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Big Arnie on Mars

JAMES HERBERT'S
CREED

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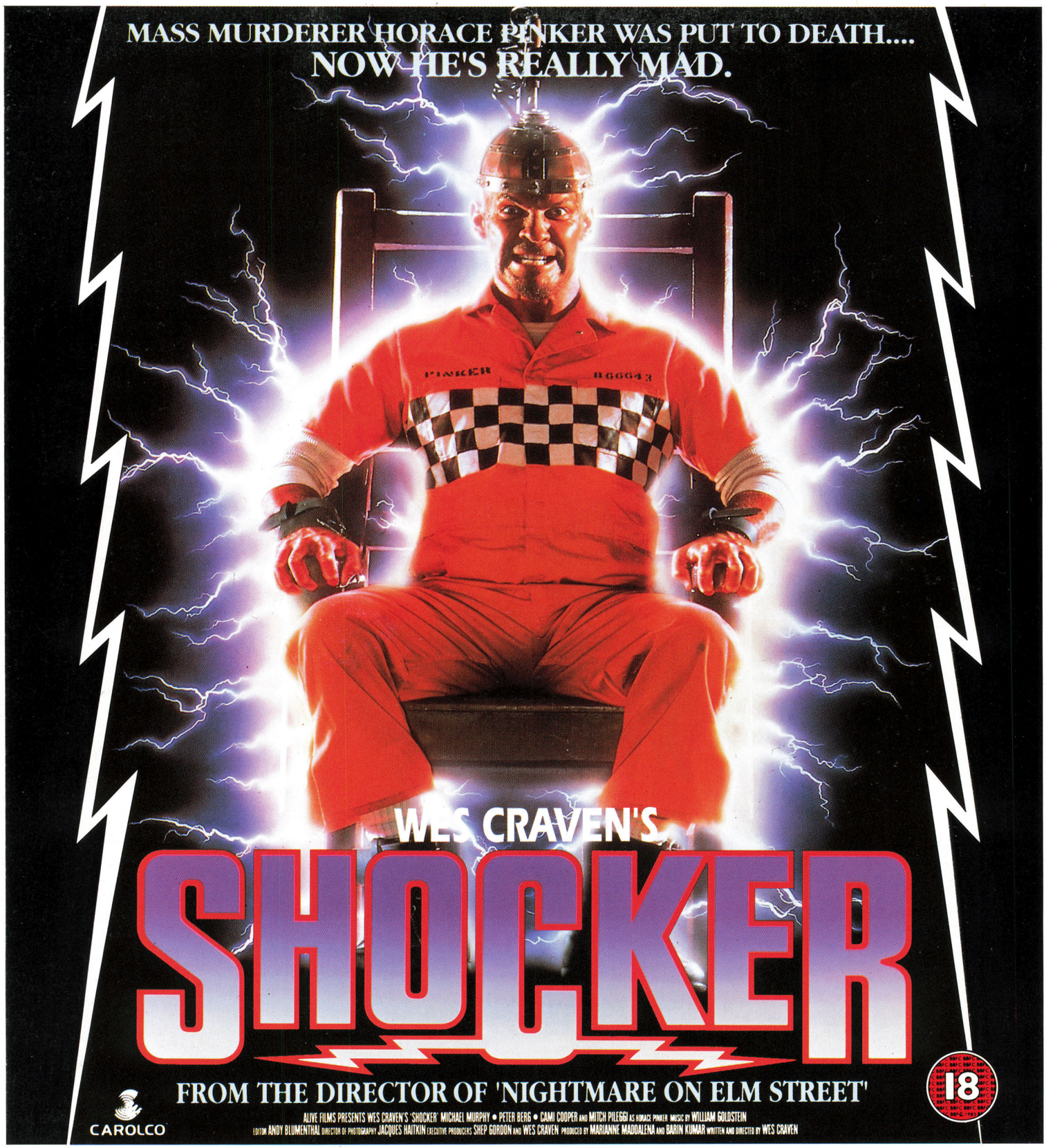

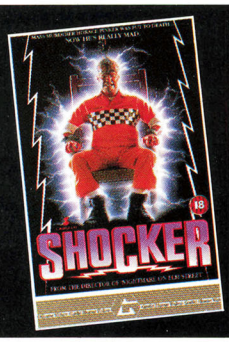

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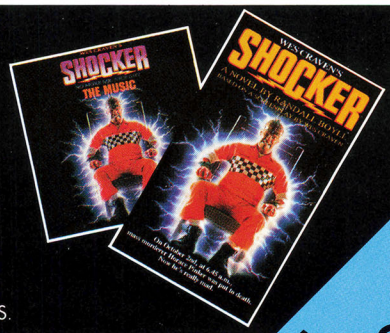

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FROM 16th AUGUST

FEAR

FEAR ISSUE No.20 CONTENTS AUGUST 1990

Positive reactions to the new look FEAR have been pouring into our offices. Nice to see we seem to have interpreted your questionnaires correctly!

Onto this month... We lead with a candid interview with James Herbert at home on the eve of the publication of his new novel Creed, and include an extract plus a very special competition.

Hammer films are a legend — FEAR looks at their achievements and hopes of a revival. We report on Total Recall, the big summer blockbuster (alongside Dick Tracy — see also our news feature on the history of the comic book detective), and delve into the history of the chainsaw in the movies.

All this — and more reviews than any other magazine in the field... Chomp on that!

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The latest bone-crunching news from around the globe, in which Arnie remembers how to spell his surname in Total Recall, Warren tries to forget his in Dick Tracy, and a new inheritor of the Hitchcock mantle hits the screens.

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Win loadsa lovely loot in this month's set of fantastic FEAR brain-mashers.

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Your mail from Hell!

MIND GAMES

Arnie meets with the Martians and still manages to hang on in there in Total Recall (above), while director Paul Verhoeven shouts 'Trust me!' (below).

Total Recall features super hunk Arnold Schwarzenegger in an uncharacteristic role as a man who doesn't know his own mind. J B Macabre talks to director Paul Verhoeven and to muscle-chops himself about the movie that dares to pit itself against the might of Beatty and Co for this summer's box office take.

If there is one thing to be said of Phillip K Dick, it's that his writing is hard to translate to the screen — witness the shenanigans over *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* — or *Bladerunner*, as it is better known to cinemagoers. That was a full-length novel, so no wonder that the second attempt at adaption one of his short stories was chosen: *We Can Remember It For You Wholesale*. Set in the year 2084, the SF film *Total Recall* is based on that story, with a screenplay by Ronald Shusett, Dan O'Bannon and Gary Goldman. Arnold Schwarzenegger plays Doug Quaid, a construction worker whose recurring, haunting dreams of another life and a mysterious woman send him on a journey from Earth to the red planet, Mars.

'*Total Recall* is a science fiction action adventure film with an underlying psychological level,' says director Paul Verhoeven, veteran director of action/adventure and science fiction, whose credits include the war drama *Soldier Of Orange*, the thriller *The Fourth Man* and the 1987 hit, *Robocop*.

'The story is science fiction because it takes place in the future and is partly situated on the planet Mars, which has been colonised and abused by Earth. It's an action adventure in that it's about a man being hunted by people who are trying to kill him because something in his brain, which he has forgotten, threatens them. Yet it is also a story about 'reality', which gives the film a deeper psychological complexity.

'This undercurrent will, every once in a while, undermine the audience's perceptions. For the most part, you will be experiencing a straightforward thriller, but then suddenly you'll find yourself at the edge of an abyss wondering if what you are seeing is real or the product of a man's fantasy.'

To help create the unique visual effects for the film, Dream Quest Images, whose credits include *Scrooged*, *The Lost Boys* and *The Abyss*, joined forces with production designer William Sandell, who worked previously with Verhoeven on *Robocop*.

TOY SHOP

For the Mars setting they turned to Churubusco Studios in Mexico City. Verhoeven and Sandell got together with conceptual artist Ron Cobb (whose credits include *Star Wars*, *Alien* and *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*) and the alien world of *Total Recall* began to take shape.

'Working with special effects both frightens and fascinates me,' says Verhoeven. 'Science fiction is a dream world furnished by a toy shop. The frightening aspect comes from the danger than can occur if you allow the effects to take away the energy from the other crucial areas of the production.

'It's extremely difficult to create a world that is realistic while still making people feel that this is not now — this is then. In films like *Star Wars* or *Star Trek*, you know you're far away in time and you can do whatever you want because it's fantasy. Here we're taking what we know today and extrapolating that into the future to create a heightened reality.'

With the story set on two different planets, the film required two very different futuristic looks for these worlds. 'The feeling for the total Mars experience was that of the architecture impressed on rock,' explains Sandell. 'We established that the people live in the rock to protect themselves from the dangerous solar radiation that filters through Mars' thin atmosphere, and all our sets incorporated the rock into the architecture. It's practical and has a mass-produced look that's in keeping with the economics of the colonies.

'Using the red rock in the archi-

tecture is also stylistically interesting. Many of the interiors, such as the hallways of the Mars Hilton, incorporate the rock in the construction as a decorative touch.'

For Earth's stylistic look of the future, the crew found that what they were looking for was right under their noses, in Mexico City. 'Verhoeven wanted a look that's loosely known as 'new brutalism', where the buildings are very solid and brutal in their style,' says Sandell. 'In Mexico City we found a number of buildings that fitted this perfectly — huge monolithic structures devoid of any surrounding foliage, which physically diminished our characters.'

With sets built, the crew of Dream Quest Images, under the direction of Eric Brevig, had their work cut out, largely because of the generous size of the sets and the special effects required for the film.

'In previous films of this nature, the blue screen photography has been somewhat limited because the action had to be moved to a special blue screen stage. On this film, we were able to accomplish very large blue screen shots on our shooting stages in over 40 separate setups,' states Brevig.

'In most cases, the blue screens measured a mammoth 40' by 60' to accommodate the huge sets. The fact that we were able to take screens of this size to the stages is significant, because nothing of this scale has even been attempted before.'

The finishing touches to the Mars environment involved creating the mutants that resulted from the early days of the planet's colonisation, when the settlers were exposed to Mars' deadly solar radiation. Rob Bottin, who began working on films such as *Star Wars* and *King Kong* and startled audiences with films such as *The Howling* and *The Thing*, was called in to create the creatures and special make-up effects.

'Our story is presented in a lighter fashion, so the mutants won't be too grotesque. The creatures are very much like the story's vision of the future, one that is pleasantly and entertainingly disturbing,' says Verhoeven.

In the film, Doug Quaid's quest of self-discovery takes him from Earth to the oppressed colonies of Mars. Schwarzenegger is enthusiastic about his role: 'Doug Quaid is a very normal kind of guy who works in construction but actually has another life that was deprogrammed from his mind. When he's confronted with this information, he doesn't know what his reality is and what is nothing more than a programmed dream. The audience will not know either, and that's what makes this movie so very interesting.'

Total Recall opens on 27 July in London and on 10 August nationwide. The book of the film (also entitled Total Recall) by Piers Anthony is published in hardback by Legend, price £12.99.

SNIP! SNIP!

- The ITV serialisation of **Stephen Gallagher's Chimera** has, according to the author, been dropped back from August to 'a more high profile slot in the winter season where it can generate maximum revenue for the ITV network'. Production company **Zenith** is being cagey about the principal creature, **Chad**, which has been created by SFX company **Image Animation**, who also worked on the **Hellraiser** and **Nightbreed** movies. More exclusive details are promised for **FEAR** readers nearer the release date.

- **Monster Moods**, a horror greetings card design and manufacture company is about to start distribution to a wide number of Stateside comic stores and plans to start up business in British specialty shops soon. One of the brains behind the project is **FEAR's Stanley Wiater** who enthuses: 'The horror cards tend to come out at **Halloween** and then go away again, but we intend to have them in the shops all year round.' Watch those shelves.

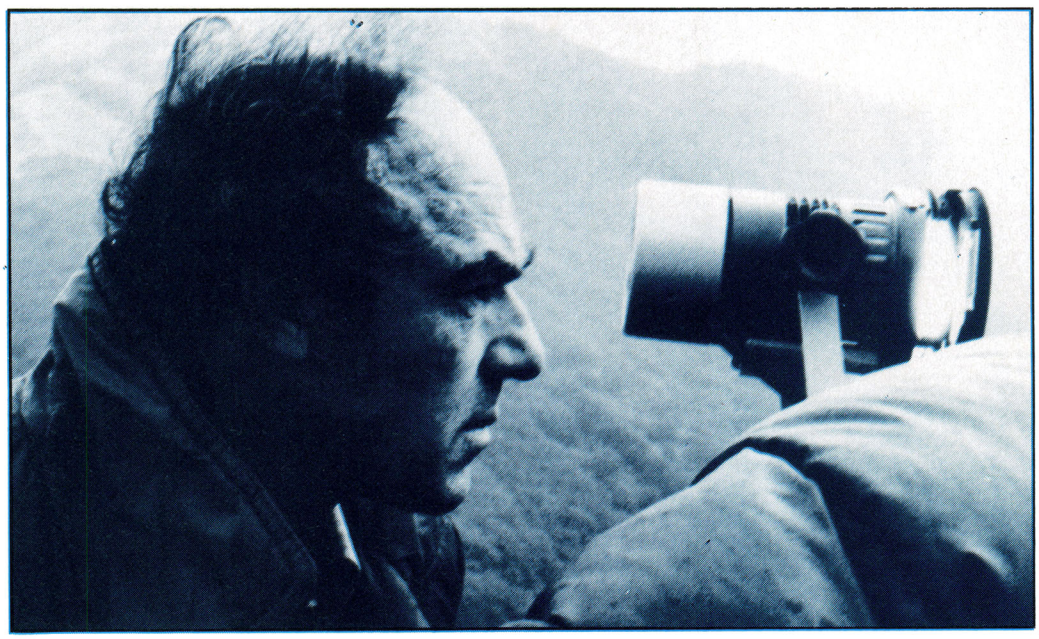
- **Stephen King's** new novel, **Four Past Midnight**, will be published by **Hodder and Stoughton** in October, price £13.95. Previous reports stated that his next book would be a collection of novellas. Also, despite the recent reissues of **'Salem's Lot, The Shining** and **Night Shift**, anyone interested in obtaining a hardback copy of **The Bachman Books** should get their order in now. Hodder's only have a few left in the warehouse and do not intend to reprint.

- **Dean R Koontz**'s new novel, **Cold Fire**, will be published in hardback on January 21, 1991, when the paperback of **The Bad Place** will also appear. **Headline** will also reprint **Night Chills** (February), **The Voice Of The Night** (March), **Strangers** (April), **Twilight Eyes** (May) and **The Vision** (June). There are also plans to reprint **Demon Seed** in late 1991.

John Gilbert/M R Webb

DISAPPEARING TRICK

George Sluizer, director of The Vanishing, talks to FEAR's Mark Kermode about his devastating new thriller which has taken the international movie world by storm.



To be proclaimed as the 'new Hitchcock' is an accolade for which most directors (particularly those working in the horror/thriller genre) would give their right eye. After all, Brian de Palma has spent the last fifteen years trying to convince us that he should be taken seriously as a latterday Hitch, but so far he's been fighting a losing battle.

Whilst huge amounts of time and money have been spent in Hollywood attempting to recapture the master's crown, a little known (over here, at least) Dutch director has quietly and discreetly crept in through the back door and deftly usurped the throne, by delivering the most surprising horror/chiller in years. Appearing out of the blue, *The Vanishing* has met with international acclaim, and director George Sluizer has promptly been hailed by the press as representing the cutting edge of the Hitchcockian tradition.

Yet, sitting in the resolutely dingy offices of Metro Pictures in London, Sluizer, whose previous screen credits include producing the awesome Werner Herzog-directed *Fitzcarraldo*, seems genuinely surprised (and a little bemused) by the comparison. 'I tell you honestly, I suppose I *can* understand it but I really never thought about it,' he insists quietly. 'I never *tried* to be Hitchcockian, although I think the result may have that quality. Even in the editing that thought never entered my mind — I never thought 'How did Hitchcock do this?' even when I was trying to build suspense. I was just thinking 'How can I make this material work?'. When people asked me in the past who my favourite filmmakers were, I never said 'Hitchcock'. I mean, obviously I've seen and am familiar with his work, and I must admit that there are some films that I like very much, but I've never really made that connection.'

Based on a novel by Tim Krabbe entitled *The Golden Egg*, the plot of *The Vanishing* is almost ethereally slender. A young Dutch couple, Rex and Saskia, stop at a service station whilst on a driving holiday in France; Saskia walks to the toilet block, and simply vanishes without trace. From there ensues a psychological battle between the bereaved boyfriend Rex (Gene Bervoets), and Saskia's horribly ordinary abductor, Raymond Lemorne (played with terrifying mundanity by Bernard-Pierre Donnadieu).

SCARED WITLESS

Sluizer professes to be taken aback by the fact that *The Vanishing* has been universally described as 'terrifying' and that audiences have been, to put it mildly, scared witless by its nerveracking climax. Nevertheless, he concedes that he has in the past warned audiences that they should rightly be disturbed by the picture, although he remains keen to avoid labelling the movie primarily as a 'horror' outing. 'I know that at certain screenings I attended I did indeed say that people should be disturbed by what they saw,' he admits, 'but that was partially to prepare people, to get them sitting well in their seats, if you like. I think now that rather than being disturbed I would like people to reflect on what they see. But I think people may indeed be distressed temporarily.'

When I point out that, for me, being 'distressed temporarily' involved spending the greater part of an entire day feeling dazed, disorientated and occasionally claustrophobically nauseous, Sluizer nods his head knowingly — he's apparently getting used to this sort of reaction. 'I'll tell you a story,' he murmurs comfortingly. 'The film was shown at a festival just outside San Francisco, and I got a letter from a hotel owner who wrote 'You are welcome in my hotel' — which was nice. He then went on to say that he'd seen *The Vanishing* the day before the San Francisco earthquake happened, and he was talking about it with some friends just after the quake. They were *still* talking about the movie, and he wrote 'Your film is stronger than the earthquake!' — which means that they were so full of God-knows-what that, even when the house fell down, still it was there somewhere in their minds.'

A key element in the movie's lasting power to disturb is Sluizer's refusal to distance us from the central character of Lemorne, a psychopathic kidnapper with an awesome potential for evil. Describing the tone of Krabbe's source novel as 'rather sarcastic and ironical', Sluizer praises the author for shying away from crass pseudo-scientific explanations and justifications for Lemorne's murderous bent. 'Tim didn't come up with all those standard psychological explanations, such as 'His mother beat him when he was a boy and therefore...' all of which I think is not interesting. Obviously, some people are shocked at the end of the movie,' continues Sluizer, 'but actually I think what they are reacting to is much more the fact that they feel 'I can recognise myself somewhere in this film — and I don't really want to. I can see that that man has something of me.' Because you always want to be able to make that distinction; *there* are the bad guys, and *I am* the good guy. But the moment you say 'Well, I could think that too', or 'I might do that', and if it then leads you to something horrible, then you might well get frightened. It's not only the claustrophobia side... Remember, you see a lot of films with cut throats and a lot of horror which is ten times worse. With *The Vanishing*, it's the mental horror, the mental fear.'

THORNY PROBLEM

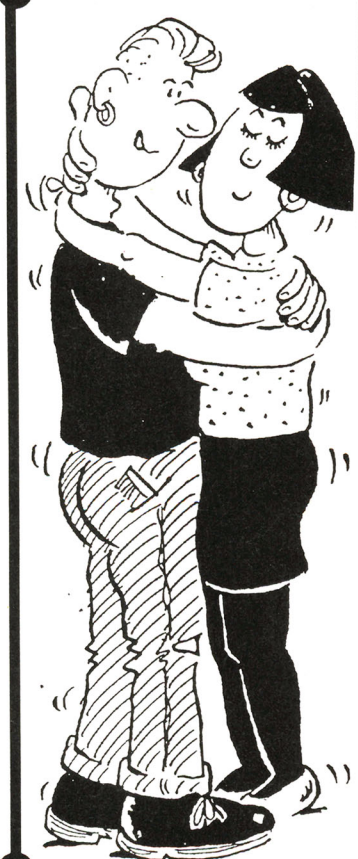
Indeed, the absence of any form of visceral gore or onscreen violence in *The Vanishing* has perversely proved a thorny problem for the British Board Of Film Classification, who awarded the movie a startling '12' certificate, only to be charged subsequently with misjudging its disturbing potential. Following complaints to the Board, two examiners were despatched to view the movie during an afternoon performance at the Metro Cinema, and although there are no plans to rescind the certificate, BBFC deputy director Margaret Ford admits that it raised a difficult problem. 'Ironically, we feel that

George Sluizer (left); a scene from The Vanishing (above), stronger than an earthquake...

the film may possibly be *more* disturbing for adults than children,' she explained. More ironic still is the fact that a film with which *The Vanishing* bears comparison — John McNaughton's *Henry: Portrait Of A Serial Killer* — has recently been deemed unacceptable by the American ratings board the MPAA, on the grounds that its tone was objectionable.

So, is Sluizer familiar with McNaughton's movie? 'I haven't seen it, but I've heard of it. I had one comment in New York when somebody said what you have said, pointing to the similarity, but they said 'The difference is that your film does not alienate in the same way. The other film I object to. But your film does not alienate me, in that I am a prisoner of the film.' I don't say it did not disturb him, but there was no fundamental rejection.'

Unhappy with such a reaction, I attempt to persuade Sluizer to seek out McNaughton's movie and judge it for himself — stressing the similarities of approach. I assure Sluizer that *Henry* cannot fail to move and disturb him, at which he laughs, insisting that no movie could ever do such a thing. 'You see, to me, film is a work of art, an illusion, and I don't get disturbed by art. What disturbs me is when it's bad, but that's not in the sense that you mean. If it is well done, I'm not disturbed even if it is 'evil', if you want, because then I think it is beautiful: it enlarges the mind. I'm not easily shocked. When I saw *A Short Film About Killing*, because it's a tough film, I had for a moment to hold my stomach and say 'this is a little disagreeable'. I don't say it's pleasant, but the film does not disturb me. In fact I was quite joyful when I came out, and everybody else was nearly vomiting. And I just thought: 'It's a good movie...'



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BFS BULLETIN

AIMS AND BENEFITS

Publications, events, and your chance to meet famous personages from the worlds of horror, fantasy and science fiction... Co-chairpersons Mike and Di Wathen present the second part of their introduction to the British Fantasy Society.

Last month we brought you up to date with the history of the BFS with a brief look at its troughs and peaks. This month we'll round off that introduction with a round-up of the services we supply and a short roll call of famous names who support our cause — they're the ones you're likely to see at events sponsored by us.

Our aims, simply, are to bring together people interested in fantastic literature and film, and to provide coverage of what's going on. In recent years, we have been accused of a horror bias, which may be true, as we try to meet members' demands, and they are currently more vocal in suporting this side of fantasy. It may all change next year, with a swing to high fantasy or sword and sorcery.

BFS publications include *The Newsletter*, featuring news, views and articles such as Mike Ashley's book column and Di Wathen's Shopping By Post. Graham Evans has just assumed the editorship from Peter Colborne as Peter is concentrating on his annual *Winter Chills* fiction anthology which is now up to volume four. *Mystique: Tales Of Wonder*, a homage to the Pulps of the Thirties and Forties, edited by Mike Chinn, is another annual publication which usually appears near convention time in September. Both those fiction anthologies attract top authors amongst their contributors.

Non-fiction and fiction combine in *Dark Horizons*, shortly to reappear under the new editorship of Phil Williams after a long absence. Another semi-regular magazine series is *Masters Of Fantasy*, each issue of which concentrates on the life and bibliography of one author. Those featured so far include Peter Tremeyne, August Derleth, M R James and G G Pendarves. *Masters Of Fantasy: Tanith Lee* will appear soon.

Other BFS services include a fanzine library, run by Nick Walker, which is stocked with an impressive number of magazines (including **FEAR**) for members to borrow. John Aitken performs a similar service on the limited edition front with books for sale, including deluxe American hardbacks from Dark Harvest and Ganley at vastly reduced prices.

We also supply information on the genre, and always reply to anyone enclosing an SAE. Most questions we try to answer, but some are too outlandish — such as how many films and books use the vampire theme! (Well, you try to answer that one accurately...)

Sociable creatures that we are, we like to meet our members and give them a chance to meet each other — horrible thought — so we hold four open nights a year in the private bar of a London pub. Amongst those who have dropped in for a drink and chat are Stephen King, Peter Straub, Clive Barker, David Brin, Ramsey Campbell, Tanith Lee, Karl Edward Wagner and Dennis Etchison. Open nights later this year will guest fantasy authors Tad Williams from America, and David Gemmell from Britain. We also, of course, host the annual Fantasycon, with major guests every year. Next month, BFS President Ramsey Campbell will take over this column to give you a taste of what to expect.

Finally, until now we've been vague about the extent of our membership — which currently covers Britain, mainland Europe, America, Russia, Czechoslovakia, Iceland, Australia and Japan. Members include Dean R Koontz, Charles L Grant, Brian Lumley, Stephens Gallagher and Laws, Storm Constantine, Adrian Cole, John Gilbert, Neil Gaiman, Brian Stableford and, from the film world, Kim Newman, Peter Atkins and Milton Subotsky.

Why not join them? A mere £10 ($24 USA, £13 Europe, £18 elsewhere), payable to the British Fantasy Society, 15 Stanley Road, Morden, Surrey SM4 5DE, and you're in. Welcome aboard.

