence, Sam Raimi's classic horror *The Evil Dead* is back with a BBFC certificate, but with 'significant cuts'. Mark Kermode reports on the movie's strange history, and examines the newly approved video version.



Bruce Campbell awaits another onslaught of the *Evil Dead*

For most British horror fans, the early Eighties will be remembered as a period during which obscure movies became available for the first time on video, only to be hounded through the courts on various seemingly random obscenity charges. Following a hysterical press campaign against 'video nasties' (a phrase invented by Mary Whitehouse), a large number of videos were impounded and dealers prosecuted under the controversial 1959 Obscene Publications Act. Ironically, many of the films which were successfully proceeded against held legitimate BBFC cinema certificates: a list of around 60 impoundable titles issued by the DPP in 1983 includes Tobe Hooper's *Funhouse*, Gary Sherman's *Dead And Buried* and, of course, Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead*.

Whilst few distributors put up a fight, Palace decided to contest the prosecutions, and indeed won a number of

crucial Section 1 cases. Yet fatally, a number of uncontested prosecutions were upheld, during which the video of *The Evil Dead* was found obscene, in exactly the same format as that passed by the BBFC for cinema release — ie: with 40 seconds of cuts.

With the introduction of the Video Recordings Act in 1984, the BBFC were appointed by the government to classify all videos with special regard to 'suitability for viewing in the home', meaning that they should be judged more strictly than cinema movies. More importantly, the BBFC were under strict instruction not to pass any material which might infringe the Obscene Publications Act, a move which could lead to their being de-delegated as the classifying authority. With their jobs very

much on the line, the BBFC decided to play it safe, and refused to categorise the now notorious video. '*The Evil Dead* has been found obscene in several courts,' said BBFC deputy director Margaret Ford in June of 1989. 'The position of the Board is that if something has been found obscene under whichever section of the Obscene Publications Act, and it's got a case history, then it's incumbent upon us not to pass it, because obviously we would be in breach of our duties to do so.' Six months later, however, BBFC director James Ferman revealed that, after much deliberation, the board had finally approved a 'significantly cut' version of *The Evil Dead* for sell-through video release, which this month appears on the shelves priced £9.99. (Ferman subsequently confirmed the official cut running time as one minute and six seconds).

The most 'significant' alteration, is unsurprisingly, a trimming of the 'tree-rape' sequence, which removes the suggestion of penetration. Readers may care to note that, despite his contempt for censorship, Raimi himself recently expressed reservations about the scene: 'I think it went too far,' he told me in December, with his usual candour. 'It touched a very nasty aspect of things. Women being treated badly in films is not entertaining, and is usually just the work of immature minds, like mine was. I was 19 when I wrote that.'

Other cuts concentrate on 'toning down' rather than removing entirely scenes of supernatural mayhem, lending a somewhat diffuse quality to the picture, robbing it of its original kinetic pacing and relentless visual flair. *The Evil Dead* was, in its original form, a masterpiece of editing, and to have such a work tampered with is inevitably infuriating. Nevertheless, there's still enough that's survived the rusty scissors to deliver ample treats, and if you don't already possess an uncut copy, this will do to be getting on with.

Meanwhile, *The Exorcist* still remains banned in its entirety on video, as does *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*; a sobering reminder of just how rampant censorship has become in Britain. As Raimi himself says: 'The censors are making decisions for everyone else, which is dangerous. I think it's terrible, awful, frightening... Much more frightening than anything in *The Evil Dead*.'

NEXT ISSUE

FEAR

INVITES YOU TO A WEDDING

● **RE-ANIMATOR 2**
HP Lovecraft's resurrectionist brings his bride to life. FEAR compares the sequel with the original and talks to producer Keith Walley.

● **DANNY ELFMAN**
Batman, Ghostbusters II, Texas Chainsaw Massacre II, Darkman, Nightbreed... You name it, he's composed it.

● **TERRY PRATCHETT**
The Wacky Wizard Of Wit talks about his latest books, Good Omens and Pyramids.

PLUS!

SFX master John Buechler, comedy monster movie Tremors, and Tales From The Darkside: The Movie, a set visit.