PLEASANCE BORED WITH GORE

Donald Pleasance in House Of Usher.

Donald Pleasance has had enough of horror movies. He finds the continual gush of blood and gore dull and preposterous. 'When I was young, I was more interested in that kind of material than I am now . I always read a lot of ghost stories and, of course, Edgar Allan Poe . Nowadays I don't like horror films. I find them boring. They've had a fantastically good run but they could soon play themselves out. Look what happened to the Western. Twenty years ago, half the directors in Hollywood were making them, but the genre just played itself out.'

So the man who started his horror career playing Dr Crippen — but turned down the lead role of Reginald Christie in Richard Fleischer's 10 Rillington Place — must have found something special in the Poe adaptation. 'People have got tired of blood and guts. Edgar Allan Poe is a bit more classy.' And yet he remonstrates: 'I would have preferred to have made the original story, but I understand why they had to bring it up to date.'

The movie also features a rare filmic appearance by Three Musketeers and Castaway star Oliver Reed , as the master of the house intent on continuing his failing family line at all costs. Pleasance is a close friend of Reed's and is quick to point out that he is always professional when at work, and a gentleman when at play. 'He's a lovely man, as good as gold. He has his moods, but doesn't everybody? I recently spent two weeks on holiday with him in Barbados!'

Pleasance has just finished playing Winston Churchill in a French television series about the statesman's relationship with Charles De Gaulle , so it appears that, true to his word, he has decided to go for the mainstream. He even displays a certain amount of dissatisfaction with the latest Halloween movies and admits: 'We're not making one this year. Halloween 5 wasn't as successful as the others. John Carpenter doesn't like blood — like me — and is tongue in cheek. John Carpenter's Halloween was a very logical film with very little blood. Although Halloween 2 was written by Carpenter, he didn't direct it and it was also a little more bloody. Number three was strange. It had nothing whatsoever to do with the other two.'

From the sound of it, that's the end of the Halloween series, and few would shed a tear. In the meantime, Donald Pleasance goes down under to make a series of outback films for the rapidly growing Australian film industry — films which have nothing to do with spurting veins or knife-wielding psychos. 'I've had several good scripts from Australia, and I'll be going there in the autumn.'
John Gilbert

BASED ON A STORY BY EDGAR ALLAN POE
DONALD PLEASENCE
OLIVER REED
the house of Usher
18
Thrilling Chillers
Released Aug. 2nd
CASTLE Pictures

© Disney

THE SUPER SLEUTH RETURNS

Who is Dick Tracy, and why have Touchstone Pictures put so much cash into Warren Beatty's film about the seedy 'tec' and the strange villains he encounters? Stephen Jones takes a look at the character's comic-book birth in the Thirties and at his development in cinema serials and feature films.

As Touchstone Pictures hype their long-awaited multimillion dollar version of *Dick Tracy*, the time is ripe to look back at earlier cinematic incarnations of the crook-nosed cop.

The square-jawed super-sleuth with the all-American virtues first appeared in a newspaper strip in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* on October 4, 1931, written and drawn by Chester Gould. Following years of Prohibition gangsterism, Gould's highly-stylised two-dimensional images immediately broke comic-strip taboos by showing violence and murder in all their gory detail. However, after the initial protest died down, Dick Tracy quickly became one of the most popular characters in comics history.

One of the strengths of the strip was the incredible gallery of freakish villains which Tracy was regularly pitted against. With outlandish names like Half-and-Half, Prune Face, Larceny Lue, Measles, Boris Arson, Itchy, Shaky, Shoulders, The Brow, Flyface, and Flattop, Gould's grotesque gallery of rogues set a precedent for the colourful criminals who would later confront the dynamic duo of Batman and Robin — such as The Joker, The Penguin, The Riddler and Cat Woman.

TYPE CAST

In fact, Tracy's opponents were so popular that, in 1944, when Flattop came to a nasty end, impaled on an underwater spike, Gould received half-a-dozen telegrams claiming the body, and was deluged with wreaths and letters of condolence!

Six years after his comics debut, Tracy made the transition to motion pictures in the first of four 15-chapter serials produced by Republic Pictures. In *Dick Tracy* (1937), actor Ralph Byrd was cast as the dedicated detective, and rarely have a performer and character been so completely unified; so successful was Byrd's identification with the role that later in his career he found it hard to find any other work.

From the original cartoon strip by Chester Gould © Chicago Tribune — New York Syndicate

In his first cinematic outing, Dick Tracy is pitted against a grotesquely-masked villain called The Lame One/The Spider, who is unleashing terrorist attacks on vital American industries with the aid of his futuristic flying wing. One of the most terrifying sequences ever to appear in the serials opens Chapter One as The Lame One stalks character actor Byron Foulger down a dark, deserted street and kills him — and, in an original plot twist, Tracy's brother is operated on and transformed into one of the villain's henchmen.

Although somewhat slow-moving, the serial proved to be a big hit and the following year Byrd was back in *Dick Tracy Returns*, hot on the trail of Pa Stark (played by classic screen villain Charles *Ming The Merciless* Middleton) and his five deadly sons. One-by-one, Stark's evil brood are killed off until, in the closing chapter, the villain meets a flaming death in a crashed plane.

HOT PROPERTY

Through 15 action-packed chapters in 1939, *Dick Tracy's G-Men* had the detective (again portrayed by Byrd) hunting down a living dead man. In the opening episode, international spy Zarnoff (actor/director Irving Pichel) is

Morgan Conway, a less than popular Tracy, (left) with Mike Mazurki as Splitface and Anne Jeffreys as Tess, and (above) Warren Beatty as the new Dick — still looking pretty good for an old fella.

executed in the gas chamber. His body is, however, stolen by members of his gang, who use powerful drugs to bring him back to life, and he is soon attempting to sabotage America's defence system. Once again, the villain meets an unpleasant end, and dies in the last chapter from arsenic poisoning.

The fourth and final Tracy serial, also starring Byrd, appeared in 1941. In *Dick Tracy Vs Crime Inc* his nemesis was The Ghost, a criminal with the power to make himself invisible through the means of a special machine created by his righthand henchman, Lucifer. The climactic fight sequence (which was printed on negative film stock to create the image of 'reversed polarity') ends with The Ghost being electrocuted whilst trying to escape across high tension wires.

One chapter of *Dick Tracy Vs Crime Inc* had a cliff-hanger ending, with the detective trapped in a blazing inferno which, according to director William Witney, got so out of control that it nearly burned down the sound stage. But this final Dick Tracy serial by no means marked the end of the crime-fighter's movie career. In 1945, RKO Radio Pictures B movie unit revived the character for four low-budget adventures, the first two featuring character actor Morgan Conway as an ineffectual Tracy and Anne Jeffreys as his long-suffering fiancé, Tess Truehart. *Dick Tracy* (aka *Dick Tracy, Detective*) opens in grand *film noir* style, as a young woman is stalked and murdered on the same street set used for the 'bus' sequence in Val Lewton's *Cat People*.

CUE KARLOFF

Although hampered by lack of money, director William Berke created some stylish moments in this straightforward thriller, ably assisted by the casting of former heavyweight wrestler Mike Mazurki as the monstrous killer, Splitface, and creepy character actor Milson Parsons as a seedy undertaker.

The following year saw the release of *Dick Tracy Vs Cueball*, in which Tracy was on the trail of the bald-domed murderer Cueball (Dick Wessel) and a horde of stolen diamonds. Director Gordon Douglas gave the film a dark, atmospheric look more in keeping with the comic-strip style, and another great character actor, Skelton Knaggs, was featured down the cast list.

Conway's performance as Tracy was not successful with audiences, so RKO brought back Ralph Byrd to star in *Dick Tracy's Dilemma* (1947), which showcased Chester Gould's weird humour in an otherwise routine hunt for a gang of fur thieves, headed by The Claw (Jack Lambert) with his lethal hook hand.

The last, and probably the best of RKO's four Dick Tracy features was *Dick Tracy Meets Gruesome* (UK title: *Dick Tracy's Amazing Adventure*), also made in 1947. Horror great Boris Karloff received top billing over Byrd as the hideous Gruesome, who uses Dr A Tomic's paralysing bombs to freeze people while he and his gang rob banks.

Although it is not one of his best performances, Karloff gives the film an added 'star' quality, along with support from Milton Parsons as the doomed inventor (who ends up stuffed into an incinerator by Gruesome) and Skelton Knaggs behind pebble-glasses as henchman X-Ray. John Rawlins (who directed both this and the previous Tracy outing) created some striking moments, and there are brief appearances by Lex Barker and Robert Clarke, both at the start of their careers.

LAME DICK

In the early 1950s, the character made the move to the then developing medium of television, and although the hero was once again portrayed by Ralph Byrd, the short-lived series proved to be a disaster, and the actor died not long afterwards.

By the end of the following decade, Chester Gould's strip had moved the character into outer space to hunt down astrocrooks with his two-way wrist radio, while an animated Dick Tracy television series was aimed squarely at juvenile audiences, and the character soon lost most of the dark, often nightmarishly gruesome aspects of his creation.

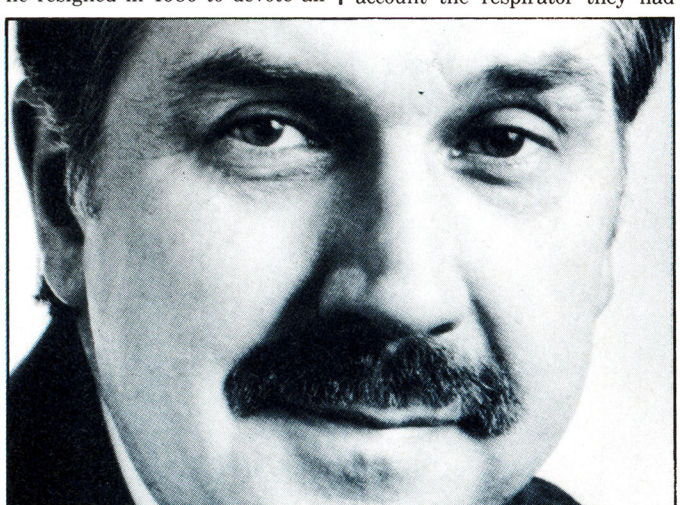
It remains to be seen if Warren Beatty's garishly-coloured revival of *Dick Tracy* will be the blockbuster that Touchstone hopes for. Certainly, the high production values and extraordinary star cast bode well for a smash success, and with a marketing strategy that looks set to put even last year's *Batman* merchandising blitz in the shade, we can expect (if only until the next summer hit comes along) a revival of interest in Chester Gould's enduring defender of right and virtue. But I wonder if, somewhere down the line, the atmospheric intensity of the character's earlier film appearances has not been sacrificed for big budget expediency, or if Beatty will ever be as closely identified with the role as Ralph Byrd was. Somehow, I don't think so...

Dick Tracy, directed by Warren Beatty and starring Madonna, opens at the Odeon Leicester Square on 6 July and goes nationwide on 20 July.

TOTEMS

Stanley Wiater talks to David Morrell, the suspense writer who's a horror author at heart...

Inspired by Stephen King's *'Salem's Lot*, David Morrell has written only one novel firmly placed in the horror genre, *The Totem* (1979), but anyone who has read his novels will realise that his ability to bridge the gap between what is often classified as the thriller and out-and-out horror separates him from most other writers. Formerly a professor of American Literature until he resigned in 1986 to devote all of his time to writing, Morrell is that rare breed of author who simply defies categorisation, but his early, and continuing, love of writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, and of Fifties films such as *Them!*, makes horror a natural staging post for his work.



David Morrell

'I am drawn to the narrative. I *love* to experience a very strong narrative,' he states. 'I knew immediately that I wanted to have an effect on my readers that would be equivalent to the effect the books and movies I read and saw had on me. I do it constantly now — attempt to distract my readers from reality.'

The horror, and those who write within it, helped Morrell when his own 15-year old son was dying. 'Matthew had cancer, and I was convinced he was going to survive it. To my overwhelming shock, he did not respond to the chemical he was given. And at a certain point he went into a coma. I sat with him in the intensive care ward at the University of Iowa hospital. Partially because of the lack of space, the entire family wasn't in there at once — we all took turns. We also took turns because if you spend more than eight hours in an intensive care ward it can really, really have a disastrous psychological effect on you.

'During my eight hours I was sitting in a corner looking at Matt, while the nurses were doing what was necessary. At one time I counted that the poor kid had three IV poles, with every one of their several hooks filled with various fluids connected to the IV lines. That doesn't take into account the respirator they had chest. Nor the fact that his kidneys had failed and he was on a dialysis machine as well.

FAKE HORROR

'Stephen King, being the generous and caring man that he is, had periodically been in touch with Matt, to try and cheer him up. Sometimes he'd call and sometimes he'd write, and sometimes he'd send a tape because he knew that Matt liked rock 'n' roll as much as Steve does. Sometimes Steve would send a new book. Now, Matt sure wasn't going to get to read the book, which if memory serves, was an advance edition of *The Tommyknockers*. So I was sitting there. And what I would do periodically is read Stephen's book, and look up at Matt, and see all the tubes and the lights flashing on the monitors, and then I would go back to reading. And we all know the kind of wonderful thing that Steve does with horror: I was reading about people with their hair falling out, and their flesh rotting, and all that. In a certain way, the same sort of thing had happened to Matthew. So I'd read Steve, and look at my son — my poor, bald, puffed up with steroids son.

'Fake horror, such as in Steve's book — and I use the word 'fake' with great respect — was somehow acting as an antidote to the real horror around me. It was allowing me to escape to this fantasy world that was believably depicted, but nonetheless *was* fantastic. It was like releasing the pressures that were within me. So afterwards I realised that rather than write an entirely different kind of fiction — a very realistic form of fiction, that addressed very real life concerns — I could feel, that by writing thrillers or horror, that I was performing a very positive function for my readers. That I would be distracting *them* from real horrors with my 'fake' horrors. It was a revelation to me that what we do in this form has such social benefit that I have an obligation to continue doing it.

'After my son died, one of the ways I was able to break my writer's block was by the numerous, very kind, letters from fans asking: 'When are we going to get another book? We can't wait!' Or they would say: 'I lost my loved one' or 'I've been in a car accident' or 'My wife left me,' or some other disaster. So these days I'm deliberately writing stories which I'm hoping will serve that function. 'Horror, of course, is pure plot. Some people write 'ooze horror,' but I write 'incident horror'. It's one thing after another in a startling fashion, but without being so gross that the reader shuts the book.'

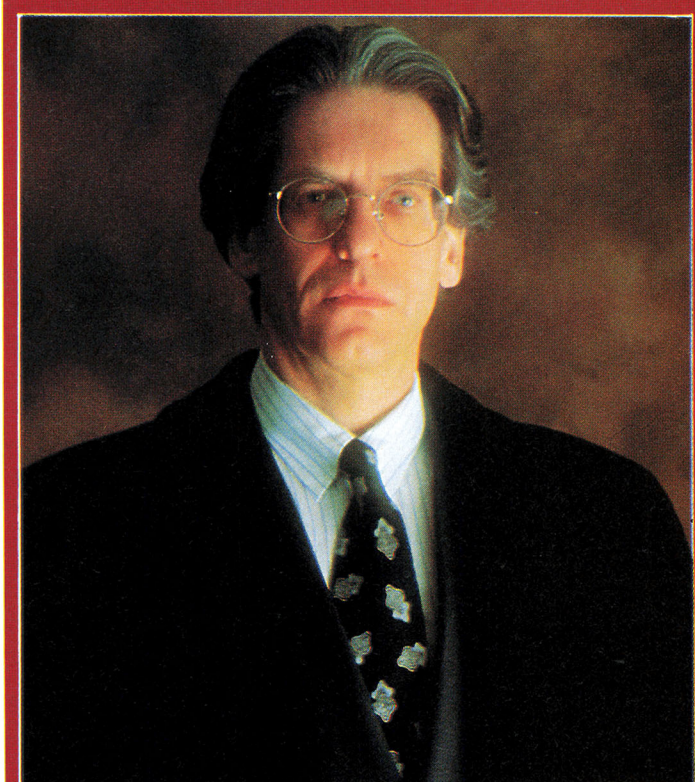
JUST RAGE

Morrell's novels have, however, gained a reputation for overt psychological horror, which some-

CRONENBERG'S DANGEROUS LIAISONS

David Cronenberg has cast his film version of William Burrough's novel The Naked Lunch. John Malkovich (Dangerous Liaisons),Willem Dafoe (Platoon) and Barbara Hershey (Beaches) are slated to star, with the plot loosely revolving around the theory that'An American should never be in a foreign land without his gun (ask Oliver North)'. True to form, Cronenberg has found room for a little S&M in the story structure, but it remains a mystery as to whether Ms Hershey will feature in those scenes.

The sets for Alien 3 are under construction at Pinewood studios. Sigourney Weaver will be back, for around $2 million, which is a



The Naked Lunch director David Cronenberg (above), seen here fully clothed in Nightbreed.

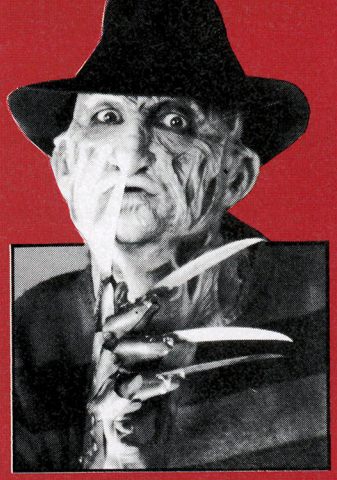
good deal for the film's producers. If their star had been male, Schwarzenegger for instance, the budget would probably have been higher. Yet another writer has joined the fold. John Fanuso will be contributing/ rewriting the David Twohy script, which is rumoured to have the aliens developing a degree of intelligence and coming to Earth for a showdown with the human race. If you remember, at the end of Aliens Ripley blows the queen out of the hatch and that's the last we see of her. We don't see her destroyed — a major loophole that could be plugged in number 3.

For those of you waiting to see the Special Edition on video, Ripley and Hicks' first names are Ellen and, wait for it, Duane. No wonder they stick to using their surnames.

Dino De Laurentis has been casting his beady eye over the recent trade in comic book heroes, and has hatched a plot to jump on the bandwagon. Yes, he's going to make Flash Gordon 2!

The planet Mars is the trendsetter for movies in 1990, with Total Recall very much to the fore. Disney studios, ever determined to make big, big money from the movies, set about developing the John Carter Of Mars series of books by Tarzan creator Edgar Rice Burroughs. An embryonic team was assembled consisting of Charles Edward Pogue (Psycho II and Fly scripter), Rick Baker and Jim Henson (on the FX side). Then, sadly, Jim Henson passed away, leaving the project in limbo. Whether Disney decides to continue the project at a later date remains to be seen.

Elm Street 6 is on the cards for 1991, with Robert Englund reprising his role, for what is



expected to be the final outing for Freddy. Fred's father, Wes Craven, has offered to direct but only on the proviso that it will be the last Krueger movie.

Director the moment, John McTiernon (Red October, Predator, Die Hard) has decided to film the legend of Robin Hood. 20th Century Fox are backing the 'lavish' production, which will film on this side of the Atlantic. Negotiations are underway with KevinCostner for the lead.

Hellraiser III is rumoured to feature an army of the dead, on a budget of 4 million dollars, with Tony Randall reprising his director role.

Expect Children Of The Corn 2 by the end of the year. I think that Stephen King has a responsibility to stop things like this being forced upon society.

Stephen Herek has refused to direct the sequel to his own Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure because he couldn't see how much further the story could be taken. So, Herke has agreed to direct Short Circuit 3, a story that, no doubt, in his opinion has underdiscovered angles which must be explored. Give me Bill and Ted any day.

John Glenday

HEADING FOR A LYNCHING?

David Lynch's violent, erotic black comedy Wild At Heart may have won the coveted Golden Palm at the Cannes Festival in May, but in America it looks likely to win an X rating from the MPAA although the Samuel Goldwyn Co, the film's distributor, denies the supposition.

Described by one critic as heavily tabooist, the Lynch movie has generated speculation concerning its rating after Pedro Almadovar's Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down! was recently slapped with an X, the fourth movie in as many months to be awarded the Over 21 Only certificate.

Lynch is contractually obligated to deliver an R rated cut of the film to ensure it can be released in several hundred theatres this August. However, industry insiders believe Goldwyn's 'no problem' stance is wishful thinking in light of a censorship debate screened on ABC Television's Nightline programme in May, in which the film was singled out by MPAA president Jack Valenti as being 'problematic'.

As various state legislators in the South try to curtail the availability of horror movies in video stores and the MPAA's tough stance on genre productions, it looks as if America is finally succumbing to the repressive paranoia that swept through Britain in the wake of the Video Nasties Bill.

Philip Nutman

STOP PRESS!!

Never to be re-offered opportunity for discerning collectors

"The Bride". First in a series of 4 prestige, signed & numbered Fine Art prints by the renowned Glenn Fabry. Measuring 337mm x 450mm and limited to 1000 the print will cost £15.50 (including P & P in U.K only). Cheques payable to Out of the Blue, and sent to:16 Cambridge Road,Walton-on-Thames,Surrey,KT12 2DP,England.

times slips into the preserve of the supernatural. 'Doug Winter — American critic, anthologist and horror author — once said to me that he thought the last third of *First Blood* tripped over from adventure into horror. Because the characters become clairvoyant — they start to read each others' minds. And the bat cave sequence, even though it was a naturally horrific scene as opposed to a supernatural one, nevertheless evokes all the feelings that we normally associate with a supernatural horror scene. '*Testament*, the next novel, had very, very strong horror overtones. And of course *The Totem* was an out-and-out horror novel, although not based on a supernatural premise. There's even horror embedded in my espionage stories, but for the most part my horror stories are studies of psychological breakdowns more than anything else.

'Even though I'm presently writing what is called 'international intrigue', it's with a strong dash of horror. For example, in *The Brotherhood Of The Rose* [recently shown as an ITV mini-series] — after Saul's foster brother Chris has been killed, Saul goes on a very brutal mission of vengeance, having been worked up into what I call a 'just rage'. I'm hoping that the reader will be cheering him on and saying, 'Yeah, man! Go for it! Those bastards!'

'It's very satisfying to write a vengeance story. It brings out all the venom in your soul, and you can just spew it out so you can finally get even. Better to do it on the page than in real life. And throughout his mission of vengeance, Saul sees the ghost of his dead brother beside him.'

The Fifth Profession, David Morrell's new thriller, is published in hardback by Headline on July 12, price £14.95.

Alex Winter as Marco in The Lost Boys

BILL AND TED MAKE THE MOST

Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure may be getting 'most serious' British video coverage right now, but in the States the terrible twinset have risen to even higher glory.

Alex Winter, who plays Bill in the movie and also did a turn as Marco in **The Lost Boys**, has been run off his feet with all the cult acclaim his character has received. 'We've been doing the voices for a Saturday morning cartoon series and we're going to be doing a sequel in the autumn. It won't be a time travel storyline.'

According to Winter, the original movie almost went unreleased and he was surprised that it was such a big success. 'The studio that made the film [De Laurentis, which also made **Conan** and **Vengeance The Demon**] went down the tubes. It had been so long between making it and its release that it did come as a surprise when it did so well.'

The actor, who is still in his early twenties, is currently making good use of his talents behind the camera, filming rock videos. There's also the chance of writing/starring in a feature film. '**Sam Raimi**, who's a good friend, has commissioned us to do an extreme rock comedy.'

And the rumours concerning a possible **Lost Boys** sequel? 'It's a mess. Nobody I've talked to seems to know anything about it. It's journalists who've been passing these rumours around.'

LOVECRAFT PLAQUE FOR PROVIDENCE

Friends of H P Lovecraft is an organisation dedicated to the appreciation of the influenctial American horror writer who died in 1937. With the help of the city of his birth, Providence, Rhode Island, they are seeking to place a commemorative bronze plaque at Prospect Terrace, the park Lovecraft often visited for the spectacular panoramic view of the city. It is hoped that the plaque will be dedicated on Monday, 20 August 1990, the centenary of Lovecraft's birth.

According to Robert Bloch, author of Psycho and one-time Lovecraft correspondent: 'In many ways, this distinguished author ranks as the city's most famous citizen. And in honouring H P Lovecraft, Providence is honouring itself.'

Currently, no commemoration of HPL's existence exists in Providence, apart from a headstone in Swan Point cemetery, and the organisation would use the plaque to express their 'gratitude to him for his gift of literature and of immortalising Providence in those writings.'

They are asking all those who appreciate Lovecraft to donate $25 or more towards the necessary funds. By joining the Friends of H P Lovecraft, you will be updated on the progress of the project, on the planned ceremony, and with a donation of $25 or more will receive a limited edition commemorative book featuring the names of all who donated.

All correspondence and donations to: Friends Lovecraft, PO Box 40663, Providence, RI 02940, USA.

Stephen Jones

DICK TRACY: MEGA-HIT OR MARKETING DISASTER?

Want to buy a **Dick Tracy** watch? Walkie-talkie? Limited edition **Breathless Mahoney** earrings? A bath towel? Key chain? **Boxer shorts?** The list of merchandise is seemingly endless, but those companies which have jumped on the bandwagon before it started rolling — US department store chain **Macy's** began plugging their Tracy collection of consumer durables three months before the film opened — stand a good chance of ending up with **egg** all over their faces, according to licensing industry expert **Larry Carlat**.

The reason for this potential disaster is negative audience identification. 'Kids don't know who **Dick Tracy** is,' one toy executive told **Variety** in a recent article on the selling of the movie. 'And worse than that, they thought he was **boring**.'

Batman had an edge in that the character had a strong audience recognition factor right across the age spectrum, but despite appearing in the same era as the **Caped Crusader**, the **beak-nosed 'tec** appears to hold little charm for those adults who remember him. 'I related well to **Batman** because I grew up with him. **Dick Tracy** was a distant tenth in overall awareness,' said **Bill Parker**, VP of sales, marketing and advertising for the **K-Mart** chain, America's largest retail group. 'We haven't been able to get a fix on who the target audience is, so we're not betting heavily.'

Parker's comments were substantiated by figures compiled by Marketing Evaluations/TVQ, a licensing industry research company. On their ratings scale the character scored unfavourably. However, at this time last year, **Batman** scored similarly, yet more than half of that film's £500 million revenue came from merchandising sales, a home truth which punches holes in market research thinking. Yet what is inescapable is the younger audience's apathy — not to mention outright hostility — towards **Warren Beatty**.

'**Batman** had a couple of other aces up its sleeve other than audience identification with the **Bat logo**,' opined an industry insider during a recent discussion on this year's summer box office battle of the big movies. 'Kids knew who **Michael Keaton** was, knew **Jack Nicholson**. There was the whole controversy concerning the casting of Keaton as **Bruce Wayne** — could he cut it? Kids don't care about Beatty. Hell, half of the them don't even know what he looks like because he makes so few movies. But the thing that grosses them out is the idea of what to them is some old guy making out with **Madonna**. She's their heroine, she epitomises sexiness, glamour, and the thought of her smooching with some guy old enough to be her father doesn't excite them. There's no chemistry.'

Teenage tastes aside, the other factor working against the film's merchandising is that the market place is swamped with product this year. The **Mutant Ninja Turtles** have proved to be a phenomenon, as have **Matt Groening's The Simpsons** (the weird cartoon family from **The Tracy Ullman Show**), and pop stars **New Kids On The Block**.

Ultimately, though, do we care? To serious moviegoers the question is whether or not the film is good. To the film industry, the question is will **Dick Tracy** boost stock prices, even if the money comes from merchandising sales? A sad reflection on the times, but that's show business.

Philip Nutman

SNIP! SNIP!

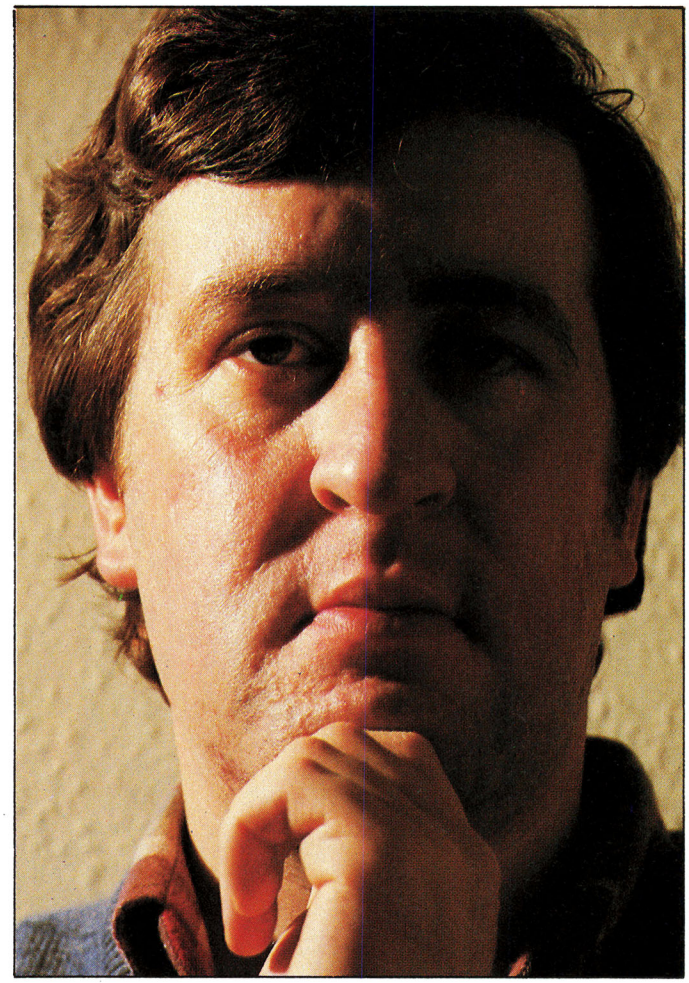
- The final chapter in the life of dreamkiller **Freddy Krueger** will be filmed next year. Entitled **Freddy's Dead**, and not **The Dream Teen** as previously reported, it is likely to be directed by **Elm Street** creator **Wes Craven**. He agreed to go along for the ride as long as production company **New Line** promised an end to the series, of which number five was a comparative financial, as well as critical, disappointment. Good on yer, Wes.

- Official **Star Trek** merchandise hits Britain in preparation for the relaunch of the original series on **Sky Television** and the **Next Generation** on **BBC1**. **Titan Merchandise** offers a range of four T-shirts (£6.95 each) and ten badges (45p each) featuring the images of **Kirk, Spock, McCoy, Scotty** and **Uhura**. Look out for them in specialist shops.

- **Street Trash** producer **Roy Frumkis** and **Combat Shock** director **Buddy Giavanazio** have now teamed up and are planning to shoot **123 Depravity Street**, their first joint project, this autumn. 'This one's a character piece,' explains Frumkis. 'You're really in for it when you visit Depravity Street. This is one of the toughest scripts I've come across in a while.' **Depravity Street**, described as an 'erotic thriller' by its creators, concerns a young boy who returns home after an extensive stay in a rehab clinic, vowing to straighten out his life. He inadvertently falls in with a homicidal couple who live across the street. But his depraved neighbours are seen as pillars of the community, and he's the one with the bad reputation. By the time he realises what's going on and tries to extricate himself from the situation he finds his past is working against him. Frumkis also plans to shoot a documentary about the author **Harlan Ellison**, called **An Edge To My Voice**.

John Gilbert/Philip Nutman

COLD WAR



I've always been astounded by the hypocrisy of big audience film review shows such as *Film 90*. They profess to take an unbiased, critical and all-encompassing look at the world of movies, but when it comes to the horror genre, they roll their eyes and look snidely down their nostrils at what they describe as 'genre garbage'.

However, I can now reveal that, in a guarded aside, genre critic Barry Norman recently came out of the closet with as bad a case of horrophobia as I've ever seen. *Film 90* simply refused to review two of this summer's biggest horror releases, *A Nightmare On Elm Street 5: The Dream Child* and Castle Pictures' *Phantom Of The Opera*. Perhaps Bazzer has a grudge against Robert Englund.

However, around that same time, Norman was also heard to say that he did not like horror. Surely his personal preferences for a whole, and very successful, genre of films should not be exhibited on screen for millions of viewers to see. The attitude goes way beyond criticism and verges on vendetta. It also proves that *Film 90* can no longer be regarded as the comprehensive film show it once pretended to be. According to our recent market research, **FEAR** helps to sell approximately half a million cinema tickets every year. Even as a ball park figure, that means horror is a massively subscribed genre, accounting for almost a quarter of all cinema visits. It also means that, if *Film 90* continues to ignore major genre releases, it is ignoring the preferences of a quarter of its audiences.

It also seems strange to me that a man whose father made a living from films such as *X The Unknown*, and who himself wrote several science fiction novels in his early years in the profession, should exhibit such nihilistic tendencies. Admittedly, Barry Norman is an accomplished reviewer, and even I respect his opinions on other filmic matters, but this sort of double-handed treatment must stop. He is, of course, not the only critic to have had pretentions towards the horror genre but, once they've left it behind to criticise those who choose to remain. Double standards appear in the most unlikely places and it's up to us to root them out. I certainly would like to hear from anyone who finds newspaper stories, or radio or television reports misrepresenting the genre. It's about time **FEAR** did a logical and levelheaded critique of this manipulative phenomenon.

While one section of television does battle against the virulent hordes of horror, another stumbles across its rising popularity. Bestselling author Stephen Gallagher tells me that television production company Zenith has wrapped on the adaptation of his first horror novel, *Chimera* — and lo, a wonderful thing has happened. For the first time, a production company with Zenith's standing, that is better known for producing crime thrillers such as *Inspector Morse* and *The Paradise Club*, has become excited about a horror project.

Steve has seen the first two episodes of his thriller and says that he's '95 per cent happy with what they've done'. That's high praise indeed from a man who, like James Herbert, has been known to demand perfection. Steve also says that *Chimera*, which will appear some time in the autumn, is unlike anything ever seen before on British television. Why? One of the reasons is that it includes the novel's gory incidents, which have only been slightly edited. It will also appear in two sets of two hour-long episodes before and after *The News At Ten*. The trend might set a precedent which other production companies could well follow, and — if the series is successful — start a new fantasy boom on network television.

Certainly the boom has begun on satellite and cable, as BSB shows old genre movies and both movie channels put horror and fantasy on at a reasonable time.

We have yet to see a networked genre television show devoted to film, books and video, a cross between *Saturday Night At The Movies* and Anne Robinson's *The Write Stuff*, but that's not for the want of trying, believe me!. Who knows, in a year or two, **FEAR**'s growing influence might come to the attention of the programme-makers who might even decide that those within the genre — rather than big cult names who fancy a turn on a novelty show or the money it might produce — should have a say in the making of such a series.

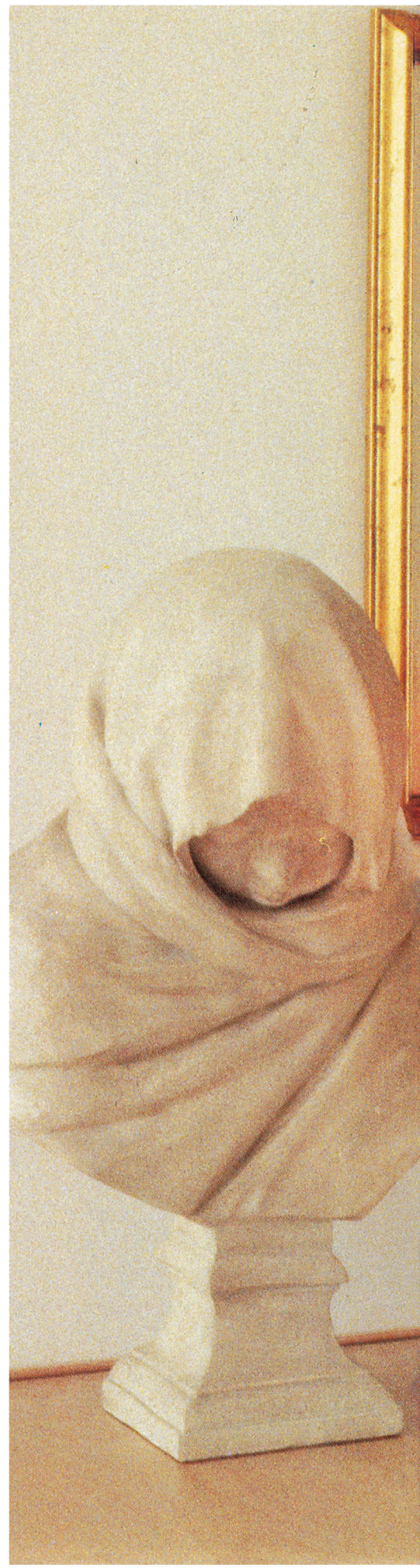
Until then, at least the swings *Film 90* and roundabouts of *Chimera* are keeping the ripe genre flame at audience eye level. Perhaps, at last, horror is going to become the televisual taboo that came in from the cold?

Perhaps.

John Gilbert

THE DEVIL YOU KNOW

James Herbert is Britain's bestselling horror author. However, his blatant success and refusal to play the prima donna have led to a great deal of sniping from critics and, most surprisingly, from so-called aficionados of the horror genre. FEAR's John Gilbert visited the author at his home to talk for the first time about the person rather than the portrait.



'Demons today are a shoddy lot... '
James Herbert, Creed
'There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe..'
C S Lewis, The Screwtape Letters

t first, I felt like Wormwood, that trainee demon, invited at last to meet Screwtape — the senior devil who has done so much for Hell — on his own territory.

The parallel between that fictional encounter and my meeting with Britain's bestselling horror novelist is certainly there. At the sensitive age of twelve, I picked up my first contemporary horror novel: *The Rats* by James Herbert. From there to **FEAR** was merely a matter of time; nevertheless, Jim's rare offer to spend a day with him at his home on the Sussex Downs just outside Brighton was like having your heart thrust into your mouth, and then being invited to chew.

The Herbert residence is set in heaven, amongst the hillocks and narrow roadways of the Sussex countryside. It's a peaceful haven for any author, though Jim had to move into a cottage near his home to complete his new novel, *Creed*.

Not that the book has suffered. It's ostensibly a thriller about Joseph Creed, a paparazzo photographer who witnesses the desecration of a famous movie star's grave just after she's been buried. His life is one hectic photo shoot, and he does not believe it could become more complicated. But soon he's on the run from a creature that looks suspiciously like Nosferatu and he becomes embroiled in the greatest international conspiracy since The Fall — and we're not talking Wall Street here.

The life of Joseph Creed, whose sole function is to produce embarrassing bromides of celebs in awkward situations, provides enough potential for a stick-wielding thriller, but James Herbert is quick to point out that there are other possibilities which make the book different from the fourteen others he's written. 'It's more humorous than usual. There's always a lot of humour in the books, but this time I've done almost the modern equivalent of *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*. I wanted to see if it could be done in a modern way.'

IN FOCUS

The name of the book, *Creed*, is also part of that humour. 'You think, 'It's Herbert', so it's horror or supernatural, or both. *Creed* sounds very portentous, very religious, but it's the name of the hero, Joe Creed. And I can't really call him a hero.

'We have two clichéd heroes now. The old hero was the enigmatic character who always won through — very brave, very courageous — and I've used that character myself. Then I went for the anti-hero — the world weary cynic, but again someone who was very warm and courageous — which again became very popular. *That* has now become a cliché.

'This time I wanted a different kind of 'hero', that was neither a hero nor an anti-hero. The guy is just a shit. When this man is scared, he faints. If he's up against a terrible situation, he runs away. He's a real sleaze. That's why I chose the paparazzi for his profession.

'The great challenge for me was to get you to like him. You shouldn't, because he reacts badly in any situation. The challenge was to get the reader to have some empathy with the guy so that at the end you may just warm to him.'

James Herbert always enjoys the writing process, but the research for *Creed* provided some unusual, if hair-raising, bonuses. 'I went out with the paparazzi. I contacted the king of paparazzi in England, Richard Young, and he's great. In fact, he was a bit of a disappointment because I expected someone like the character I had in mind; a real sleaze, because paparazzi are real thieves. They steal moments of peoples lives, moments that people don't want stolen. They take candid shots of celebrities, and they take the worst possible shots they can get. Richard Young is a perfect gentleman. He's rough and tough, but he's really great. He introduced me to other paparazzi, who more closely live up to the image.

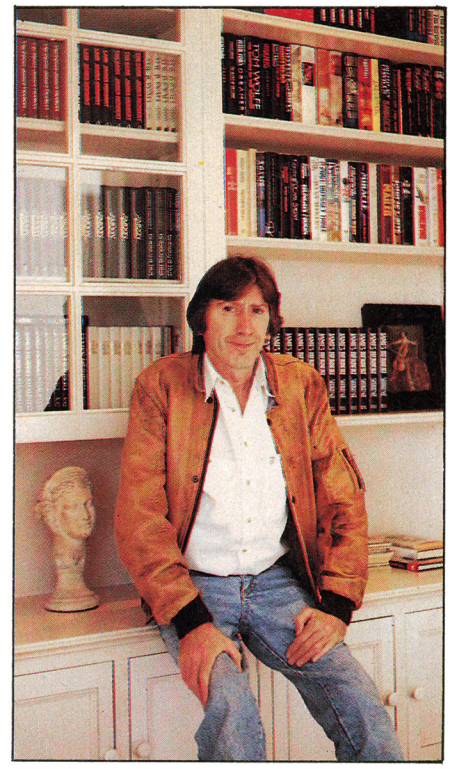
'So I went around with Richard. We went to openings, book launches, star parties, the clubs, restaurants, particularly Langan's. We actually chased Jack Nicholson down the road. All the stuff I've used in the book, I've named names. That's the tone of the book.

'Now what the hell's that got to do with horror, you may ask? I wanted to do something about the fallen angels of Europe; the demons, the devils. My theme for the book was that it's bloody hard work being evil, and if you've been evil for centuries and centuries, you must be a little bit tacky around the edges.

'These demons, they're pissed off because suddenly the public has these new hero/villains in the form of Freddy Krueger and Michael Myers. So the real devils, they're not getting any publicity any more — Freddy Krueger's getting it all. Plus the fact that they're losing their powers: one, because they're weary with all the evil over the centuries and two, because if people are using that kind of evil as entertainment with the movies and the videos that they see, it's all become a bit of a joke. Because they're not believing in these devils any more, these devils are losing their powers. Our hero finds them in an old folks home.'

PO-FACED

'So that was the basic theme of the book, then I was trying to get this different kind of hero. I thought, what sort of profession employs these sorts of people. Now there is journalism, of course, and another appendage of journalism is the photographers, and the lowest form of photographer is the paparazzo.



Home comforts: James Herbert at his new abode near Brighton. Overleaf: Herbert sits in the hot seat formerly owned by Black Magic maestro Aleister Crowley

'It fitted in so neatly with the kind of guy I wanted, and it was fun for me to explore, to research. I could see plenty of funny situations developing just from the guy's background.'

Not your normal kind of horror novel, but the man whose novel, *The Rats*, appeared in Britain three months before Stephen King's *Carrie* feels that the horror genre has gone through a myriad of phases, and is a little too po-faced. 'We are, as writers, taking the horror genre a little bit too seriously. When we do convention panels, we're talking too much about the metaphor and the sub-text, and it's getting a bit too precious. I want to pop that balloon and say: 'It's not'. It's all getting too pompous.'

He does, however, point out that there are several types of reader, each getting something different from horror. 'Some just like the thrill, the horror, and of my elder books they like the blood and gore. Then there's the other reader who's a bit more serious, takes the message behind the books, and sees what the writer is putting in. There are a lot of subliminal messages, points that you hope to make, but they're not necessary for the reader.

'In *Creed*, I've burst a few balloons about the mythology of horror. I've said where we get Frankenstein from and Dracula, but humorously.'

EXPORT AND ENLIGHTEN

Slapstick has often been associated with horror. The many, OTT routines in the *A Nightmare On Elm Street* and *Friday The*

'Last year I was invited as the guest of honour at a Foyles literary lunch... the last horror writer ever to be invited to one of those functions was Dennis Wheatley, and that was about 30 or 40 years ago. So I thought, 'Well, again, it's breaking down the barriers"

13th films use gore to get a laugh, and even Freddy Krueger's fast one-liners come from the George Burns school of groans. But Jim thinks that even the grossest of situations can be elevated with a more subtle humour. 'I thought there was quite a bit of subtle humour in *Magic Cottage*, but there's more subtle horror in books like *The Fog* and *Domain*, because you don't really know it's there until you read back. Because they're very fast paced, violent books, you tend to miss anything that's subtle in there. But, I promise you, it is there if you care to look.'

That mixture of horror and humour has not only made James Herbert Britain's most popular horror impresario, but has also sold his books in 22 countries. 'I'm pleased to be in the vanguard of breaking down these barriers. The last book I signed over was for Poland, and that's smashing. You almost give it away, they can't afford to pay a lot of money, but it's such a delight to be able to say, 'Well, now we can get horror into a country like that — they can read it.

'There are places like Argentina, Brazil... Not big markets for horror, but they're suddenly taking an interest. It's like being in that position where you're able to break down doors. It's like how I was 14 years ago in England when horror wasn't a going concern. The only horror writer we had in those days was Dennis Wheatley, and he wasn't writing any more.'

LITERARY FOIL

Until recently, James Herbert has been reticent to appear in public, other than at signings — and even now he's careful about the invitations he accepts. The 1988 World Fantasy Convention in London changed all that, and now you'll often find him in the middle of a scrum at a fair number of fan gatherings. He is a great ambassador for horror and has been invited to talk to many learned groups, including a record two appearances at the Oxford Union with surprising reactions from audiences and professorial critics.

Some of these audiences are 'very snooty about horror; in fact, you'll find in America that they're much more geared to it. I've had my best reviews from professors of literature in America. But here, a couple of my books are on reading lists, but there is that strain of thinking that it's very non-adult. The only thing is that you're getting the younger lecturers, the younger professors that have been brought up on a diet of movies and horror stories. The attitude is changing. It's mainly the normal schools that hate it; they really detest it. But then they hate Enid Blyton as well, which is why I make a great point of telling them that I have always read Enid Blyton to my kids. Anything to get up their noses.'

Jim has also proven his worth to the literary establishment, which has always been more than ready to condemn horror and its practitioners. 'Last year I was invited as the guest of honour at a Foyles literary lunch. They give you all the bumf on these events. I looked down the list, and the last horror writer ever to be invited to one of those functions was Dennis Wheatley, and that was about 30 or 40 years ago. So I thought, 'Well, again, it's breaking down the barriers.'

VOX POPULI

Surmounting barriers may go some way towards achieving an acceptance of horror amongst the literati but there appears to be very little in the way of new writing talent at the moment, and — if we're being honest — there does not seem to be a contemporary author of the stature of King, Herbert or Campbell. But Jim is cautiously optimistic: 'People just turn up. It's like Clive [Barker]. Suddenly Clive was there. You need fresh blood all the time.

'About five years ago, I thought the horror industry was dying. I thought it had been done to death with videos, the trashy books, the copyists. And then it revived, it became good again. I think it's about to go into that dip again, but you never know.'

Horror is likely to survive any such dip in popularity because it is sufficiently flexible to take on board contemporary political, social and religious debates. James Herbert's own novels provide a case in point. *Sepulchre* looks at terrorism, *Shrine* looks at religion, and *The Rats* can be equated with the all-pervasive political systems that control human lives.

Herbert has some very clear-cut views on all these subjects, particularly politics, although he vehemently denies the many suggestions in the popular press that he is left wing or right wing just because his books portray such characters. 'I believe in strength, in fighting anything that is wrong. Now, that doesn't make me right wing. I believe there comes a point where you would have to use violence against anything that is wrong. I don't believe in terrorism, nobody has the right to terrorise anyone, but there comes a point where you may have to fight.

'I would do anything to protect my daughters. If anyone broke into this house, they might get in but they'd never get out. So there comes that point, and in *Sepulchre*, yes, you're talking about organisations that are composed of ex-military men. So in that sense it makes it right wing, but that doesn't mean to say I am. I'm *writing* about those people.

'If you enjoy what you do, it doesn't seem like hard work; because you enjoy it, you just want to go on'

'You have to put yourself in another position, see it through somebody else's eyes. If I write about homosexuals, it doesn't mean I'm a homosexual or that I'm going to be. It's just the research — you learn to use your own imagination. You can be accused of all sorts of things, merely because you voice the opinion of the person in the book.

'I like things to be right, which again is why I avoid a lot of publicity. There's a certain amount that you have to do, but they can get so many things wrong about you. I remember for years I read things like I always wore black — I have one black suit, a dinner suit — and that kind of thing rankles. But that's what you can expect from the press. They want their image of you.'

NOT A PENNY LESS

The public image could not be more different from the private Jim Herbert. He is most definitely a family man, with wife Eileen and three children — the eldest of whom is at university, the second is jittery but confident about her recently finished school exams, and the youngest proved to me there and then that she could outrace even the PR men in Jim's indoor swimming pool.

James Herbert loves writing, but in the end everything he does is for his family. 'Whatever I've done I've had to do off my own bat. With my background, I knew nobody, I had no connections, no help from anybody, and I'm very proud of that. But now I'm there I want to do the best for my kids.

'I don't believe in what Jeffrey Archer once said — that he's not going to leave a penny to his children. I find it *incredible*. Kids, that's what you're working for, so they will get every penny I can give them.

'They're hardworking. It's always been a big thing in my family that we've always worked hard. I've got two older brothers. One is a Lloyds' broker — he's very successful — and my eldest brother has got a stall in the market, and he's successful in his own way.

'If you enjoy what you do, it doesn't seem like hard work, because you enjoy it, you just want to go on.'

Then is retirement not for him? If he was given the choice of working and losing five years off his life, or living to the ripe old age of 90, what decision would he make? 'Oh, the work. To me there is no choice. I don't particularly want to live to 90, I don't want to be falling to pieces. I'd rather lose five or even ten years working — and enjoying myself.'