**FEAR ISSUE 19
ON SALE JUNE 14**

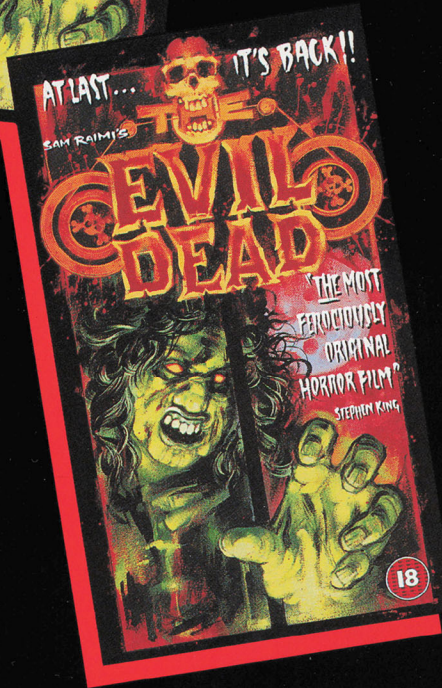
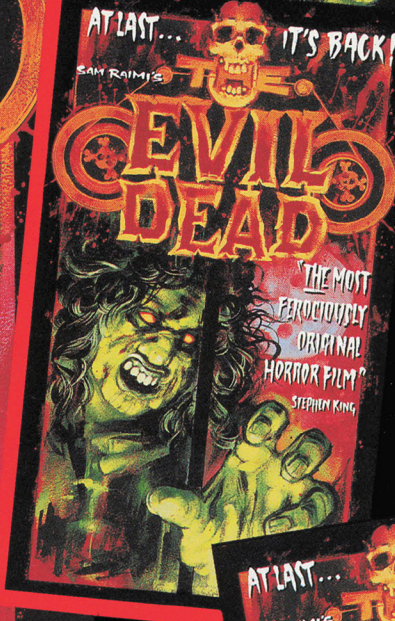
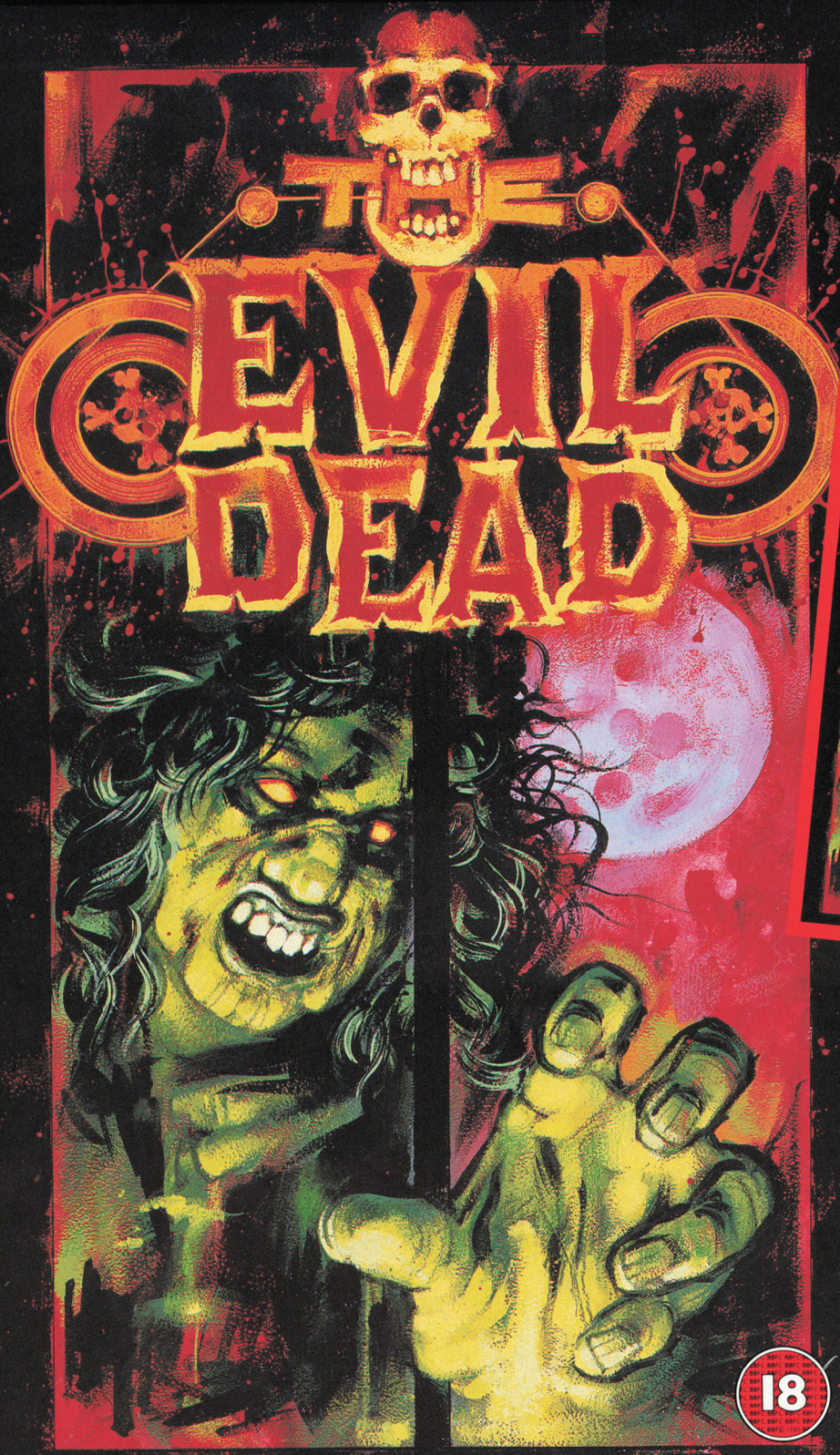
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