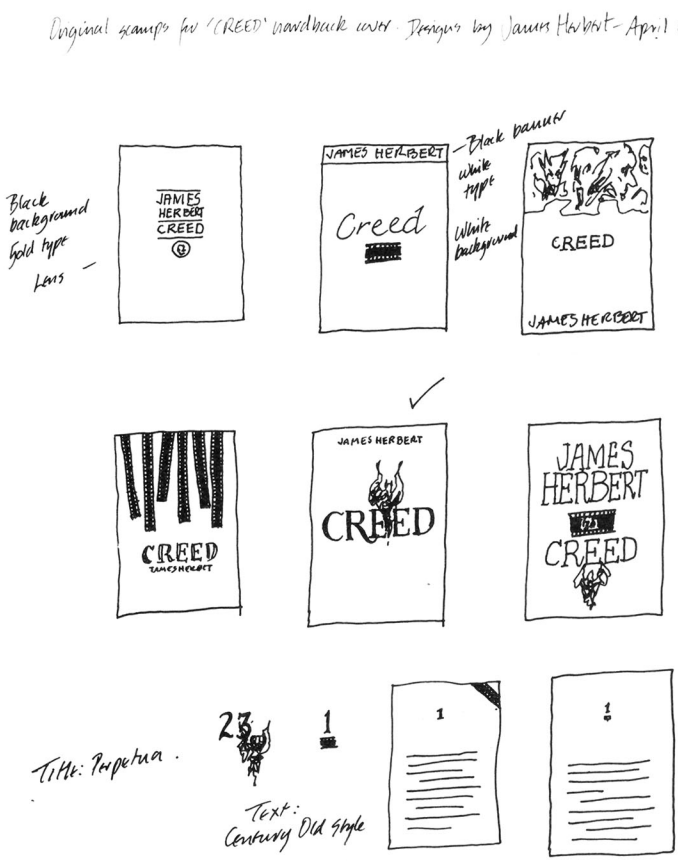
Thanks to Tony Mulliken for his invaluable help.

FEAR competition

WIN!

JAMES HERBERT'S ORIGINAL ARTWORK FOR THE COVER OF CREED

Most writers have nothing to do with the processes involved in the production of their books. James Herbert is the exception, designing not only the cover illustration but also the type faces and sizes and the promotional text on the outside back cover. We have the design roughs and frontcover artwork for his forthcoming horror superseller Creed, and intend to pass them on, signed and dated, to three lucky winners in this great competition.



FIRST PRIZE A portfolio of the design process, including: the original ideas for the cover design, the evolution of the Creed creature, layouts for the title page and text, the design for the inside cover flap, the layout for the outside back cover, the original cover artwork and the original cover design.

SECOND PRIZE An original drawing of the Creed cover creature, plus an alternative layout for the Creed cover.

THIRD PRIZE The original artwork for the Creed creature.

Just think, these original images which will shortly appear in bookshops nationwide–could be yours!

To enter, simply solve the following riddles:

Name James Herbert's profession before he became a bestselling novelist.

Give the name of the infamous Nazi who appears at the end of The Spear.

Name the squirrel who appears in Magic Cottage and describe his relationship with another James Herbert book, Fluke.

Tough questions? Well, the winners of this artwork should be Herbert fans. Answers on the back of a postcard or sealed envelope to: **James Herbert's Creed Creature Compo**, FEAR, Newsfield, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1JW. **Entries in by 16 August, 1990**No person with any relationship to Newsfield, FEAR or Hodder and Stoughton may enter.

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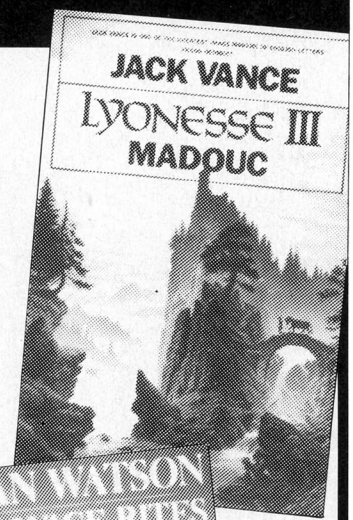

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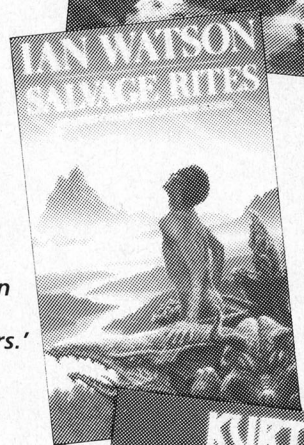

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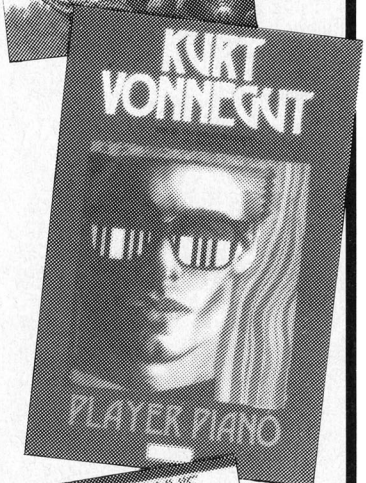

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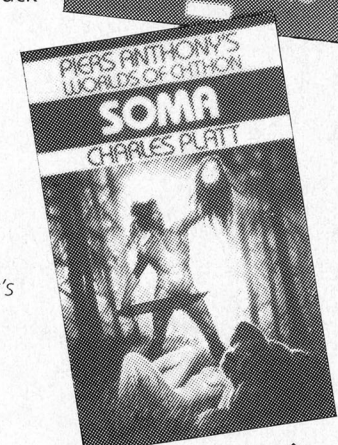

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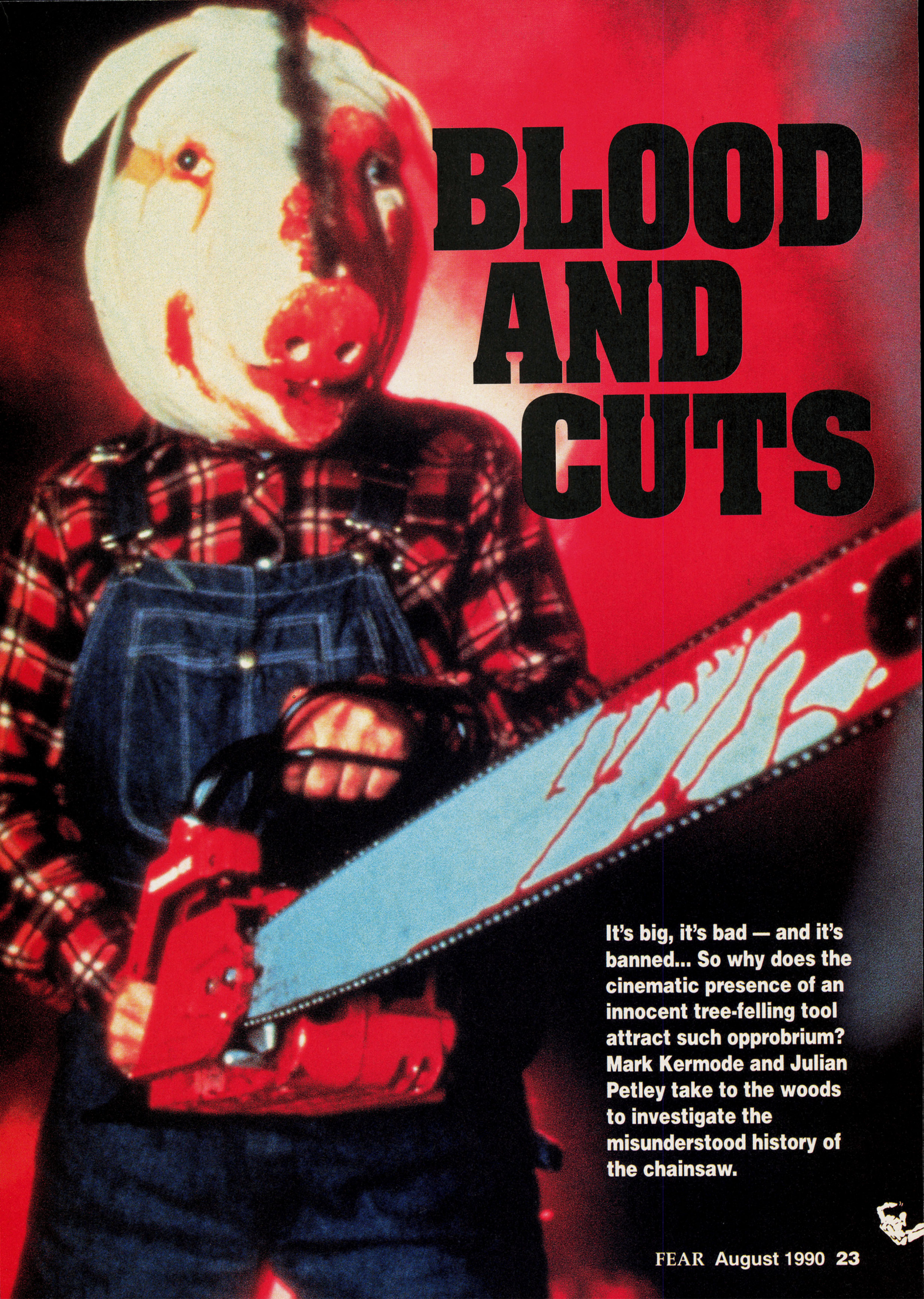


BLOOD AND CUTS

It's big, it's bad — and it's banned... So why does the cinematic presence of an innocent tree-felling tool attract such opprobrium? Mark Kermode and Julian Petley take to the woods to investigate the misunderstood history of the chainsaw.

What's the dirtiest word in the British Board of Film Classification's vocabulary? No, it's neither of the two most obvious four letter candidates — it's CHAINSAW! So far, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and its two successors have been banned outright — the second even in a toned-down version specially prepared for certain timorous Canadian provinces.

The true depth of the Board's chainsaw phobia was revealed for what it is when, in 1989, they insisted that Colourbox remove the word 'Chainsaw' from the title of Fred Olen Ray's spoof *Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers* ('they charge an arm and a leg') on the grounds that it 'invited comparisons with other more famous movies,' and could encourage the attention of people seeking 'the sort of gross violence that you can inflict with a chainsaw'; they also removed just over a minute of running time. Surprisingly, the BBFC's Packaging Review Committee didn't object to the eye-catching cover shot which depicts a number of scantily clad 'babes' wielding bloody great chainsaws... thus creating a peculiar situation in which chainsaws could be shown, but not named.

Ever since making this heroically inconsistent ruling, the very mention of the movie's title has caused *profundo rosso* faces at the Board, and plenty of energetic verbal backpeddling to boot. 'It does seem a bit illogical', admitted the Board's customarily candid Deputy Director Margaret Ford in June 1989, whilst Principal Examiner Guy Phelps was equally diplomatic when he talked to *Sam Hain* magazine six months later. 'Whether or not we should have taken the 'chainsaw' out of the title is one of those things that becomes a sort of censor's bête noir', he confessed, going on to admit that there was 'a bit of a knee-jerk reaction' invoked by 'anything with 'chainsaw' in the title.' However, when we spoke to BBFC Director James Ferman for *Time Out* last year, he denied that he personally had ever demanded that the 'C' word be removed, adding laconically that Colourbox had got 'jolly good publicity' out of the whole affair. Clearly a case of the saw that dare not speak its name.

CAMP BLOODLETTING

The *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* may have been the first movie to star a chainsaw, but it was by no means the first in which the instrument was put to nefarious and improper purposes. An early and indeed seminal sighting can be found (where else but?) in Herschell Gordon Lewis' anarchically surrealist swamp of a movie *The Wizard of Gore* (1971) wherein Montag the Magician chainsaws a female volunteer in half, whilst despatching other unfortunates with an array of swords, railroad spikes and industrial punch presses. A surprisingly self-reflexive and playful variation on the old reality vs illusion theme, this was Lewis' penultimate gore movie, bombarding the audience with decidedly camp bloodletting whilst pushing the boundaries of outrageous pseudo-philosophising to new limits.

Whilst the chainsaw was depicted as a weapon of surrealistic splatter by Lewis in 1971, the following year it was to appear in much more naturalistic surroundings in Sean

Title page: Farmer Vincent dons a hogshead and does battle with his trusty 'saw in Motel Hell. Above: fritter fodder from Motel Hell. Left: a brazen hussy flaunts her unspeakable instrument in Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers

Cunningham and Wes Craven's relentlessly disturbing collaboration, *The Last House On The Left*. Having worked together in 1970 on a sex documentary entitled *Together*, Cunningham and Craven then made their first foray into the world of horror; the result was a milestone in the development of a particularly visceral and violent strand of filmmaking, replete with documentary-style camerawork, and Mondo-esque atrocities. Detailing the ordeal of two young women trapped by a gang of maniacs, the movie presents a catalogue of humiliation, rape, torture and murder, which is subsequently reversed when the abusers become victims at the hands of the parents of one of the girls. It is during the course of this hideously protracted and inventive revenge that the father despatches the leader of the gang, Krug, with a chainsaw. Purporting to be a reworking of Ingmar Bergman's art-house classic *The Virgin Spring*, and championed by heavyweight critics such as Robin Wood as an allegory about the brutalising effects of the Vietnam war, the movie was nonetheless widely picketed when released in the States and, inevitably, banned on both film and video by the BBFC. It also featured on the Director of Public Prosecutions' famous list of 'video nasties'.

FEAR AND LOATHING

If the chainsaw's cinematic role had until now been somewhat peripheral, it was about to become the centre of attention and the object of a great deal of fear and loathing. The honours here go to Tobe Hooper who, in 1974, gave the instrument what can only be called its first starring role in — *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Rejected outright by the BBFC in the course of three unsuccessful submissions, the movie instantly elevated the eponymous tool to cult status among horror fans whilst simultaneously creating a symbol of all things wicked and sleazy on celluloid for a hysterical press. 'Hemdale attempted to cut the movie', said James Ferman, 'but it made no difference at all. Several companies have asked us if there is any point in submitting it on video and we've said no... It's almost impossible to change the nature of the film'.

Indeed, from the day that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* first appeared on London's cinema screens (under the auspices of a special GLC 'X' certificate) the public view of that hallowed instrument was to become irrevocably charged with the most gruesome overtones. It should also be pointed out that, in Britain at least, the film's appearance chimed neatly with the birth of what came to be known as the 'punk sensibility' — witness, for example, the Ramones' number 'Chainsaw' and the early punk 'zine of the same name (edited by one Charlie Chainsaw). Needless to say, those punks who later mutated into Goths also found much to their taste in *Massacre* and its offspring.

'Kevin Connor's terrifically twisted and satirical romp Motel Hell remains to this day the only avowedly vegetarian splatter movie'

The film was loosely based on the true story of the 'Wisconsin ghoul' Ed Gein, who also inspired *Psycho* and Bob Clark's excellent, underrated *Deranged* (1974). It is, despite its reputation, a surprisingly inexplicit, un-gory affair, featuring relatively little on-screen bloodletting. However, Tobe Hooper filmed the story in such a disturbingly kinetic, relentless and expressionist style that viewers *feel* that they have been party to some of the most foul and twisted violence ever committed to film.

Picking up a maniacal, bloodsucking hitchhiker in the boiling sun of the Texan desert, Sally (Marilyn Burns) and her companions soon find themselves the victims of a cannibal family of lunatic Southern trash, presided over by a corpse-like grandfather. The family's fleshy fetish is catered for by the recreational activities of Leatherface (Gunnar Hansen), who enjoys nothing more than to carve up young bodies with his trusty chainsaw. Ironically, one of the most striking aspects of the film is that it clearly demonstrates that, in terms of efficiency and ease of handling, a chainsaw is hardly the most effective instrument for an aspiring murderer — rather like trying to kill someone with an outboard motor! Moreover, it has a trying habit of stalling just when you most need it. The movie's final image of Leatherface lumbering around clumsily and pathetically, attempting to grapple with his recalcitrant weapon whilst Sally legs it off into the distance, should have been more than enough to discourage any unbalanced viewers from attempting imitational crimes. It is indeed a much overlooked fact that, throughout the annals of international crime, there are virtually no recorded cases of people being actually assaulted with

chainsaws, for the simple reason that whilst guns, knives, nunchuckers and flying stars are designed to kill people, chainsaws are designed to cut down trees... It's a matter of getting the right tool for the right job.

IMPOTENT RAGE

Twelve years after failing to make mincemeat of young Sally, Leatherface was still experiencing disappointment with his chosen tool in Hooper's considerably more lighthearted sequel *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*. Submitted in various 'softened' versions, the movie was once again thrown out by the BBFC, for whom the chainsaw *per se* was fast becoming something of a bugbear. Particular objection was taken to a scene in which Leatherface impotently waggles his phallic chainsaw between the legs of a potential female victim, who taunts him about his inability to 'get it started' — true to form, the tool resolutely refuses to rise to the occasion.

If Leatherface had failed to learn his lesson in the decade between *Texas 1* and *2*, he was not alone in his folly, for in those interim years a surprising number of screen characters were to try their hand at buzz-saw butchery. In 1976 *Pieces* advertised itself with the line 'You don't have to go to Texas for a chainsaw massacre!' and a poster which shows a dead woman with jagged stitches on her legs

'The Texas Chainsaw Massacre instantly elevated the eponymous tool to cult status among horror fans whilst creating a symbol of all things wicked and sleazy on celluloid for a hysterical press'

and wrists which suggest that she has been sewn together. The silly story, directed by Spanish hack Juan Piquer Simon, starts with a mother discovering her eight year old son doing a jigsaw of a *Playboy*-style centrefold. She berates him and he kills her with an axe ('over-reaction' do we hear you say...?). In later life he prowls around with a chainsaw cutting up young girls and putting together a human jigsaw — well obviously he *would*, wouldn't he? Tacky and badly made, the film has nothing to recommend it, and was the target of pickets in the States by Women Against Pornography and the National Organisation Of Women, and a campaign by the ACTT over here. The only (unintentionally) enjoyable moment in the film is the ludicrous scene in which the killer follows his intended victim into a lift whilst trying to conceal his huge chainsaw behind his back!

Much more fun is *Up* (1976), from the ever-reliable Russ Meyer. In this movie, one character goes for another with a chainsaw, but this is nothing compared to the climax of Kevin Connor's terrifically twisted and satirical romp *Motel Hell* (1980), which remains to this day the only avowedly vegetarian splatter movie. 'It takes all kinds of critters to make Farmer Vincent's fritters', proudly announces the apparently amiable hicksy bumpkin. Yet when the now obligatory young woman stumbles upon the farmer's awful secret — his 'special ingredient' is nothing less than human flesh — the chainsaws are out in a flash. Sporting a fetchingly fetid pig's head, Farmer Vincent challenges all comers in a slaughterhouse slice-up that mixes gore, grunge and humour in equal doses.

DEAD FARCE

Anyone interested in chainsaws in space should take a look at Norman J Warren's *Alien* rip-off *Inseminoid* (1980), which features a character cutting off her *own* leg, but we have to wait a further couple of years before our favourite instrument of terror, torment and torture crops up again in an interesting context, when first-time feature director Sam Raimi used his groundbreaking horror-farce *The Evil Dead* valiantly to make the point that just because you love somebody, you should never shy away from chainsawing them to pieces should the occasion call for it. When his girlfriend Linda becomes possessed by marauding Sumerian demons, dopey dimwit Ash rightly decides that he has no option but to dismember her, pronto. Strapping his infested heart-throb down to a convenient work-surface, Ash is about to introduce Linda to the cutting edge of his personality when his eyes fall upon a pendant which he has given her. Overcome with remorse, Ash makes the fatal error of unshackling his apparently helpless other-half and burying her intact in the garden. This is a big mistake because, unsurprisingly, Linda is soon up and about again, causing Ash to resort to hacking her to pieces with a common-or-garden spade.

Ironically, the video of *The Evil Dead* has subsequently suffered similar dismemberment in Britain, following various successful prosecutions under the Obscene Publications Act during the 'video nasty' era and is currently limping around minus 1 minute 45 seconds, although chainsaw enthusiasts will be pleased to know that Ash's ridiculous display of Chaino-phobia remains untouched, a glorious cautionary moment for us all. Of course, in *Evil Dead 2* Ash *does* get the chance to chainsaw Linda and, furthermore, cut off his own hand when it takes on a malign life of its own and turns against him.

The fact that *The Evil Dead*'s very obvious sense of humour didn't save it from being mutilated by the BBFC (even in its theatrical release versio should have prepared us for the Board's ridiculous behaviour over *Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers*. The film begins with the following warning: 'The chainsaws used in this motion picture are real and dangerous. They are handled by seasoned professionals. The makers of this motion picture advise strongly against anyone attempting to perform these stunts at home. Especially if you are naked and about to indulge in strenuous sex. My conscience is clear. Fred Olen Ray'. One would have thought it well nigh impossible to signal JOKE more strongly but, whatever the case, *Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers* placed the big buzz back in the centre spotlight where it belongs, once again in the ever capable hands of Gunnar Hansen. 'The chainsaw is the cosmic link by which all things are united' pronounces the big man proudly in his role as the mysterious Master of an ancient chainsaw worshipping cult: 'The blade of the saw purifies the evil flesh and makes it holy to please our God'. Absolutely. During the course of the movie, victims are sliced-and-diced to the sound of Elvis Presley, the Chainsaws of the Gods are invoked and duly worshipped, and scream-queen Linnea Quigley performs the Virgin Dance of the Double Chainsaws.

Nor did Colourbox video let us down with

Leatherface with his hopelessly ineffectual tool in Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3

their subsequent major release, a low budget sci-fi/horror spoof entitled *Bad Taste*, directed by antipodean first-timer Peter Jackson, who also stars as wimpy hero Derek. Following a veritable orgy of offal, vomit and rocket launchers, the by now dynamic Derek rounds off the interstellar slaughter by chainsawing the offending space-men, climaxing in an astonishing scene in which our boy plunges his way straight through one poor unfortunate, entering through his head and emerging triumphant from his arse-hole, aptly hollering 'I am reborn!'

But what of the future? Is the chainsaw to remain *object non grata* with the British censor, or will its cameo appearance in 'respectable' big budget movies such as the Schwarzenegger vehicle *The Running Man* or William Friedkin's *The Guardian* (in which it is used to despatch a particularly nasty flesh-eating tree) start to earn it the respect and credibility it so sadly lacks at the moment? The recent rejection of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3* for theatrical distribution by the BBFC (despite the distributor's tactful omission of the dreaded 'C' word from the title, opting instead simply for *Leatherface*) seems to bode ill, suggesting that tough times still lie ahead. Even an appearance in an upmarket and impeccably Green advert condemning the barbarous ivory trade in parts of Africa has failed to improve the chainsaw's public image, and it seems unlikely that Fred Olen Ray's long awaited *Student Chainsaw Nurses* ('they're bad to the bone!') will lessen the loathing that the big 'C' seems to inspire in certain official quarters.

Now, who's for 'Power Tools in the Movies?'

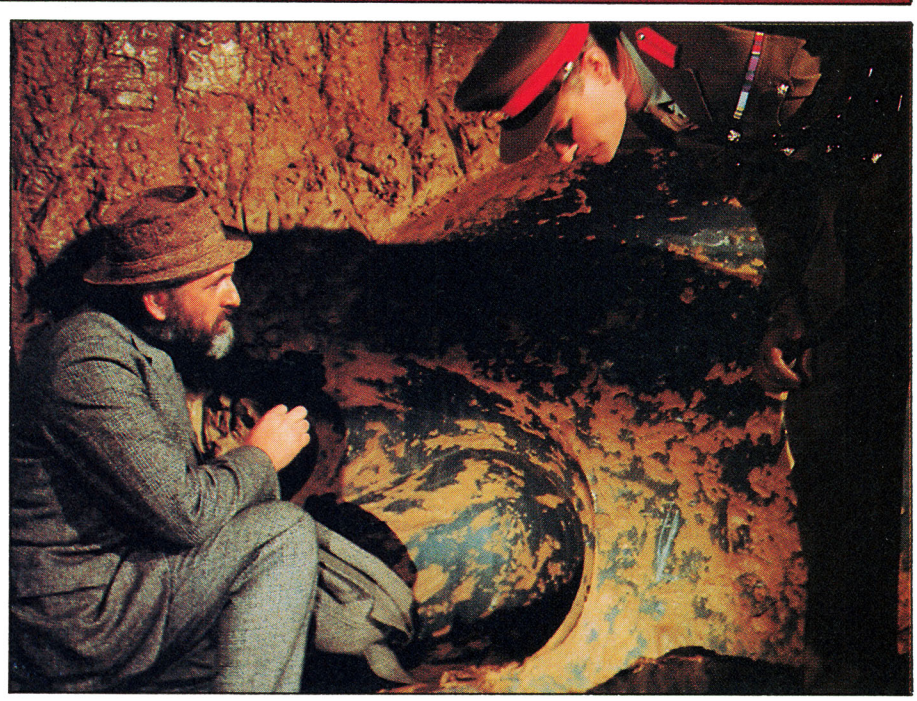
BOOK NOW AT YOUR LOCAL VIDEO STORE!
FOR SOME,
LIFE IS ALL ABOUT
MAKING SACRIFICES . . .
NEVER CRY DEVIL
18
Medusa PICTURES

R

AISING THE DEAD

Hammer — the very name is a byword for English Gothic cinema, conjuring up visions of starched wing collars, suave vampiric bluebloods, semi-clad sacrificial maidens and gloomy coachmen, whose single line of dialogue involves mumbled advice along the lines of: 'Don't you be goin' up to the big 'ouse tonight'. Born in the Forties, Hammer Film Productions were the market leaders for horror in the Fifties, but the company fell ill in the late Sixties and was sentenced to death in the Seventies. FEAR looks at the fall and rise of a British institution which is threatening once more to burst from its family vault.

Stephen Laws, horror author and lifetime fan of Hammer horror films, charts the rise and demise of Britain's premier independent production company.



Top: Christopher Lee as the reactivated bloodsucker in Taste The Blood Of Dracula (1969). Above: Andrew Keir and Julian Glover in Quatermass And The Pit (1967).

'It leaves nothing to the imagination. It is marinaded in tomato sauce. It observes the details of death with technical skill and lip-licking relish down to the last disintegrating toenail. Its monsters, whether man, woman or beast, are legendary sex maniacs. Its vampires are lechers of the tomb.'

A review of Lucio Fulci's *Zombie Flesheaters*, perhaps? A diatribe against the modern horror film? No. In fact, the above quote is taken from the *Daily Worker* and concerns the Hammer Film industry in 1966. And, whether you paid to see the films when they first appeared, or were caught up with the rereleases in the pre-video era, or cut your baby fangs on the late night television showings, no true horror fan will fail to know that the House Of Hammer dominated the scene for over two decades.

In retrospect, it is possible to surmise that Hammer was probably the only film company combining the mythical with the ulta-commercial, reintroducing into Britain movies of action, spectacle and imagination at a time of suffocatingly middle-brow and tame homegrown films.

Originally a British film distribution company called Exclusive, Hammer turned out a string of obscure B movies in the 1940s and early 1950s. Their turning point came with the film version in 1956 of Nigel Kneale's *The Quatermass Experiment*. The television series had been a popular phenomenon, and it was only natural that the shrewd business minds of Hammer (Michael Carreras and Anthony Hinds) should seize on this opportunity. It was closely followed by *X The Unknown* and *Quatermass 2*. These films were successful, but not as popular as the original *Quatermass*, which led Hammer executives to indulge in market research: science fiction... or horror? Their research revealed that it was indubitably horror that the public wanted.

MUMMY MIME

The next Hammer film to explode on the market place made the company an international fortune. *The Curse Of Frankenstein* (1957), directed by Terence Fisher, was not so much a remake of the James Whale/Boris Karloff film (*Frankenstein*, 1931) as a new Technicolor, blood and guts version, bringing together a popular British television actor, Peter Cushing and a relative unknown, Christopher Lee. The formula established the performing

and creative team that would bring immense popularity — and the Queen's Award For Industry — to Hammer.

After reintroducing Frankenstein, Hammer turned its attention to the next popular horror figure with *Dracula* (1958). The film firmly established Cushing as a hero of the horrors, and produced a sensational new horror star in Christopher Lee. Staying with Baron Frankenstein as the continuing series-character, rather than with the monster itself, Hammer produced a sequel in 1958: *The Revenge Of Frankenstein*.

The Mummy appeared shortly after in 1959. In the era of special effects, it's difficult to imagine the gob-smacked audience reaction when Cushing blew two crater-sized holes in Lee's chest with a shotgun, and then rammed a spear through him; but then it was powerful stuff. The film also showed how superb Lee could be at using mime. Even under layers of gauze and make-up, his ability to convey the anguish of Karis the High Priest still impresses.

The Hound Of The Baskervilles appeared in 1959, with Cushing giving a superlative performance as Sherlock Holmes, and in 1960 Hammer turned its hands to a further two horror favourites: *The Two Faces Of Dr Jekyll* and *The Curse Of The Werewolf*. The latter gave Oliver Reed his first starring role.

LEE WAY

Afraid of typecasting, Christopher Lee could not be persuaded to return to the role of Count Dracula, so in 1960 Hammer produced a sequel of sorts featuring David Peel as a disciple of the vampire Count. *The Brides of Dracula* again featured Cushing in the heroic role of Van Helsing. Director Terence Fisher pulled out all the stops and, as well as providing some wonderfully eerie moments with vampire brides being coaxed from their graves by a mad Freda Jackson, showed how well he could orchestrate the action scenes.

In 1960, Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* slashed across the screen. The success of the film prompted a number of imitators, including Hammer, to produce a series of black and white thrillers including *Scream Of Fear, Maniac* and *Paranoid*. The films generally featured a twist-in-the-tail owing more, perhaps, to Henri Georges Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques* than to *Psycho*.

The Evil Of Frankenstein, third in the series and directed by Freddie Francis, was spawned in 1964. Unfairly discounted by contemporary critics, the film presented Frankenstein in a more heroic, even swashbuckling, mould. Ruthless in *Curse*, a manipulator in *Revenge*, the character, though still single-minded in his wish to create man, is presented in a more sympathetic vein. By the time that *Frankenstein Created Woman* was made (1967), Cushing seemed to be positively benevolent, acting almost as a father-figure to the woman who is subject to his soul-transference experiment. As he turns, griefstricken, from the edge of the waterfall where the unfortunate woman has committed suicide at the end of this melancholy film, audience sympathy is heightened by this tragic, misunderstood figure. Hammer was aware of this sympathy and so, in *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed* (1969) returned to the utter ruthlessness of the earlier incarnation.

WET DREAMS

In addition to the popular horror figures, Hammer created a monster of its own with *The Gorgon* (1964). In 1966, they presented *The Reptile* and *Plague Of The Zombies*, both directed back-to-back by John Gilling, using the same sets. These two films are perhaps the best Hammer horrors of the 1960s.

Hammer also produced epics such as *She* (1965), *One Million Years BC* and *The Lost Continent;* returning to science fiction with *Quatermass And The Pit* (1967) and *Moon Zero Two* (1969). But *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* remained public favourites.

Christopher Lee returned to the role of the vampire Count in *Dracula, Prince Of Darkness* (1965). Beginning with a reprise from the exciting climactic confrontation between Cushing and Lee from the original film, *Prince* culminates in a battle on the frozen moat outside Castle Dracula, where the Count is consigned to watery oblivion. But you can't keep a good man down, and in *Dracula Has Risen From The Grave*, the accidental spilling of a priest's blood revives the Count who rampages with gusto until impaled on a six-foot crucifix.

By 1969, Ralph Bates had retrieved the vampire's apparently freeze-dried blood and, by inviting his fellow sybarites to *Taste The Blood Of Dracula*, managed to revive him in Victorian England. Visiting the sins of the fathers upon three hypocrites, Dracula uses their children to do his dirty work, even at one point ordering a daughter to drive a stake through the heart of the father who is attempting to do the same to him.

'Cushing blew two crater- sized holes in Lee`s chest with a shotgun, and then rammed a spear through him.'

Lee was gradually becoming disgruntled with the role. Having nothing whatever to say in *Prince*, only token remarks were allowed him in subsequent films. The 1970 attempt to return to the original concept, with *Scars Of Dracula*, was an anachronistic failure. *The Vampire Lovers* in the same year represented

BLOOD ROCK

Hammer connects with rock group Warfare to present a new image for the Nineties. Heavy metal fan John Gilbert jams with lead singer Evo.

Shocker, A Nightmare On Elm Street 5, Pet Sematary and *Near Dark* are all movies which contain heavy metal influences, and perhaps that's why Hammer Films decided not only to allow Northern rock group Warfare to produce a concept album based on their movies, but also to license the startling result.

The band is composed of lead singer/drummer Evo, Zlaughter on bass and keyboards, and Lazer who controls keyboards and samples. It is, however, Evo who came up with the idea and sold it to Hammer MD, Roy Skeggs. 'I've been a fan of Hammer for many years, and I've got most of the videos at home. I was sitting watching a movie one night and it just came, a lightbulb went on. I wrote explaining that I would like to write a concept album for the company, celebrating the films.

'I got a telephone call saying, yes, they would be very interested. It seemed like a good way of launching the Hammer name into the Nineties, and could we do them some demo tapes. We demoed *Prince Of Darkness* and *Phantom Of The Opera* in a 24-track studio and then sent them on cassette format. Hammer telephoned me and said they were brilliant, especially *Phantom Of The Opera*, they were knocked out by it.

'It's very hard to record X amount of songs and cover the whole Hammer scene. I was quite biased in my choice. I picked my favourite movies, obviously the Frankenstein saga, *Phantom Of The Opera* is a classic, *Zombies* is one of my favourites...

'I've dealt with the subtler elements of the horror genre in this record, whereas a lot of people, because we were very noisy in the early days, expect it to be just a total bloodbath. Hammer films were never bloodbaths. They're relaxation, escapism, whereas nowadays a lot of horror movies deal with violence too much.

'I'm against the violent side of it. I don't think a woman getting her throat cut out in a New York telephone box is entertaining, to me it's shocking. That is horrific, but the Hammer films were never like that.

'With *Prince Of Darkness* and *Scream Of The Vampire* I actually went to Whitby. That's what gave Stoker his inspiration, so I thought I might get the same inspiration. I wrote the lyrics in the churchyard looking across the sea; that's method song writing as opposed to method acting.'

The album's cover notes have been provided by Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee, two gentlemen who have been off the interview circuit for some time. Evo admits that they were surprised when the two big Hammer stars seemed so willing to participate. 'I wrote to them and said, 'Dear Sir, would you kindly prepare sleeve notes for my record, I've been a great fan from an early age'.

'Really, it was a genuine fan letter. A short while later both letters arrived wishing me good luck for sleeve notes. Even the people at Hammer were surprised that Christopher Lee had written sleeve notes, because he seems to be a very dark, heroic person who won't have anything to do with anything.

'I had to reassure both of them that what I was tackling was a serious theatrical concept album which highlighted their careers in good taste and not bad taste.'

We shall soon see if their confidence was well placed as the album/cassette and compact disc appear on the Hammer Films Music label at most record shops. A full review from our metal expert will appear in the next issue.

the company's change in direction, delivering not so much a nightmare as a wet dream. As Sheridan Lefanu's Camilla, Ingrid Pitt's sexual rampage through this movie was a sign of things to come.

LIGHTS OUT

If the only saving grace of *Horror of Frankenstein* was its black comedy, *Countess Dracula* had few redeeming features and no pace. *Twins of Evil* continued the sexual trend in 1971 with its depiction of Puritan witch-hunters and bare-breasted fangettes. *Vampire Circus*, despite being cobbled together from two different scripts, nevertheless contained a wealth of imaginative material with a spectacular climax and body count. But *Lust For A Vampire* seemed to be an excuse for some soft porn cavorting in the girls' dormitory after lights out. In-depth analyses of Terence Fisher's final film, *Frankenstein And The Monster From Hell* (1973), have suggested that it was a precursor to the more graphic school of zombie-horror prevalent today. But this is a poor argument.

The nail was finally in Hammer's coffin.

Attempts were made to update Dracula in a laughably swinging London (*Dracula AD 1972*), and *The Satanic Rites Of Dracula* (1973) failed to make any impression, despite its interesting premise that Dracula has wearied of his immortality and wishes to put an end to himself by initiating a new strain of plague that will wipe out humanity.

The Legend Of The Seven Golden Vampires (1974) mixed vampirism and Kung Fu in a wonderfully loony concoction... but the old thrills were gone. *To The Devil A Daughter* (1975) was Hammer's last horror — a belated attempt to follow the success of their Dennis Wheatley adaptation of 1967 (*The Devil Rides Out*) which made the terrible mistake of boring the audience. Hammer's two subsequent television series were disappointing affairs, with only one or two episodes (such as *Children Of The Moon*, starring Diana Dors as a werewolf mother) remaining in the memory.

DEATH AND DISSOLUTION

Why did Hammer's popularity wane after 1968? There are several reasons. Giving the public what they wanted was always Hammer's successful strategy. But in 1968 a film emerged that changed the future of horror. The movie was George A Romero's *Night Of The Living Dead*, which shocked and disorientated. By comparison, Hammer's horrors were becoming florid, but uninvolving. Sticking rigidly to what had been a very successful horror formula of Victorian supernatural monstrosity, the shrewd business minds at Hammer somehow ignored the new winds blowing. Come 1973... *The Exorcist* turned the concept of the horror film on its head.

Still Hammer seemed unable to take the hint, giving less attention to the quality of their horror output than to the fast bucks available on the home market via film versions of British comedy series such as *On The Buses* and *Nearest And Dearest*. So what happened to that sure business sense? The main reason for the miscalculation and decline had to do with a significant change in Hammer's personnel in 1967/68.

The superb family atmosphere at Bray Studios, the ability to know what shocked and the retention of indigenous talent, had a lot to do with the success of Hammer's films. It is significant therefore that the decline of Hammer coincided with the move from Bray Studios in 1967 to Elstree and Pinewood. The deaths of art director Bernard Robinson and director Terence Fisher, and the departure of Anthony Hinds served to disband that special *something*. The studio changed hands and was swallowed up by business minds who could not move with the times on the horror front to give the public what they wanted.

Whatever the reasons for the fall of the house of Hammer, we can still delight in the late night television showings, and replay our favourite moments courtesy of the video recorder. And perhaps we can still hope that one day there will be a resurgence in the British film industry. The talent and passion are here — and used by the Americans by the bucketload. Perhaps Britain will soon become the true home of the horror film again — and soon.

The Hammer heyday may have passed into the history of British cinema but the company still exists, under the continued managing directorship of Roy Skeggs, and is about to launch what it claims is a new brand of horror for the Nineties. John Gilbert reports.

It is difficult to see why the company responsible for the gothic horror films of yesteryear should choose to relaunch now. However, as journalist Mark Kermode — a name not unknown to this magazine — recently pointed out to me, Hammer experienced its greatest hour in the Fifties and Sixties, when censorship restrictions were tough. The Seventies saw the sexual revolution and a relaxation of censorship laws, at which point Hammer drowned in a welter of its own arterial gore, perhaps because sexy vampires and wicked images of sex no longer afforded the forbidden pleasures they once did.

Now Hammer is ready to step once more into the breach with a new House of Hammer series and a television history of the company, from the producers of the BBC's The Best Of British. The new horror series, called The Haunted House Of Hammer, concerns ghosts — good, portentous and malefic — such as those found in the stories of legendary genre groundbreakers Algernon Blackwood and M R James. Split into 26 half hourly episodes, the series contains a mixture of wellworn and inventive storylines. Most of these teleplays will rely on atmosphere and characterisation, rather than on the gross-outs that have punctuated films and American television in the 1980s...

Yes, coping with power cuts can be fun! Peter Cushing as the fuel-conserving Baron in The Evil Of Frankenstein.

■ Six people, trapped in a war torn basement discover the bodies of five of their number. So, which one of them is still alive and breathing?

■ A rich Englishman swindles a poor American out of mineral rights; but the wraith returns for recompense...

■ A young man argues with his lover, and pushes her into a river. The verdict is suicide, but he can't get rid of her that easily...

■ An evil housekeeper refuses to be dismissed, even after her death.

According to Hammer, casting has already begun, and we can look forward to seeing top-notch writers and directors in the line up. Whether the company's gothic style will again be successful depends upon horror trends within the next few years. Certainly, vampires are coming back for vengeance as films such as Red Sleep and The Vampire Lestat head towards production. Edgar Allan Poe movies seem to be back in vogue as both the 21st Century Film Corporation

and cult producer/director Roger Corman again take an interest in Masque Of The Red Death, Premature Burial and The Pit And The Pendulum.

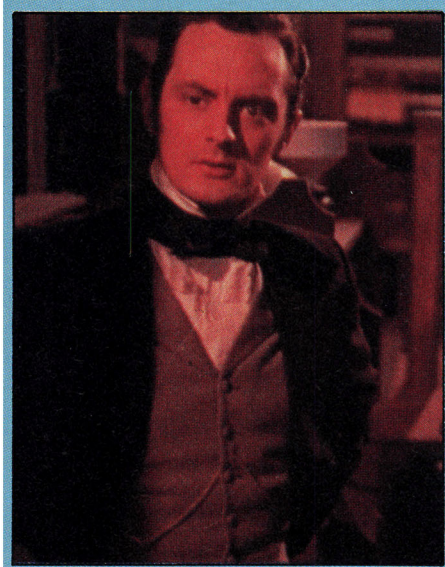
Hammer has to move with the times and compete with modern special effects to convince contemporary audiences that it holds the future of horror. One way in which it might begin to do this is through The Best Of British TV series which charts the rise — though not the fall — of the company. Again, there are 26 episodes including not only horror but costume adventure, science fiction, war, comedy, thrillers and psychological drama.

The series features clips culled from a library of more than 260 films, and there are special segments on the stars — Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee — a look at favourite monsters such as Dracula, Frankenstein's creature and the zombies, as well as insights into good versus evil, the occult, and the supernatural. Perhaps more interestingly for the horror historian, the series also looks at radio and television spin-offs along with Hammer's success in Far Eastern countries.

Both Hammer packages hint at more to come, and the company is already knee deep in film options. But for the time being it looks as if Hammer has a new life on the small, rather than the cinema, screen.

HAMMERED!

Francis Matthews has starred in just five Hammer horror movies. Here Stephen Laws asks the British actor if he is still haunted by his past...



Francis Matthews in Revenge of Frankenstein.

SL: One film I'm particularly fond of is *Dracula Prince Of Darkness*. I thought your performance was good. But you disappointed me, because this was one of the first horror movies I ever sneaked in to see underage, and it was at a time when Peter Cushing was the accepted hero figure at Hammer. As you were playing the hero in *Prince*, and later the hero in *Rasputin*, I thought that in Francis Matthews we had a new up and coming horror hero star. I didn't realise that *Dracula* and *Rasputin* were filmed back to back.

FM: Yes, literally. Sets and everything. When you look at them, they're fascinating. Dracula's castle was turned into the Winter Palace. We did the outdoor shooting for Dracula first, outside Dracula's castle — where I killed him on the ice. Then we went indoors while they revamped the castle set as the Winter Palace. Both pictures took six weeks each.

The climactic scenes on the ice in *Prince Of Darkness* are well done.

In the end sequence, I had to be smashed against a wall and then Dracula threw me back onto the ice. On the rehearsal I fell on the hammer which I had been trying to smash open the coffin with. The centre of my back went straight on the hammer and I've had a bad back ever since; appalling pain for six months.

Reference is often made to the 'family atmosphere' at Bray studios.

It was always one of the nicest places to work, which is one of the reasons why they persuaded so many good actors to go there. It was a great fun place to be. It's almost a law of our business that the fun rises and diminishes in direct disproportion to what you're doing. If you're doing something very serious, off the set you need a lot of fun. Whereas, if you're working on comedy, it's a very serious business. Getting the timing right needs an awful lot of careful thought.

How were Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing to work with?

Great. Christopher's very serious. You had to keep pulling his leg. Now Peter Cushing, you wouldn't believe, is totally the opposite. Peter was a total joker. He and I had great fun on Revenge Of Frankenstein. We used to play battleships and cruisers and 'teeth and eyes' after lunch. 'Have we done our eyes, have we done our teeth?' They used to squirt stuff in your eyes to make them sparkle. In one scene, I had a brain to be transplanted and I had to say that deathless line which brought the house down at the premiere. I look up at this creature and say: 'Pray God I have the skill to do this.' And Peter looked at me in the premiere and said: 'Oh dear, my boy. What *have* we done?'

Didn't you want to be involved in subsequent Hammers or did the parts simply not come your way?

Nobody asked me! I've never had any snobbery about the genre, or fears about moving into it and doing too much of it. Spend your life worrying about that and you really wouldn't do very much at all. Hammer films were quite highly regarded, even then. But it was still something you didn't mention much in Gerry's club, you just said you were doing a movie up at Bray and everyone knew it was a horror movie. But they're more highly regarded now, I think, than then.

Hammer films are like adult fairy tales.

Yes, but they wouldn't work any more. The period piece aspect is over. People wouldn't go to see them. And people's sensibilities do seem to be battered to death these days.

There's also a preponderance of special effects at the expense of story.

Special effects can be a bore, because all the time you're watching them, you're thoroughly aware that they're special effects. You know it's not real life. There were no real special effects in the Hammer horrors; just danger, blood and gore. Horror and fear.

It's often what you don't see that can be scarier.

Absolutely. The gross-out effect seems to be the norm now. But I've never turned a horror film down. Of course, period horror's a thing of the past now. It's all present day and future horror.

GRAPHIC DE

A WILD DANCE OF SIVA ENCIRCLING ME. A LOTUS GROWING FROM MY BELLY, HANUMAN AND KIPLING IN MY BED.
STAR OF THE EAST
AND NIGHT TILL
WHAMPCH
KRASH
YOU SOLD US OUT. WHERE IS CAIN?
WH-WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, MURPH? I DON'T KNOW ANY CAIN!
WAS THERE— URFF...
--TO KEEP YOU OUT OF TROUBLE!
SONOFAB--
UNHH!

TAIL

Warren Lapworth monopolises the bathroom as he reviews comics and graphic novels which take an ecological stance and attempt to adapt new blockbusting movies.

From humble British beginnings to later DC issues, Titan Books now present Alan Moore's *V For Vendetta* series in a single volume (£9.95). It's 1997 and Britain is controlled by a totalitarian Labour government, an iron grip headed by the Leader and monitored by the Fate computer. But there's a strange hero in the shadows, a man called V, dressed as Guy Fawkes, a pale grinning mask his visage. On November 5, he appropriately blows up Parliament and rescues a despairing teenager, Evey, from the clutches of government detectives ('Fingermen'). Together they continue to strike against leading state officials, who seem powerless to stop V and are confounded by his identity.

David Lloyd's artwork is near perfect for the scenario, areas of heavy, dark ink contrasting with the pale, distraught colours of an oppressive, demoralising world. Figures are grim and realistic, but none as enthralling as the sweeping cloak and bleached papier-mache mask of V himself. Unfortunately, it's during a reader's encounters with him in the first part of the story (divided into three 'books') that *V For Vendetta* shines, later sections are amusing and readable but too familiar, too *1984*, with V not quite as fresh as he at first appears. Still, it's impossible not to wonder who he is and exactly how far he'll go, so if you didn't buy this as a monthly series it's well worth considering the collected works.

ROUND AND ROUND...

Fleetway have finally released their long-delayed multi-strip 'adult' comic, *Revolver*. Its lead story is *Dare*, an alternative history of Daniel, Pilot of the Future, scripted by Grant Morrison (of *Arkham Asylum* fame). So little is said in the first nine page, picture-heavy episode that it's impossible to imagine where Morrison intends to take the character, but the visual emphasis is a bad move. Rian Hughes' art is simple, antiquated and abstractly coloured, and Dan Dare looks like a cross between Bruce Forsyth and Morrissey.

Although form is a bit vague, the visuals for *Purple Days*, by *Floyd* Hughes, are the best in the whole comic magazine, colour used warmly and effectively. Amiable characters begin a story based on the life of Jimi Hendrix in an intriguing if casual manner.

Pinhead is a complete waste of two pages that should've been used developing *Happenstance And Kismet*. Written by Paul Neary, best known for his inking work with Alan Davis, it's set in a pub where boozing bigot Kismet meets posh horseracing enthusiast Happenstance when the landlord accidentally discovers the deeds to the establishment. Art is suitably jocular for this cartoon farce which failed to raise even the slightest smirk from me.

A weary young man's visit to an Indian restaurant is punctuated by Rudyard Kipling's surreal, hallucinogenic journey to blue-skinned Hindu *Rogan Gosh*. Brendan McCarthy's visuals are detailed and attractively coloured but I think Pete Milligan was under the influence of something when he wrote the strange yet tedious script.

Julie Hollings' *Dire Streets* is a useless attempt at sitcom humour; seven poorly written and badly illustrated pages, and while *Nine Inches To The Mile* looks great, text is a stream of useless, semi-philosophical waffle. Most of the seven strips in *Revolver* go completely nowhere (like the barrel in a gun...), and those who don't take one step forward but struggle not to take any steps back. Hopefully it'll improve in time but as it stands *Revolver* is the perfect way to waste £1.65.

DIRECTIVE 267: KEEP AN OPEN MIND

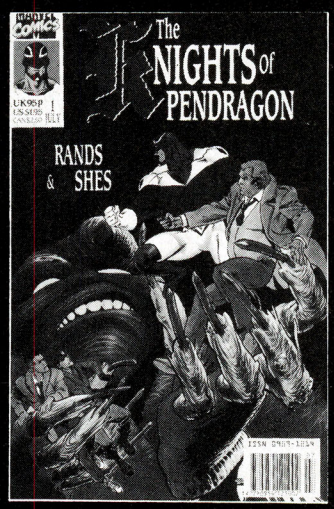
Detroit's really in trouble now. OCP's unfair treatment of its police force has caused them to strike. The city owes OCP 37 million dollars and has no hope of paying. OCP have foreclosed on all their contracts — Detroit has effectively become privatised. And a designer drug, nuke, threatens the city.

In *RoboCop 2* (Marvel, £3.50, import), Lewis and our cyborg friend are refusing to strike, but a raid on the nuke factory fails, and the leader of the ring, Cain, disassembles RoboCop. He's put back together, but with an awkwardly comprehensive list of directives, including don't run through puddles, don't monopolise the bathroom, and don't walk across a ballroom floor swinging your arms! Robo clears his mind and goes up against Cain, his hoods and OCP's newest cyborg cop...

Adapted from the screenplay co-written by Frank Miller, one would expect *RoboCop 2* to be something special. Although far from brilliant, it's interesting and action-packed, if unsophisticated. Artwork is a bit weak, worst when RoboCop's familiar visage is distorted, but it has no scenes where graphic detail is needed. It's sure to be infinitely superior as a movie, so unless you dislike surprises leave the graphic novel until you've seen the real thing.

WHO'S TO BLAME?

Logically enough, Marvel UK's new six-part series, *The Knights Of Pendragon* (95p), features Captain Britain, the leader of Marvel *USA*'s newest and, in my opinion, best mutant team, Excalibur. In issue one, he takes a backseat to Alistaire Stewart and Dai Thomas of the Weird Happenings Organisation (WHO), who are investigating a series of strange deaths: a whale hunter has been shot with a 400-year-old harpoon, a controversial fruit grower has been found vacuum-packed and irradiated, and more recently 87 people have died after eating at a fast-food joint. A sinister scarecrow somehow appears to be at the root of the deaths and, meanwhile, ruthless 'businessmen' are hindering WHO's progress.



The Knights Of Pendragon takes a firm environmental stance, to the point of being printed on paper using half as many trees as 'normal' paper(?) and using minimal bleaching agents. Certainly this isn't to the publication's disadvantage: thick and glossy pages holding Gary Erskine and Andy Lanning's clear, pleasant art well. Characters are reminiscent of those drawn by the great Alan Davis, who's produced the covers for the series, but not quite as friendly.

Other than a contrived conversation between a farmer and his worker, Green issues aren't forced down your throat, more eased down with thoughtful cynicism. Thus far, the emphasis is on the mysterious and supernatural, but I'm sure that superheroic action from Captain Britain will be brought to the fore in later issues. *The Knights Of Pendragon* is a readable, intelligent way to prick the ecological conscience of the comic-reading public.

ANIMAL MAGIC

As a light, fun view of environmental problems to educate the kids, *Brute Force* (Marvel, 60p) is perfect. In a four-issue limited series, an eagle, dolphin, lion, kangeroo and bear are transformed into intelligent, armoured beings through the ministrations of a brilliant scientist. Their first mission, on behalf of Multicorp, is to rescue a kidnapped gorilla colleague unwittingly helping with the destruction of a rain forest. Artwork, like the plot, is fairly simple and straightforward but gets the point across.

WHOSE MIND IS IT ANYWAY?

Schwarzenegger's latest movie exploits are recreated in the *Total Recall* comic (DC, £1.60). Arnie plays Doug Quaid, who would like to get away from it all but can't afford to move to one of Earth's off-world colonies. Instead, he goes to Rekall to be given the memories of a secret agent's adventure. After a supposedly unsuccessful memory transfer, he's attacked by spies on the way home. This begins his mission against Cohaagen, the power-crazed administrator of the Mars colony, a task aided by Hauser, a man with identical looks but different memories to Quaid.

Throughout *Total Recall*, you can never be sure if it's all happening to Quaid or if it's a Rekall memory or even just a dream. It's also possible that he never existed! This irritating puzzle is balanced out by plenty of gratuitous violence and fast action sequences. Well, I'm sure that's what they are in the movie but, although visuals are generally adequate and Arnie looks like he should, pace and interest lulls during these moments. The film is receiving critical acclaim, but I doubt if this adaptation is.

AND SO ON, AND ON, AND ON...

Book five is the final part of Piranha Press's *Etc* (£3.50, import), the adventures of a female clone. Having escaped the clutches of scientists, she was the inspiration for a composer before being kidnapped by her 'owners', Nadircorp. Her friends must try to rescue her.

Many months ago now I bought part one of *Etc* and found it long-winded, attempting to blind me with science. The final book is equally tiresome, a few events expanded with worthless text. Some of the characters hiding in the dark, shadowy backgrounds are malformed, but as everthing's been airbrushed to high heaven you hardly notice. £17.50 for the whole story? No, thank you.

■ Clockwise: Rogan Gosh from Revolver, The Knights Of Pendragon, Robocop 2 and Total Recall

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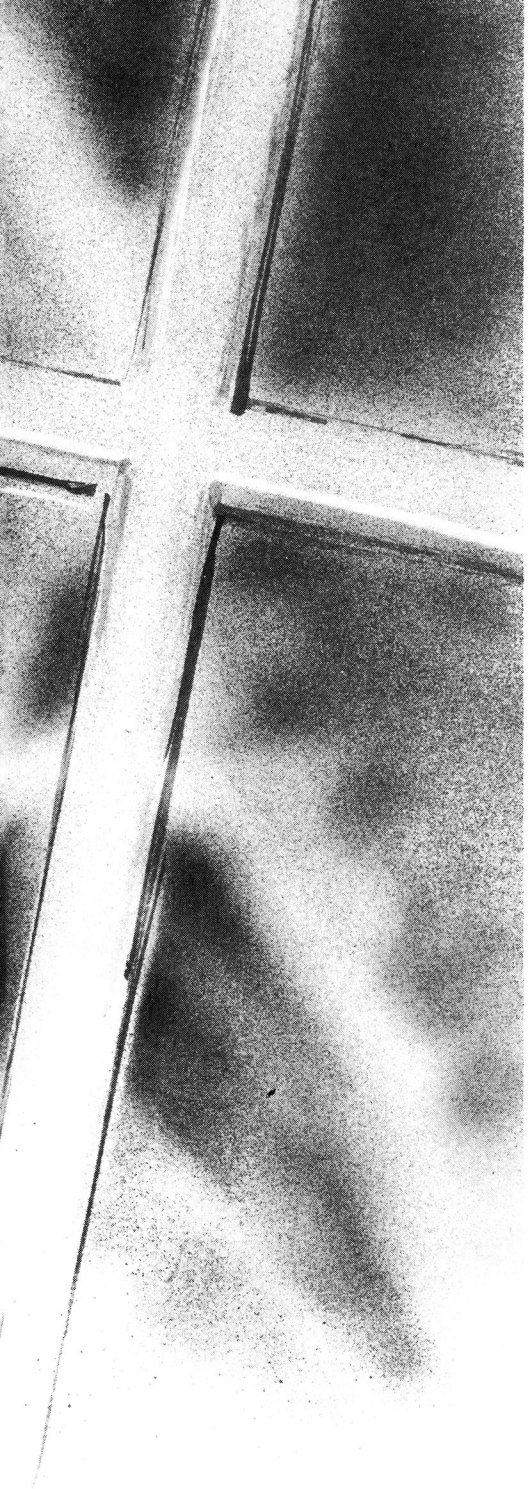
SUBMITTING SHORT STORIES TO FEAR
If you have written a short story which fits FEAR's horror, science fiction or fantasy brief, then send it to David Western, Fiction Editor, FEAR, Newsfield, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1JW. Please indicate the wordage of your story at the head of the typescript which should be no more than 5,000 words long and typed, preferably double spaced. Remember to enclose a daytime 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. We have been deluged with submissions recently, therefore it could be some considerable time, months even, before you receive a positive or negative reply. Please bear this in mind when submitting fiction to FEAR. Also it makes sense to keep a copy of your story... just in case.

FEAR BOOK EXTRACT

James Herbert

CREE



ED

Know that feeling of being watched, of eyes boring into the back of your neck? It could be in a bar, on a train or in a crowded room — you just sense someone's thoughts and gaze are directed at you and you alone. Creed had that feeling right then.

He'd taken another gulp of brandy and the glass was just leaving his lips, about two inches away, when his hand froze. For a moment he felt numbed. Smoke from the cigarette held in his other hand drifted up in a lazy stream creating a thin mist before him. It took a long time for him to turn and look towards the window.

Some of the brandy sprayed from his mouth, while the rest somehow lodged in his throat. He wheezed, coughed, did a half-retch. The chair he was sitting on flew backwards as he jumped up: he gripped the edges of the table to steady himself.

He didn't want to look round at the window again, he didn't want to see the terrible, cadaverous face that had been watching him from outside, but he forced himself to, because he knew it was beyond logic, that there really couldn't be anyone out there, for the kitchen was above the garage and office, and nobody could look through the window at that height, and if they had a ladder, he would have heard it scraping the wall or bumping the windowsill, so there couldn't possibly be anyone out there, couldn't possibly...

He *forced* himself to look again.

And there wasn't anybody there at all. No thin and pitted, skull-like face, no glaring eyeballs set in the dark sunken sockets watching him. No one there at all.

He was suddenly aware that his feet were becoming wet and warm. His cup had been knocked over and spilt tea was trickling from the table in a steady stream. Quickly he righted the cup, then grabbed a dishcloth to mop up the spreading brown liquid. Only when that was done — and reluctantly at that — did he venture over to the window.

The cobblestone street below was empty, as you might expect at that time of night/morning. Plenty of shadows, though, plenty of places to hide. But no way could someone reach this floor. No way...

His headache had shifted, no longer pressuring his temples and the area just above the bridge of his nose; instead it seemed to be occupying a space high at the back of his head. Creed touched himself there, fingers probing his hair as though attempting to move the pain around. It wouldn't budge. Delayed concussion? Was that the problem? Maybe he should have had a doctor examine him after all. Could concussion cause hallucinations? He had no idea.

He returned to the table and finished the last of the brandy. The face he's seen — *imagined* he'd seen — at the window belonged to last night's intruder, Mr Nosferatu. He shivered. A vampire could crawl up walls, couldn't it?

Now basically — and you may already have gathered this — Creed was a down-to-earth non-believing feet-on-the-ground world-weary practising cynic. His firmest belief was that he, himself, existed, and he accepted that only because it required no act of faith on his part. He could sense, he could feel, he could see, he could hear, he could taste. He could even think. All this was irrefutable. As for anything else, then he really wasn't that interested in the question, let alone the philosophy behind it. Was reality no more than an illusion of the mind? Was existence nothing more than an elaborate dream? Did an individual exist only because others perceived he or she to *be*? Creed really didn't give a shit. *I fornicate, therefore I am*, was his credo. So, because his imagination had grown lazy with regard to such intangibles, it was obvious to him that the crack on the head that morning was playing silly buggers with his brain.

And maybe he was right.

Taking the half-smoked cigarette from the ashtray, he made the short trip down the hall to the bathroom. There he opened the medicine cabinet and reached in for a carton of Paracetamols. He swallowed four, washing them down with water from the cold tap. The visage that stared back at him from the bathroom mirror was not encouraging. The eyes were red-rimmed and bloodshot, the skin was almost sallow in complexion, and the bruise on the forehead was a mushy kind of purple. He stuck out his tongue and at least that looked healthy enough.

Creed unzipped his fly and stood over the toilet, cigarette

back where it belonged, drooping from the corner of his mouth., He watched the flow of urine, not with interest, merely to make sure it hit the target. Water in the bowl bubbled under the fall.

His hand touched the wall by his side to steady himself, for he had felt his body sway. He blinked, then felt his body move again. Christ, he'd be pissing on the floor at this rate. He steadied himself mentally this time and exerted muscle pressure to vacate his bladder more speedily.

Movement again, but this time he realised it wasn't him. This time it had come from the toilet itself. The porcelain sides where the water lapped had seemed to move inwards for a fraction of a second.

'Boy, you're in trouble,' Creed muttered to himself. He needed to lie down, to crawl into his pit and pull the cover over his head so that he could sleep this thing off. Oh

'The toilet bowl was moving, as though the sides themselves were flexing, contracting — *breathing*'

Christ, there it goes again. The toilet bowl was moving, as though the sides themselves were flexing, contracting — *breathing*. The flow from his bladder was easing, becoming a trickle, and Creed tried to help it along. A spurt, nearly done. Thank —

Oh God, that wasn't right. Something more was happening down there. The sides at the water's edge appeared to be breaking out. The cigarette fell from his lips into the well with a plop and a fizz as the shiny-smooth rectangle beneath him shaped itself into a loose jagged oval. It flexed once more, became even more of an oval, its jagged edges forming into what... looked... like... oh shit... *teeth*...

He was looking down into a porcelain mouth!

Creed felt himself go weak at the knees.

But he jerked upright in absolute shock and stepped back when that tooth-edged, pissed-on mouth suddenly shot from the bottom of the toilet, glazed sides stretching as though elastic, and gnashed at the air where he had been standing a split-second before.

He screamed as water mixed with his own urine drenched him, and he fell backwards. The mouth reared over him on its long dripping neck, the snapping of its porcelain teeth loud and sharp in the tiled confines of the bathroom, before it abruptly disappeared back to where it belonged.

In a flurry of kicking legs, Creed pushed himself to the far end of the bathroom (which wasn't very far at all) and lay there gawking and trembling, not comprehending what had happened, yet believing it implicitly. His clothing was soaked and his penis had shrivelled (understandably) into insignificance somewhere inside his trousers.

Oh dear God, what was happening to him? This was insane, a nightmare, like a bad acid trip. Things like this couldn't happen, they couldn't be real. It was his head, it was all inside his head. He needed a doctor, he needed one very badly.

He forced himself onto one knee, eyes never leaving the toilet that stood impassive — impassive but *waiting* — at the other end of the bathroom. Using the edge of the bath for support, Creed reluctantly (knowing what had just happened couldn't have happened at all) slid himself back towards the seat. He had hallucinated, he knew that; yet he had to be sure, he had to make certain that nothing really lurked down there, no mouth, no teeth, nothing. That the whole thing had been a mind-joke.

He crept nearer, scarcely daring to breathe. Levering himself up into a shaky half-crouched position, he peered over the rim. There was only still water, slightly greenish, a cigarette butt floating on the surface, at the bottom.

Nevertheless he slammed down the toilet lid.

Creed sprawled on the floor for a while, trying to bring his senses together, his breathing now ragged. He didn't feel well at all.

Gradually, reason infringed upon lunacy, as it usually, or a least eventually, tends to do with the perfectly sane when something ridiculously illogical has happened. He should have had the bump seen to; it was as simple as that. Nobody could walk away from such a fall without suffering worse after-effects than a nasty headache. Brain cells had been jiggled, and this was the result. Probably, drinking alcohol that night hadn't helped any. Moaning more from self-pity than pain, Creed crawled to the door and used the handle to pull himself erect.

His clothes were wet, but that didn't surprise him: as far as he was concerned it was just another part of the illusion. Guided by the lights from the kitchen and the bathroom behind him, Creed lurched along the short hall and all but fell into the bedroom. A rest, he told himself. All I need is to get my head down for a few hours. Too late — too *early* — to call a doctor in.

What would he tell me anyway? Take a couple of aspirins, that's what he'd say. A goodnight's sleep will do wonders. See me in surgery hours. Thanks a lot, Doc. Maybe I should call an ambulance. Yeah, maybe that's the thing to do. Just... just rest for a moment, though. Just a little sleep...

Kneeling on the bed, Creed began to shed his clothes, handling them carefully because they were damp and smelled of pee. Only they didn't, did they? No, Creed, it's in your mind, only the result of upset brain chemicals. Shaken and definitely stirred. Christ, what a mess.

Jacket and shirt were gone. He sat, kicked off his shoes, then pulled at his trousers and underpants. Getting his socks off was the most difficult.

Naked, he flopped back on to the duvet. He didn't mean to, but he couldn't help it: he giggled. Crazy. A mouth jumping out of the toilet, snapping at his pecker. Oh Jesus, Judas... crazy... Before tiredness overtook him completely, he managed to slide beneath the duvet cover, pulling it up to his neck, relishing and *needing* its comfort. He lay there spreadeagled and bare, and oddly enough, the beginning of his dream was fairly pleasant.

JAMES HERBERT is one of the world's leading writers of horror and has been described as one of the most influential and widely imitated authors of our time. His novels such as *The Fog, The Dark* and *The Survivor* are already hailed as classics of the genre, while his more recent bestsellers *The Magic Cottage, Sepulchre* and *Haunted* have enhanced his reputation as a writer of depth and originality.

KID'S GAME

By David L Duggins

When the three o'clock bell rang, Davey was first out of his seat. He went through the classroom door at a dead run, cut through masses of students and faculty in the hall and careened out of Hodgekins Elementary School. Davey's best friend Randy caught him two blocks up, cutting through backyards and jumping fences. In desperation Randy threw himself at the receding figure; he caught Davey just above the knees and the two did a rough-and-tumble in the grass next to the sidewalk. Textbooks, notebooks and papers flew. No one in particular seemed to be winning until Davey got a knee into Randy's chest and pinned him down. He dug thumb and forefinger into Randy's shoulder just below his neck. Randy yelped.

'Lemme up!'

'Nerve pinch!' Davey cried triumphantly.

'Lemme up, damn it!' Randy hollered. 'Uncle! Aunt and uncle and my cousin Louie! Lemme UP!'

'Okay,' agreed Davey. 'If you promise not to follow me.'

'Deal,' Randy said disgustedly. He got up and brushed grass off himself as Davey gathered his books together. 'Don't you wanna play monsters? I'll let you be the space hero this time.'

'Nope,' said Davey. 'Got something to do.'

'You gonna be at the game this afternoon?'

Davey's eyes lit up like twin candles. 'I will be there, my friend, I would suggest that *you* be there, too.' With that he took off again, leaving Randy to sit in the grass on a dusty fall afternoon and wonder.

Davey flew into the house, wolfed down the milk and cookies his mother had left for him, read her note. DAVEY: WOMEN'S CLUB MEETING TILL 5. SHOPPING TILL 9 OR 10. COLD CUTS IN THE FRIDGE. HOPE YOU DON'T MIND. LOVE MOM.

'Nah, Mom, I don't mind,' Davey told the note. *But how would you know if I did?*

He raced through the living room, taking time to note that the TV was on. Godzilla lumbered across the screen, laying Tokyo low.

'Wish I were you, pal,' Davey said

softly. He turned the set off and went to his room. Slopping his books on the bed, he opened the top drawer of his dresser. From it he took a roll of paper towels, a small plastic bag and a surgical scalpel, the professional kind. He'd swiped it from biology class at school. Davey didn't really like swiping things, but this was important.

Shutting the drawer, he took the items and went down to the basement, switching on the light at the top of the steps and tramping down them hard. Rotting wood splintered loudly. Davey laughed, thinking of casts and broken bones.

In the corner of the shadowy basement was a bulky top-opening freezer that Davey's dad had bought at a flea market. He'd brought it down, turned it on, and promptly forgotten about it (of course, he'd taken the handle and lock off to prevent the possibility of Davey climbing in and getting trapped).

Dad had forgotten a lot of things, Davey recalled, before he'd finally left the household for good. He'd forgotten things, said and done things that didn't make any sense. Davey had not fully understood what was happening, and his mother didn't talk about it much. His mother wasn't *there* much.

Davey walked to the table beside the freezer and put down the towels, plastic bag and scalpel. He tore one of the towels off the roll and laid it out. Then he opened the freezer.

There, down at the bottom, were two objects wrapped in white butcher's paper. Davey lifted out the larger, irregularly-shaped package and laid it on the table. Cutting the tape with the scapel, he drew aside the paper, lifted the contents out, and threw the paper aside.

The cat was cold and stiff. Davey thunked it experimentally. *This must have been a beauty when it was alive,* he thought. It was a Persian, white with gold-yellow markings. Its eyes were a stunning blue. *Lovely eyes,* Davey thought. *Such lovely eyes.*

He laid the cat face-up on the table and picked up the scalpel. He was an old hand at this by now. The first few times had been difficult, but this was his twelfth. He inserted the scalpel into the socket just above the cat's left eye, pushing in and back until he felt the edge of the blade grate against the stalk. One deft cut to the left brought the eye free. Davey laid it on the paper towel and repeated the procedure with the other eye.

The right was more difficult; he had to cut away a section of the eyelid that had frozen to the surface of the eye itself. When it was done, he took the body out the back door, hiked through the thick underbush to Gaines' Creek, and watched the current wash the body downstream, as he had done with eleven previous cats. He'd thought about the bodies backlogging or being discovered somewhere, but he'd spaced the work out over a period of weeks, and so far nothing had turned up in the papers or on TV. Besides, who would suspect a little kid?

Upon returning to the basement he took the smaller package out ot the freezer and unwrapped it. It was a canning jar, filled almost to the top with cat's eyes in formaldehyde solution (also courtesy of the biology lab). He unscrewed the lid, careful to avoid inhaling the fumes, and dropped the new eyes in. Recapping it, he went upstairs to clean the scalpel. After some consideration, he put the jar in the microwave on high for a few minutes to thaw the contents. This done, he drained the jar and put them in the plastic Ziploc bag. Pouring, his hand slipped on the wet glass of the jar. An eye tipped out, plopping into the sink. It slid down the drain before Davey could get a hand on it. He didn't relish the idea of sticking his hand down there and fishing for it. *What the hell,* he mused. *One isn't going to make that much difference.* He turned on the garbage grinder, waited for the sound to even out before shutting it off. No nasty surprises for Mother.

'Davey's eyes lit up like twin candles. 'I will be there, my friend, I would suggest that you be there, too"

He looked at the kitchen clock. Four-thirty, and time to get moving. Putting the bag in his pocket, he locked the front door and headed up the block for the game.

Davey smiled. Randy would be there, and maybe Ritchie, and Andrew, Sam, Charlie and Martin. And, of course, Tony. Tony was always there, always everywhere, strutting and bragging and bullying people like Davey. His Dad was rich, so Tony got the best of everything — and he never let anyone forget it. Most of the kids liked him despite his bragging, mainly because he had some really neat toys. His dad travelled and brought him toys from all over the world. He had a genuine Kabuki mask, a train set made in Germany, a little replica of a Buckingham Palace guard from the real Buckingham Palace, and a huge warrior robot from Japan. Davey like the robot best.

Davey's own dad had travelled quite a bit before he left, but he'd stayed in the States for the most part. He never brought Davey toys from anywhere.

Now Dad was gone for good. Davey hadn't discussed his absence with Mother, but as he grew older, the older neighborhood kids had let him in on a little secret that *their* parents had told *them*, and that was that dear old dad hadn't exactly gone away. Two big men in white coats had come and taken him away. Davey asked them where, and they told him places like 'the funny farm' and 'the loony bin'. Davey asked them why, and they told him Dad 'wasn't playing with a full deck', had 'gone off the deep end', had 'lost his marbles'.

Davey chuckled. He didn't doubt that it was true. Mother didn't know he suspected, and that was the way he wanted it to stay.

Lost his marbles.

Marbles! God, did Tony have marbles! A five-pound bag of the suckers, to be sure. He had regular American glass ones and steel ones from Japan; he had some with tiny flowers embedded in them from France, and he had some African ones that were solid ivory. An impressive collection. That was, of course, why Tony was always at the game — to bring his marbles and show them off. Davey had regular glass ones, just like all the other kids.

He'd left them at home today.

He could see the guys now, sitting cross-legged on the blacktop underneath the basketball goal, leaning over. Davey saw the back of Randy's head, and there was Martin, and Sam and Andrew.

Tony's voice came to Davey as he approached the group. Bragging as usual. Davey rounded the edge of the park, approaching from Tony's rear.

' — and the ivory ones always roll true,' Tony was saying. 'Ain't no better shootin' marble than ivory, believe it.'

'I gotcha beat Tony,' Davey said from behind him. His hand slipped into his coat pocket.

Tony squinted up. 'Sure, Davey. Beat it. We got a game to play.' Talking big, as usual.

'Take a look, big shot,' Davey chided, withdrawing the bag from

'Dad had forgotten a lot of things, Davey recalled, before he'd finally left the household for good'

his pocket. 'Check 'em out.'

Tony was still looking almost straight up over his left shoulder, into the late afternoon sun. His eyes moved from Davey's face to the bag he held.

'What's so special about those?' Tony challenged. Davey opened the bag.

'These', he announced in a stage whisper, 'are... ' he brought the bag lower, toward Tony's face.

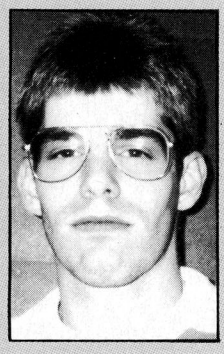
'Bona-fide... ' Lower.

'Genuine... ' he grabbed Tony's lower jaw and forced Tony's mouth open wider.

'Authentic... ' he tipped the bag.

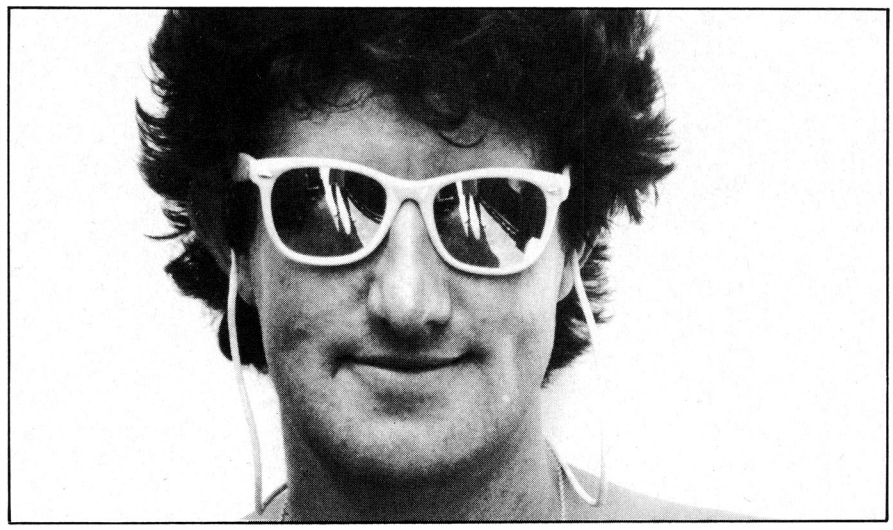
'Cat's eye marbles!' He upended the bag into Tony's mouth, dropped it and clamped both mouth and nose shut. Tony couldn't help but swallow... and swallow... and swallow.

Davey's high, musical laughter rose into the dusky autumn twilight, followed immediately by the sound of choked screams.



DAVID L DUGGINS' story of horrific gang violence, *Five Past Four*, was published in Issue 14 of **FEAR**. Here the author extends his gruesome descriptive powers with a new short story entitled *Kid's Game*. If you just ate lunch — beware. David L Duggins is currently serving with the US Forces.

FICTION FILE 8
STEPHEN HARRIS



Failed musician and full time van driver, Stephen Harris becomes a horror writer at night; and, as he tells FEAR's John Gilbert, his story of literary success is a weird one...

Failure in the music business gave Basingstoke-based Stephen Harris his big literary break: 'I started writing about seven years ago, though most of my late teens and twenties I was in a band — I played bass guitar. I started off playing in a heavy rock band at a time when nobody wanted to know about heavy rock. We were very popular on stage and very good off stage, and just couldn't get any record company interest.'

The band broke up, but Harris and fellow guitarist Ian Clifford discovered The Crusaders, a jazz/funk group of the late Forties and early Fifties. They decided to have a bash at the same combination: 'We got a band together, did a lot of recording, and took the tapes to EMI at exactly the same time that Malcolm Maclaren turned the Sex Pistols' stuff in. It was bad timing, and from then on you couldn't get a look in with that either.'

The band broke up... 'We formed another band which was also extremely good on stage, not quite so hot in the recording studio, but you couldn't get anybody interested. We packed up, and I thought: 'What can a talented chap like me do then? I'll write a book.'

Harris powered into his first book, called *Pressure Drop*, with a confidence born somewhat from naivety. 'I thought, I'm going to put this in a Jiffy bag and send it to somebody, and they're going to offer me millions of pounds for it. I got it turned down by everybody in the country — agencies and publishers alike.

Several agents have helped the paths of his manuscripts through the publishing houses, but Harris says that they can be a bane as well as a boon. 'The secret of getting *Adventureland* published was having some useful contacts. I spent a long time sending things dry to publishers, not knowing who was there and being nervous of phoning people up and saying: 'Who's your top guy who likes horror stories?'.

His expectations were dampened by the teach-yourself publishing books which many aspiring authors read while never getting through the first paragraph of their first novel. 'You read enough of that stuff and you start to believe it. When I met the people at Headline, I was completely taken aback that they were all so nice and reasonable, and that they weren't two-headed ogres, which is what you get from reading books about writing.

'I had an agent, and sent the book before *Adventureland* in to him, and he phoned me up and said: 'Come up and see me'. So I went there, got taken into a little office that was lined with hardback books that frightened me to death, and he said: 'I like this, this is really powerful stuff, I'd like to take it on'. He sent me a little leaflet of his terms, and he tried to find a publisher for me. He didn't have a great deal of success. I showed him *Adventureland* and he didn't like it at all. He said: 'I don't understand this, I don't like it, I don't want anything to do with it any more.'

'He showed me a list of names of the people he'd shown it to and they turned out to be as good as gold. One of them took *Adventureland*.'

Harris's future as a horror writer seems to be assured with *Wulf*, a horror novel with Biblical overtones, set in the countryside not far — as the crow flies — from the town house in which he lives with his father.

Adventureland, by Stephen Harris, is published this month in hardback by Headline, price £12.95. He is working on his second, commissioned, book, Wulf.

FEARWHEELING

IAN HUNTER

Listen.
Can you hear it?
Can you?
The rolling.
The turning.
The metal whisper of wheels spinning round and round.
The killer bike.
Just a folk-tale to wind up the tourists.
That's what you always thought.
Wanted to think.
Killer bike.
Just a story.
Listen.

◆◆◆◆◆

BRITS ON THE PISS.
That was their motto.
Their clarion call.
The theme music that accompanied the gulping down of lager and food, which was magically transformed into vomit and piss that they left where they liked. Gardens. Doorways. Rivers. Canals. Litterbins. Pavements. Wherever they wanted, which was usually next to the spot where they were standing, where their bodies dictated.

Brits on the piss who were pissed off.

'We should have hired bikes,' snarled Kevin, as they marched along the pavement towards the hotel, which was way off, almost two miles.

'No chance,' replied Malky, gripping a bottle of wine in his left hand. 'Who would ride in this fucking place? It's mental.'

'We could hire a car,' Bob suggested.

Kevin and Malky stopped and looked at him as if he was crazy.

'Can't afford it,' said Malky.

'I ain't got my license,' Kevin pointed out.

'I have,' said Bob. 'And you've got your Access.'

'No chance.'

'Do you want to do this every night?'

Kevin rubbed his back. Something seemed to throb under the skin, biting at his body. 'No.'

'Well then.'

It was tempting, but Kevin shook his head.

'Not me. Holland's full of fucking nutters. I wouldn't drive here.'

Bob gulped down some of the wine, then handed the bottle to Malky. He wiped his lips with the back of his hand. 'We could take it easy. Just remember to drive on the right, that's all there is to it.'

'I dunno,' Kevin muttered; but he was thinking about it. Thinking about the three mile walk back from the jazz festival for the next two nights. Thinking that if he got to bed at a decent hour he might get up in time to see breakfast, before starting on the beer and wine again.

Malky started walking, then turned to face his friends. 'Come on, I think I can smell the sea.'

Bob shrugged. 'Think about it, eh ?'
Kevin nodded. 'I will.'

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He did, and they ended up hiring a Ford Escort for the next three days. It felt like a furnace inside, but that didn't matter. They would only be using the car to get to the jazz festival, and it would be the small hours of the morning when they came out. They parked on the pavement, which was tough on the pedestrians who had a hard enough time dodging trams and cars and bikes. But those were the breaks, and Brits on the Piss played the game to suit themselves and no one else. That was the only rule of the game.

They went to the Congress centre and squeezed inside, where the sellers of food, drink, T-shirts and special commerative jewellery were displaying their wares. Ignoring them, they pushed their way through the confused hordes trying to find the various halls and stages where jazz was being performed. Finally they reached the Statenhal and camped on the floor. Wine materialised, along with loaves of thick brown bread. 'Good for crapping,' Kevin had remarked, back in the supermarket.

Bob fished out a plastic packet with cheese slices inside. Malky pulled at one end, then tried to tear the plastic with his teeth. He borrowed the knife that Bob had pinched from the railway station cafe; that did the trick. With slabs of bread and cheese in one hand and plastic cups in the other, they were now ready for the traditional toast.

'Brits on the piss!' Who glared at the bloody foreigners crowding in on them as the seconds ticked away.

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Herbie Hancock came on first, with some cool guy on sax and an even cooler nigger who could make the place jump just by moving two fingers on his electric bass.

'Herrrrbeeeee!' yelled Kevin, holding his can aloft, and ignoring the scowl of the woman in front who was jostled by his elbow.

It was hot in the hall and getting hotter. Two bottles of wine and four cans of beer were consumed, and they didn't need to piss; they were

sweating it away, saving the effort involved in pushing through to the bog and losing their spot on the floor. But then they weren't getting drunk.

Herbie did an encore, strutting around the stage with one of those portable keyboard jobs that looked like a guitar. Then the band were gone, sealed behind a curtain while some little Dutch git announced that the next band wouldn't be on for half an hour.

'What do we do now ?' Bob asked, wiping his forehead with his arm.

'Let's go outside,' suggested Kevin. 'There's a big guitar event in the garden pavilion.'

'Good idea,' agreed Malky, and he got to his feet, then dropped the empty plastic cup on the floor. He stomped on it, and grinned. 'Love that sound.'

Going outside was a better idea, even if the garden pavilion took up most of the space that the food and drink sellers didn't occupy. They bought something advertised as satay which consisted of three sticks of pork on a plate and some brown sludge that looked like shit, and tasted as if it had been ejected from a volcano. They finished the last of their beer and were forced to go and buy some that was overpriced and topped with a good head of foam.

'Bloody rip-off,' said Bob, staring into his glass.

Daylight slipped away, taking the edge off the heat. The three of them ventured into the huge marquee and watched James Blood Ulmer strut around on stage with a cape that made him look like a black Dracula.

'Blacula,' tittered Bob, and stared at the cool beer in his hand. Orangebaum, it was called, or something like it, and it was good stuff. He could feel a warm hand close around his thoughts.

Ulmer launched into a screeching guitar piece that sounded like everything in the world was falling apart, then his drummer thundered into a solo, pounding on the skins while shouting 'I'm gonna get you, babe!' at the top of his voice.

'Loada shit,' slurred Kevin. 'C'mon.'

He led the way back into the centre and into the bowels of the building where a Cajun band had their audience jumping up and down like rabid marionettes. Malky joined in, grinning at a brunette in a dazzling green outfit.

'I'm knackered,' he told his friends a while later.

'More beer?' asked Bob, digging into his pocket for guilders.

Kevin looked at him. 'You're driving.'

'I'm okay, I'm sweating beer.'

Malky unfolded his programme. 'There's nothing else I want to see today. What about you guys?'

'Nothing.'

'Let's head back,' suggested Bob. 'Have an early night.'

'Sure,' laughed Malky. It was almost three in the morning.

Bob stopped at a vendor outside and bought half a dozen cans of Heineken. 'For the hotel,' he announced.

The car was still there, they noted with relief. No parking ticket. No broken windows. Bob slipped behind the steering wheel and stared at his hands. 'Anyone remember how to drive?'

'Just wake me up when we get to the hotel,' replied Malky from the back.

Bob drove carefully, even declining a sip from the can that Kevin opened. He stopped at a red light. Someone honked their horn.

'What the fuck's up with him?' he asked, glaring into the mirror.

'The look of horror on the young man's face was illuminated perfectly by the headlights'

'You can still turn right,' Kevin explained. 'Even if the light is at red.'

'Bloody stupid rule,' Bob hissed, crunching the gears. He drove around the corner, and a big BMW eased up alongside him. The tanned, moustached driver looked over and flicked up his middle finger, then sped away.

Bob's blood began to boil, sweat poured out of his skin and turned to steam. 'Bastard!' he snapped and put his foot down. The BMW turned right at the next set of lights.

'Let him go,' Kevin cautioned. 'You'll never catch him.'

'Wanna bet?'

They turned right. Almost.

Kevin gripped his seat. 'Shit! We're on the wrong side of the road!' he shouted, his voice high with alarm, his feet pressing imaginery brakes.

Malky leaned forwards. 'You better get over.'

Bob tightened his grip on the steering wheel. 'I'm staying here until I pass him.'

Kevin reached over, Bob batted his hand away.

'Pull over,' Malky insisted.

'I'm staying here.'

Malky looked ahead. The BMW was moving away effortlessly, as if floating. 'Give it up, you'll never catch him.'

Bob grinned. 'Relax, the streets are empty.'

Famous last words, thought Kevin, but he never got the chance to say so.

The bike appeared in the road, too fast, yet slow enough for him to remember every detail. The look of horror on the young man's face was illuminated perfectly by the headlights. The way the rider flung up his arms as if they would miraculously ward off the car. The thud, then crunching noises of flesh and bone and metal breaking. The way they jumped up and down on their seats, like rodeo riders, heads hitting the roof of the car.

They stopped. Malky looked out of the back window at the thing that was half-man, half-metal. There seemed to be blood everywhere. He told himself it was just the glow of the brake lights. But his eyes knew that that was a lie. He turned, mouth hanging open.

'You killed him,' said Kevin. 'You stupid bastard.'

Bob was looking at his hands, thinking they would never open. He would go to prison with a steering wheel in his hands and everyone would know his crime just by looking at him. The road ahead was empty, his opponent gone.

'It was that guy in the BMW,' he bleated. 'He made me do it.'

Kevin grabbed his arm, digging deep with his fingers. 'Tell that to the judge, you dumb fuck.'

Bob looked in the mirror. He could just see part of a twisted wheel. 'Maybe he's still alive.'

'No way,' Malky said bluntly.

'What are we going to do ?'

'Drive,' replied Kevin.

'What ?'

'You heard me. Drive. Get back to the hotel.'

Bob shook his head. 'We should go to the police.'

'No,' said Malky. 'We'd be arrest-

ed for sure. We were on the wrong side of the road, and we've been drinking.'

Bob sucked in some air. 'They'll be looking for the car.'

'We'll keep it a few more days,' Malky suggested. 'We can drop it off in Amsterdam before we get our flight home.'

'We can't,' Bob said quietly.

'Let's argue about this later,' Kevin snapped. 'We better move on.'

Bob licked his lips. 'I don't think I can.'

Malky squeezed his shoulder. 'Sure you can. We're Brits on the piss, remember?'

And look where it's got us, Bob thought, keeping his eyes locked on the road — not on the mirror, not on the reflection of the thing he had created.

The front right tyre was flat by the time they got back to the hotel. Kevin squatted down on the pavement and looked under the car.

'See anything?'

'Nothing.'

'What about clothing?'

'Christ,' said Bob, shuddering.

Malky handed him the remains of the six-pack. 'You go in Bob. Try and get some sleep.'

Sleep? The word sat like a slimy lump in Bob's head. What did it mean? What did anything mean when you'd just pulped some poor sucker into the tarmac? Some poor guy who was probably on the way back from his girlfriend's house.

'Bob?'

He looked up and rubbed his eyes, certain he had seen blood on the flat tyre. The rubber seemed to be oozing blood. Imagination is a killer, he thought. Like you, the night echoed.

He swallowed and turned away.

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'Good concert, yes?' enquired the hotel proprietor as he placed boiled eggs in front of them.

'Great,' nodded Kevin.

'Good.'

'Thanks,' said Malky as a glass of orange juice appeared next to his egg.

'Please,' replied the hotelier.

'Why does he always say that?' asked Malky, when the man had retreated to the kitchen.

'Maybe he means that he's pleased to do it,' guessed Kevin.

'What do you think, Bob?'

Bob stared at the plate of cheese slices, ham and salami. 'I think I might throw up.'

'No you won't.'

A bitter smile spread across Bob's face. 'Why not, isn't that what Brits on the piss do ?'

'Stop feeling sorry for yourself,' Kevin said angrily. 'It was an accident.'

Bob stared at the boiled egg, afraid to touch it, afraid of the sound of the shell breaking, not wanting to see the little jagged fragments fall onto his plate.

'I killed a kid.'

Kevin glanced around the dining room. A black couple sat in the corner beside the window. He could see the killer car out in the street. 'Keep it down, huh?'

'Maybe I should go to the police,' Bob said to no one in particular. 'Maybe they'll treat me more favourably if I turn myself in.'

Malky pointed his knife at him, there was butter on the tip. 'No, you won't, Bob, because you'll fuck up our lives too. We talked it over last night when we were changing the tyre and decided it would be best to drop the car in Amsterdam before we catch our flight. Who knows, we might be able to return it at the airport.'

'That might not be a good idea,' said Kevin.

Malky shrugged. 'Whatever. The important thing is to plan this event through. If it works, we get off. If it doesn't, we go to prison, but we're not going to help the police by popping into their station.'

'Okay ?' said Kevin.

Bob nodded.

'Good,' smiled Malky, slapping his hands together. 'We'll finish breakfast and organise some food and drink for the festival.'

'You're kidding,' said Bob. 'How can we go and see jazz?'

'Because I paid over a hundred quid for the ticket,' Malky stated, lifting his glass. 'We're on holiday. Brits on the piss.'

And he downed the juice in one.

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Kevin knew exactly where he was going to buy the food and drink. There was a little supermarket on the corner of the main street with a beautiful blonde at the bread counter. 'Have a nice time at the jazz festival,' she had said to him the day before when he bought some apple turnovers and things which they had christened rock cakes. Hopefully she would be there today and maybe he could take her along, buy her a day ticket, and find a quiet spot in one of the halls or out on the grass. But first.

Money.

He was sure he had seen an AMRO bank further down the road, opposite the post office. He had enough cash to buy the eats, but that was all, and although there was a bureau de change at the festival he was certain the little booth was rip-off city, with poorer rates and higher commission. The bank was the best bet.

If he could find it.

He stopped at an intersection and read the street signs. He didn't recognise any of them. Shit. Malky should have been doing this. He was the expert, the one who liked to take charge, reinforcing his command with a map and a phrasebook. Kevin shook his head. No, it was his turn. Malky had bought most of the goodies yesterday, and it was better he stayed with Bob. They were talking about going to the nudist beach and doing some leering. Kevin almost scratched his head. Struck out again, still — the sight of some naked flesh might disperse the cloud of gloom that hovered around Bob's head. He sneezed. Bloody hay fever. Ah, well, there were worse things in life, he supposed. Like being crushed between a car and a hard place.

'He looked up at the driver's face and saw the jolting mask of surprise that had galvanised his features'

He shuddered. Crunching noises echoed in his ears. He closed his eyes and saw that white face rearing up out of nowhere like a surprised ghost.

God it was hot. The tram lines stretched on forever, disappearing in rippling waves of heat. Grass grew between them, lending the scene a forgotten, desolate air.

'Better find this bank,' Kevin said out loud, and started walking.

He came to a large crossroads, a meeting place for trams and cars and bikes. The surrounding build-

ings were large, white, with glass filling in the spaces. Offices, he supposed. Definitely not shops. Sweat trickled down his nose. The tram tracks stretched into infinity, blurring into the weeds. He thought of lines left by the space gods in remote South American jungles.

'Where the hell am I?' he asked out loud.

Malky had the map. At this rate he could wander on and on, away from the shops. A glance at his watch confirmed that time was running out, they would have to get to the Congress centre and queue at the doors to get a good spot at the Chaka Khan concert.

A tram appeared, rippling like a genie. He looked for a stop. It had to be going somewhere. Maybe if he got on board and tried to spot some familiar landmark. He started running, then gave that up as a bad idea. The hay fever was snatching at his breath.

Ding! Ding!

He almost jumped out of his skin. It sounded as though the tram was right behind him. He'd never catch it at this rate. Hot dust swirled in his lungs.

Ding! Ding!

The tram was almost on top of him, he stumbled to the side and turned round.

The tram was close, but the bike was closer, heading straight for him. Splashes of red on the wheels. No one in the saddle. *It can't be,* he thought, as he stood frozen in the bike lane. But it was, and it was going to run him down.

Without thinking, he dived to the side and heard the real bell of the tram ringing, then it was lost in the whine of brakes. He looked up at the driver's face and saw the jolting mask of surprise that had galvanised his features.

Like me last night, Kevin thought, as the tram slammed into his body and dragged his torn form several yards.

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'Where is he ?' snarled Malky, staring at his watch. He looked at the clock on the tower across the road in the hope that he had the wrong time. He hadn't. The doors would be opening in seconds.

'What are we going to do?' said Bob, edging forward as more people joined the mess that passed for a queue. He couldn't believe the way that people just shoved their way to the front, past others who had been waiting for hours.

'Let's go in,' Malky said simply.

Bob shook his head. 'We can't do that, he'll never find us.'

'Sure he will, he knows what concert we're going to.'

'But it's a big hall.'

'Well, stuff it, I'm not his keeper.'

'We can't just leave him,' Bob insisted. 'He's got the food.'

Malky sighed. This heat was murder. It was bad enough that Kevin was late, but the bastard had all the beers. 'Look, I'll wait outside for him.'

'I'll stay too.'

'No, you go in. Find a good spot and spread out. We'll be in as quick as we can.'

Bob nodded, then grabbed hold of Malky before he could depart. 'You don't think this has anything to do with last night?'

'Course not. He's just had trouble at the bank. Maybe the supermarket's closed on a Friday. Who knows?'

'Yeah, that's it,' said Bob, letting his hand drop.

Malky slipped through the crowd and headed across the road that led down to the underground car park. *Asshole,* he thought. Bob's actions might cost them dearly, and he had no intention of spending a few years in a Dutch prison. For now he would play it straight, but as soon as they got back to England he would cut Bob loose. It would be a sorry day if he ever bumped into him again.

He stopped at one of the vans and got himself an ice-cream. A large pond of water stretched out in front of him with ornamental fountains dotted across it. Carefully, he stepped over a knee-high metal fence then over the legs of people lying in the sun. He slipped off his trainers, but had second thoughts about having a paddle. The water looked dark and oily, pieces of paper floated on top like flattened birds.

This is the life, he thought. Slow and easy. The world seemed to move at a different pace over here, or maybe that was just the facade that the tourist saw. Still, it would be nice to be on holiday every day of the year.

The shock of ice-cream dripping onto his legs shattered the daydream. Better move, he decided, or he would end up sleeping here and miss Kevin altogether.

Ding! Ding!

He had to smile. Bloody cyclists. They were like drunken tightrope walkers the way they careered about. Fearless, or just stupid.

Or unlucky, eh, Malky? Like that poor sap last night.

His hand closed, cracking the cone between his fingers. They felt cold for a second or two, then only sticky. He threw the remains of the ice-cream into the pond. A bird swooped hopefully.

Ding! Ding!

He squinted down the street, in the direction that Kevin would come from. The pavement was full of people, ants marching to the jazz picnic table.

Ding! Ding!

The sea of ants parted, letting something through, something that was travelling at a fair rate of knots.

Ding! Ding!

Malky laughed, standing on his toes to get a better look, but he couldn't see anything. It must be a midget in a hurry, he thought. The bike lane wasn't good enough for this guy. Well, there was no way he was going to move.

The people nearest to him skipped back and Malky could see, but couldn't believe, what was coming towards him.

A bike.

Without a rider.

Malky's eyes narrowed, taking in every detail as the bike raced closer.

The splashes of blood.

The bent saddle.

The way the bike looked as if it had been twisted out of shape, and then twisted back into something like its former glory, a goal which had not quite been reached.

And he knew he had seen that bike before, bathed in blood and the glow of brake lights.

He jumped back. His foot came down between the spikes of the little fence and his leg turned and gave way with a crack.

He fell backwards, the sound of spinning wheels ghosting through his ears.

The spikes punched through his back in a neat, straight line, leaving jagged, uneven holes. He looked down at his chest, and at the red stain that was spreading across his British bulldog T-shirt. A point appeared, something quivered on the end of it, and Malky wondered dimly if his heart was

still beating.

But then again, it couldn't be, not when he was dead.

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Bob worried for hours about them, taking no enjoyment from Chaka Khan, or the Blues Brothers Band, not even the mighty Mike Brecker on sax, or the mightier Mike Stern on guitar. Then Miles Davis was on, and the buzz of expectation carried his doubts away. He eased closer to the stage, past a guy who had to be German. Blond hair, moustache... It was a stick-on, and the Nazi wasn't pleased. Bob spent the next half hour in a slow race with him. Feet edging forward inch by inch. Elbow moving in front of an arm, then the whole body followed through. The trouble was that they weren't the only people with that idea. Everyone wanted to get close to Miles.

Two girls fainted and were carried out. The air began to boil and thin out. Some serious shit was lit up and passed around. Those with cameras began to get a wild, crazy look in their eyes, desperate for a good spot to snap and snap and snap. Five people sat on the floor, stubbornly refusing to get up, despite the comments and feet that were aimed in their direction. Bob looked round. Three mangiants were eyeing up that spot, knowing that when the five stood up there would be some space around them for a second or two.

Shit, thought Bob. If those seven foot fuckers moved in front of him, he wouldn't see a thing. He licked his lips, a plan forming in his mind. When they move, I move, he decided. They move forward, I move left, and occupy the space they've just vacated.

And that's what he did. His own ingenuity surprised him.

Then Miles appeared and the knot of bodies squeezed tighter. Bob lifted up his pocket camera to take a picture and some people moved closer, filling the space where his arms had been. This is crazy, he thought. Just take a few pictures and get out, up to the back of the hall for a nice, cool beer. But the music was too good to abandon. Miles stalked the stage like a panther in search of the perfect note, and Bob hoped he was getting some great pictures.

Only the girl on his right kept asking the little Spanish git on his left for cigarettes and beer, and these items kept appearing in front of his camera lens.

'For fuck's sake,' Bob groaned, glaring at the girl. She muttered something in reply, and before Bob knew it his elbow was on fire.

The Spaniard grinned at him, turning the cigarette in his fingers.

He burned you, Bob's mind told him in disbelief. *The little bastard burned you.*

That was it, he decided. Time for a beer.

Not surprisingly, the bars were empty. He gulped down his beer and ordered another, then walked to the front of the hall, past the side of the stage and then behind it. Stout security guards eyed him suspiciously. He sat down with his back to the wall and sipped at his beer. There were thousands of people in front of him. Thousands. All hypnotised by the happenings on stage. And he felt shattered.

I'm getting too old for this, he thought, holding the cool glass to his forehead. He wondered where the others were. Probably in here somewhere. He could wander around all night and never find them.

Tomorrow they would head for Amsterdam. By car. He would have to drive, and he didn't know if he could handle that. Even the thought of it made his palms feel sweaty. You'll be okay, he said to himself, and nodded. Fat chance. One of the others could drive. They wouldn't have an accident. Not like him.

He finished the beer and went to get another. Miles was finished too, the band filtered away while the music kept playing. Only the hardware was left on stage. The crowd roared. Clapped. Stomped. Chanted. Miles would not be moved. The lights came up. The festival was over.

Bob had one for the road. And why not? There was no point in joining the rest of the lemmings who were shuffling out of the hall. Imagine if there was a fire in here, he thought. He took his time with the beer, watching the clean-up staff move back and forth across the hall, sweeping up piles of cans and splinters of plastic cups.

On the way out he considered buying a souvenir programme, but the salespoint was beseiged by people intent on having a last minute memento of their visit.

He walked out into the night, pausing only to buy a hot dog and a Coke. It was still hot, despite the darkness. The crowds surrounded him for a while, then people fell away, heading off in other directions.

He walked on, vaguely aware of the man across the street. A drunk, he hoped. Not an addict, not a nutter. A swarthy man wearing a dark jacket and walking at a tilt, leaning into the air in front of him and muttering.

Bob couldn't understand a single word, but the stranger didn't sound happy.

Don't run, he told himself. It was better not to attract attention. Just walk a bit faster, put some distance between you and run when you get to the next corner. He lengthened his stride. The man continued to mutter, spitting out angry words.

'*Asshole,* he thought. Bob's actions might cost them dearly, and he had no intention of spending a few years in a Dutch prison'

Bob reached the corner. The street was deserted. The windows dark. The shutters pulled down. Even the late night cafes were closed.

And the muttering continued.

Bob began to run, then slowed to a jog. Heartburn flared in his chest. He stopped at an alleyway, convinced he had seen something.

A man who had stepped back into the shadows. *Bloody Jack the Ripper,* he thought, but couldn't raise a smile. He marched forward, daring himself to stare down the alley. There was nothing there.

Was there?

He blinked, wondering if he had seen three men running towards him. Three angry men. Malky, Kevin and...

Someone bloody.

Someone dragging a leg.

The bike rider.

'Oh Jesus,' he moaned, and rubbed his eyes. Tiredness stabbed him in a million places.

He heard a cry, and turned.

The drunk was shouting, waving his arms, punching at phantoms. His eyes locked with Bob's.

The drunk started to run.

Bob ran, swallowing the acid that splashed up in his gullet. Running, and trying to ignore the stitch in his side and the way his lungs ached.

The drunk was gaining.

The drunk was right behind him.

Bob panted, knowing he would have to stop or drop, knowing he was about to wrestle with a man possessed.

Then he saw it.

A bike. Leaning against a wall. Without a security chain to render it useless.

He grabbed the handlebars, and mounted. His heart was in his mouth for a few seconds as the bike weaved from side to side, then steadied. He started pumping.

The drunk howled behind him.

Bob grinned, and looked over his shoulder, before deciding that the old victory sign would be appropriate.

But he couldn't let go of the handlebars.

He tugged at the bike, knowing he was sweating, knowing his hands should just slip off. But they didn't seem to know it.

His fingers stretched for the brakes.

The bike didn't even slow down.

He looked at his fingers, thinking that some trick of the light was making them darker. Something black and sticky was seeping between them, giving off a smell he would have recognised anywhere.

Blood.

He stopped pedalling, or tried to, but the pedals kept turning. He couldn't even take his feet off them.

And they were going faster.

Faster.

Stealing his energy.

Taking him past the houses and into the night.

Screaming all the way.

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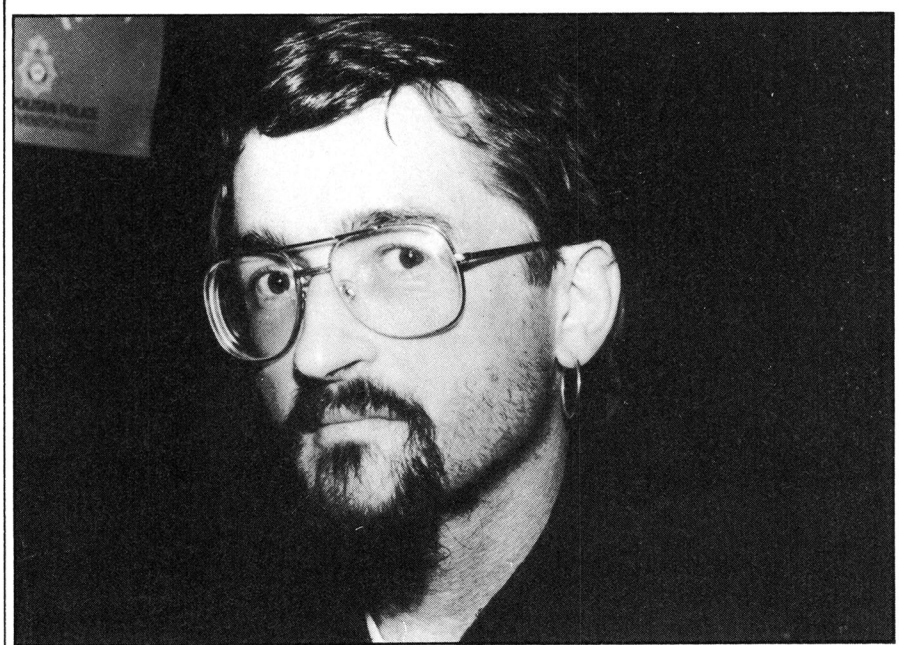
Listen...

IAN HUNTER lives in Scotland. He has written five fantasy novels for children and a Highland horror novel called *The Tearing*, all of which are currently homeless. This doesn't stop him juggling several works-in-progress, and he's trying hard not to drop the piece inspired by H P Lovecraft, for obvious reasons.

FICTION FILE 9

COLIN GREENLAND



Author Colin Greenland talks to Liz Holliday about reclaiming space opera for the written word.

'I wanted to write a big book, a plentiful book, and it seemed to me that space opera was a plentiful form,' says Colin Greenland of his recently published SF epic *Take Back Plenty*. 'It's big already, and it's expansive. Your plot always starts little and gets bigger as it moves out from the centre, just the way Doc Smith and Van Vogt did it. There is room to create a big, various, pluralistic sort of world.'

Tabitha Jute, captain of the space barge Alice Liddel, is propelled through a plot of increasingly surreal complexity, never quite understanding, constantly lied to and misdirected, but never giving in to the chaos around her. The key, of course, is in the name: Alice. 'Tolkien's fine, but for me he's not very interesting as a role model. Lewis Carroll had a far greater grasp of what the world's actually like. Certainly I sympathise with a lot of the things in the Alice books and find myself going through the same shapes in my fiction.'

It is a phantasmagoria, a whirlwind trip through all the worlds the old pulp magazines ever imagined — but made in Greenland's own image. There are archetypes here, but no clichés: 'Mars and Venus belong to us. We know perfectly well that there are no canals on Mars, and that there's jungle on Venus. We have this deep in our bones, and any number of satellite surveys or manned landings are not going to change that.

'That's another part of our impoverishment: that people have relegated space fiction to the scientific. I wanted to write a colourful, rich sort of book, in which you cannot grasp a fraction of the data that is offered to you. It seems to me that that's something space opera always did. It always had incredible machines, fantastic vistas.

'I thought, I want some of that back. I want Mars back. I want Venus back. I've seen the arguments, and I'm not convinced by them. I do not see why we can't have Mars! It's in our culture. It's wonderful, it's rich, it's strong. Why should we turn our backs on it when it's not out there, it's in here?'

Not surprisingly, the book reads a lot like a movie: 'Traditionally, space opera in words has not been very good. Recent developments in film have filled out what space opera really should have been. I owe much to their imagery: that first sequence in *Star Wars*, where you're sitting looking at the planet, and there's this thing coming over your head forever, and it's exhilarating and also a bit scary. And the cantina scene — all that stuff. That you can, say, have this alien spaceship, but the people who live inside it make it crummy. *Dark Star* is another one, particularly. All that puts a human face on space opera, while getting the scale and the excitement and the adventure and the violence.

'It seemed to me that cinema had not exactly stolen from us, but that we'd rather given up on the space opera, as if we'd let them do it, and I didn't see why we couldn't do it. So I thought I would have a go.'

***Take Back Plenty* is a fat book. Surely Greenland has said all he has to say about space, at least for a while? 'I think I want to write another space book. It won't be set in the universe I've created here, but there'll be points of similarity. I'd like to do a sort of story set in a space opera universe, rather than writing a space opera. One of the things about writing a plentiful book is that you generate plots. There's so much *space*.'**

BAD METAL

BRIAN COOPER

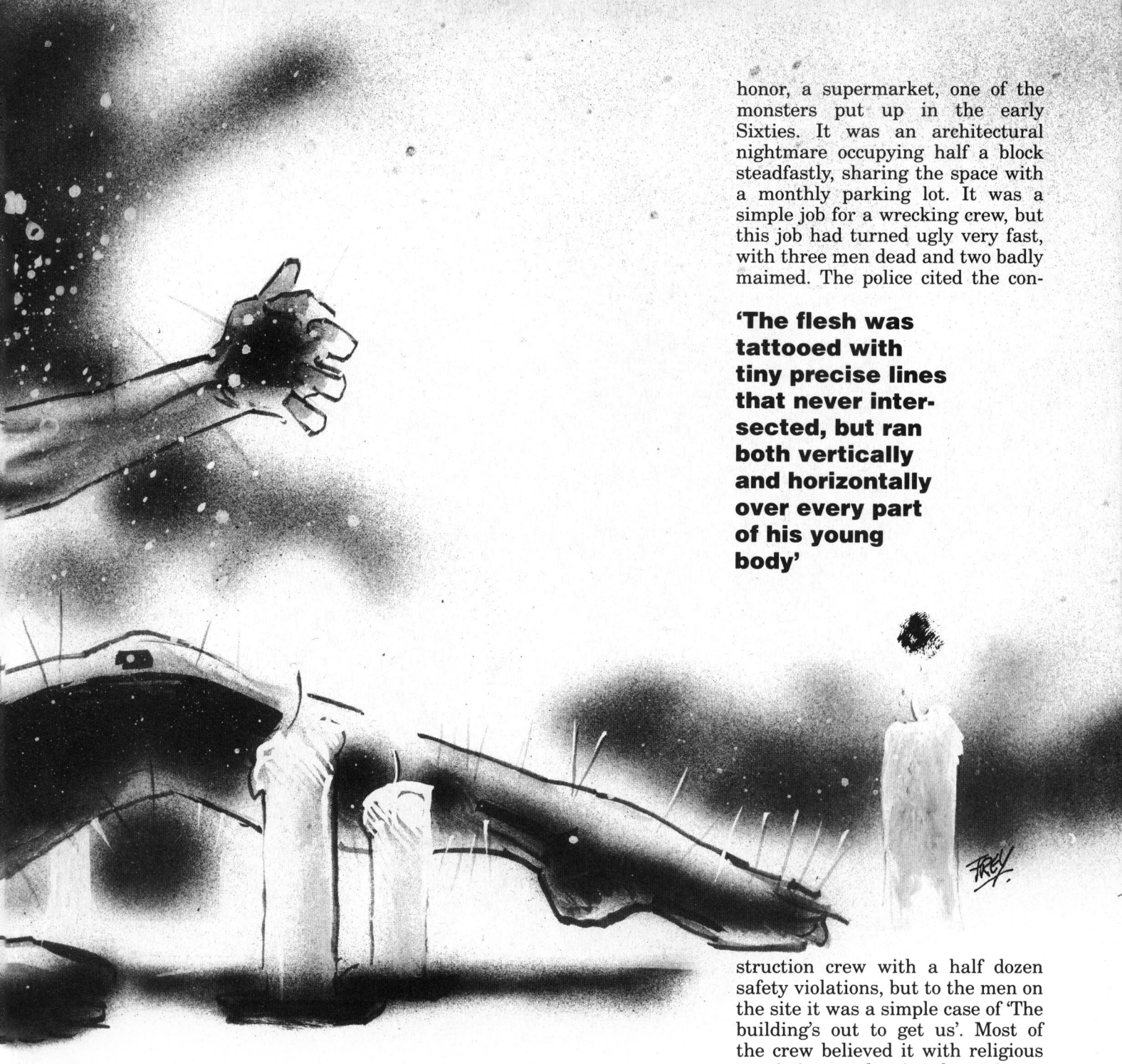
He sat on the hardwood floor, the lights turned off except for a neon sign on the wall that said 'Fear'. Candles illuminated the room, dripping hot wax over hundreds of old pop cans. The candles were for his dramatic sense. The needles lay in front of him. They were for real.

His bare back hunched forward, muscles straining against his skin. The flesh was tattooed with tiny precise lines that never intersected, but ran both vertically and horizontally over every part of his young body. The only skin that remained unmarked was that on the front of his neck and his face. The face was so smooth and hairless that people on the street often mistook him at a glance for a girl, and he did little to inform them otherwise. Women were attracted to his girlish features, and it was not uncommon to see him anointed with eyeliner and lipstick. The women he liked, however, weren't the type that fawned over his heavy metal, rock star looks. He liked the type of woman who demanded and took him: women of rough trade.

His name was David. He was an alchemist, but his interests weren't in turning lead to gold or forging invincible weapons. David's need was a wellspring of a far more infinite power. He sought, instead, pain, humiliation and sexual gratification. In such worlds he explored with confidence, jaded deeply enough to resist any surprise that might spring from them. In their pursuit he was as devout as a monk, fanatical as any zealot.

David lifted the first needle and raised the cruel quicksilver dart before his left eye. The point glinted with candlelight and neon fire in coloured streaks that slid languidly from its tip. The needle was sharp and thin, twelve inches of high grade tool steel handforged to David's specifications. The end had no guard: it could be pulled all the way through.

He placed his hand palm down,



fingers spread, against the floor. Turning the needle down he forced the point through the skin between the thumb and first finger. His features remained smooth, but star points of sweat broke out on his forehead. He raised his hand and pushed the needle, stretching and breaking the skin on the other side. The pain was constant. David knew that the Bad Metal demanded his agony. He took another shaft from those now laid out in front of him and spread his toes for the kiss. Again he lowered the tip, piercing the skin just between the first and second metatarsals. The pain increased with a steady throbbing in sync with his heart. The inevitable headache began and his ears hummed. The tattoo lines began to glow softly, as though illuminated from the inside at his ankle and wrist, pale steel blue like a straight razor's edge.

The pain and the metal had to be in harmony, building evenly to a crescendo dictated by his tolerance, so David began to twist the needles, hanging twin lead weights from the rings in his pierced nipples. He forced two shafts through his penis head and hung another weight from the ring embedded in his scrotum. Far from crescendo — many more needles to go. The tattoo glow crept around his body, slowly growing brighter.

Three blocks away, demolitions were happening. The guest of honor, a supermarket, one of the monsters put up in the early Sixties. It was an architectural nightmare occupying half a block steadfastly, sharing the space with a monthly parking lot. It was a simple job for a wrecking crew, but this job had turned ugly very fast, with three men dead and two badly maimed. The police cited the construction crew with a half dozen safety violations, but to the men on the site it was a simple case of 'The building's out to get us'. Most of the crew believed it with religious conviction, and pointed out in an unflappable way that the unbelievers were dead.

'The flesh was tattooed with tiny precise lines that never intersected, but ran both vertically and horizontally over every part of his young body'

Lunch break with the crew was an animated discussion dealing with the myriad ways of death, the horrible accidents they'd witnessed on other sites, and sex. John Petrakos never joined the twisted talks the others relished. John Petrakos was a self-proclaimed Badass and excessive alcoholic. He occupied his lunch break drinking silently behind the dozer. Today he was staring at an old man across the street, who had shown up every day since the work first started. He wore soiled army dress pants, canvas tennis shoes, an old blue T-shirt and a dirty, rumpled, London Fog dress coat. Sticking

out above this pile of rags was a paper-fleshed skull shrivelled beyond age. He never moved from his station in the doorframe of a derelict storefront. Judging by the pile of newspapers in the doorway, the old man must have lived there.

John had seen the type before; old forgotten men with nothing better to do and a few waning years to do it in. Old men were attracted to demolition sites. They would stand a safe distance away and mutter to themselves or with other street slime about a broad range of crap, usually about the past, when they had identities. They would grunt, spit or cough every time the ball made a good hit, an absurd kind of acknowledgement. John hated them. All the fucked-up street trash he had to tolerate in this job. He was dead certain that if he left for five minutes they would sneak in at night, start fires, shit on the ground, and steal anything they could load into a shopping cart. He'd caught two old bastards already. John was the watchman, this was his site, and where he parked his trailer he was fucking king!

He scowled at the man across the street, and the old man met his gaze with two cataract-blocked orbs of his own. Throwing down

'Turning the needle down he forced the point through the skin between the thumb and first finger'

the gauntlet, it seemed to John. He dribbled out words between pulls on his bottle. 'You're next, old man.'

John grew angrier as the staring match went on: 'I'll do you like I did your slimeball buddies!' He stopped himself when he realised he was starting to yell. 'Great,' he thought, 'Tell the whole fucking world, you asshole.' He looked around to make sure no one was watching, picked up a rock and threw it over the safety fence as hard as he could. It caught the old man on the temple, and he staggered backward, his body slamming hard into the door then slipping to its knees. Blood ran from the cut, spilling over his cheek and into his toothless mouth. John grinned — 'Right in the fucking face!'

The old man raised his head very slowly. Though the blood flowed freely, a broad black grin spread over his face, and stopped John's self-congratulations cold — dead cold. The old man stood up very slowly, as if each bone was being pulled back together under his grinning old skull. For John the world tilted a little. Fear tickled his gut. The old man squared his shoulders and started across the street. This wasn't right, John told himself: 'I'm the fucking watchman. They're supposed to run'. He looked around to see if a weapon was handy, and when he looked back the old man was at the safety fence.

'This is our fucking city. You don't go killing nobody down here.' The deep brown voice resonated with younger days of strength and confidence. Under the voice somewhere was the kind of tone found in dark places where lunatics like to scream. 'Old Gustav was the King of a country. Who the hell are you to touch him?'

John's mind was in a panic fire. 'The shithead knows! He fucking knows!' The black raisin face opened again: 'The rat eater told me stories about his days as a writer. He was big in the old pulp days. Glorious mind leaking out that ear. He deserved better than the bottom of a gravel pit'. John found his last ounce of bravado and fired it at the bloody black skull on the other side of the fence: 'You're next, old man!'

The old man raised the stump of his left hand to his temple. He stopped grinning, said seriously: 'I paid for you, John Petrakos. It cost me my hand, took it clean off. It's mean, John. Meaner than anything you can imagine, and I raised it myself just for assholes like you. You just wait for it, John. It took my hand clean off, didn't even know it happened. You're a fucking dead man, John'.

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David was a glowing mass of light in the barren apartment. The blood on the floorboards threw back the crawling radiance with a dark liquid shine like a city street after rain. David had pierced his flesh seventy times in the past two hours, and the needles hung from every loose fold of skin he had — arms, legs, back, ears, nose, groin. The Bad Metal in the shafts was awake and the power was at a peak. His nerves were alive with Bad Metal, and now he fought to contain it. This had been a most satisfying session. Orgasm after shocking orgasm had rocked his body, and even now his erection raged for more. He liked it when the brothers gave him big assignments. He enjoyed exploring these new heights of sexual pleasure slightly more than he did the release. The fraternity and their offerings to him were nothing compared to this pleasure.

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Eight years back, David walked the rails that ran behind the high school in that squalid suburban neighborhood north of the city. David walked the rails every chance he got. Often he'd sneak out of the house. Late at night was best; you could almost see the ghosts of the people who had died under churning wheels. He could imagine them forever walking between the iron. He would smoke cigarettes, drink Coke, and dream. There was plenty to see. On his left, as he walked north, the twisted suburban tumor where his house lay. On his right, the ugly trailer park jungles full of white trash and cruel second-generation Mexicans. He hated going to school with the mindless spawn of both camps. To them, geeks like him didn't fit. At first, David walked the twin lines thinking they represented escape to someplace better, but he discovered that wasn't true at all.

The first revelation came as David walked the rails one night in the late summer. Up ahead he could see motion low to the ground. As he approached, he saw the back haunch of a cat, torn off just below the ribcage. Blood and organs spread out on down the line. Shiny black and pale white. About ten feet further up, lying on the gravel, was the top half of the cat. It licked the wound where the rest of its body used to be. It looked at David, dull-eyed, and hissed, then returned to the useless repairs. David walked on in shock, his mind balking at the sight of death dealt so decisively, so quickly, the animal wasn't even aware it was dead.

The evidence of power was everywhere he looked. Sand made so hot

by passing wheels it became paper-thin green glass. Coins flattened and stretched beyond recognition, thousands of bones partially ground, oil-covered feathers, clumps of fur like in a witch's larder. A vicious sociopathic monolith stalked the steel lands. Deep inside, David twisted the slightest bit.

Three weeks after the first revelation came the second, in the shape of an old man sitting at the side of the rails, wearing an old trench coat and smoking a clay Churchwarden pipe. The stem was broken off close to the bowl. He didn't turn to look at David, but stared intently at a point ahead of him somewhere. He was the dirtiest man David had ever seen. 'Been waiting for ya.'

David stopped, looked closer, 'Huh?'

'Been sitting here damn near a week. Heard you were the new switchman. Got a job waiting down the line.' The old man tamped down his pipe, looking up at David. 'You look mean enough for it.'

David smiled, 'Wrong guy'. The old man laughed till he broke out in a cough. 'You like pain, don't ya? Jerk off a lot, huh? Never had a real girl before, have you? Dream a lot about the Boss bitches whipping your ass, squeezing your balls. All that leather shit. Boy, I know you. Bad Metal's been talkin'.'

'You fucking crazy dude.' Fear cracking in David's voice. The old man leapt to his feet. He grabbed David by the hair and swung him around till he hit the tracks hard. He jumped on David's back, pinning his arms so David's face rested on steel. The old man spat. 'Gonna cut you now. Show you a magic trick.' David felt something warm on his neck, then the sharp sting of a slicing knife. 'You cut me, you crazy fuck! Get the fuck off me!'

The old man wiped the blood on the rail, grinning. The blood streaks shrank and disappeared. He cackled, 'See that! See that! Drank it! Slurped it up! Now it'll do what you want!' The old man whacked David's head. 'You paying attention, boy? You're a switchman. You can bend the rails. You can bend Bad Metal!'

'You're fucking crazy!' David thrashed wildly. The old man hit David again. 'Make it bend!'

'Fuck you!'

'Tell it to move!'

The man drew his knife across David's neck again. 'I'll cut your dick off! Tell it to bend!'

'OK, bend!'

'Not like that, you shithead!' The old man drove his knife into David's leg.

'Jesus!' David screamed, 'Bend!

'John found his last ounce of bravado and fired it at the bloody black skull on the other side of the fence: 'You're next, old man!"

Bend! Bend!'

The steel under David's cheek began to vibrate. He watched as the rail began to blister and warp. A railroad spike popped from its hole and the rail began to bend upward, then back into its original straight line.

'Some folks just don't want to learn,' the old man sighed as he lit his pipe.

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Years later, David waited peacefully on the floor, slowly flexing each muscle he could control. The needles were gone, but every nerve was firing electric rhythms to his brain. The power was inside now. Deep inside, he could feel it coiled around his spinal column. His mind was a blur of colors, red to purple to black. Still, each muscle relaxed, one after another, unclenching, releasing. There was the job now. It was hard not to get aroused at the erotic image. The fraternity needed. David waited.

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John Petrakos checked his gun for the third time in ten minutes. A 9mm Baretta did a lot for his self-confidence. All day long after his encounter with the old man, the site seemed repulsive to him. Everything was disgusting; the dirt, the dust, the sweat, the sanolets, even his co-workers — 'Sweaty ignorant scum.' They lived for their next beer and talked all the time about sex that never happened and women who wouldn't touch them with someone else's body. Every word they spoke was an irritant to him. No matter how he wrestled with it he couldn't relax. It was three o'clock when John spotted the old man again. He had brought friends. The old man was keeping his distance this time. He set himself up at the entrance to an alleyway between a laundromat and a used clothing store. His friends chose street corners and retaining walls for their vigil. Grim dirty men with glowing white eyes under the grease. Some wore hats or masses of black hair. An Indian was with them, smoking a cigarette. He wore combat boots and work overalls and a red bandana around his head. Over in front of the 7-11, a tall man with long Dreadlocks and a beard sat on a trashcan screaming at passersby. 'They're gonna crawl up your ass and eat your heart! They're gonna crawl up your ass and eat your heart! You told me! You told me! Shit! Shit! Shit! Shit! Shit! They're gonna crawl up your ass and eat your heart!' John could see twelve but he was sure there were more. Their presence sent him into a silent panic. John punched out and went to his trailer. There was no comfort inside either. He paced from window to window, trying to watch all twelve of them at once.

John's violent nature did not mix well with a sit and wait strategy. He felt trappped, boxed in. Focus was destroyed. Adrenalin assaulted his brain again and again. With no kinetic outlet for his frustration, John was left with only a desperate confusion. He became more and more disoriented and irrational with each passing minute. Images of dead men stared at him, shaped from the uneven shadow-folds of his curtains on the floor and wall. Contorted faces mottled with blood and mud — twenty men in so many years, men nobody would miss and nobody noticed were gone. Endless scrubbing, concealing evidence. Plenty of paranoia over being caught, but no guilt. Never guilt. All that drove John was the hope that more of the filth would climb his fence, and they always did. They couldn't help it. On the inside was John, waiting, stalking, screaming, swinging his sledgehammer justice. This cannonball through hell headrush of killing was better than cocaine, better than sex, a sex taken further than orgasm. Self-seduction

torn inside out. Muscle, sweat and blood lining up, organising, forming itself into a fleeting incarnation of death. It was all about going to the point of standing outside himself, watching his body dealing in mortality. Brave, strong, fearless. Not cold-blooded murder, but hot electric dirty mortal fucking. Electric orgasms on a rollercoaster of flesh.

Four o'clock came and the crew disappeared like gremlins at daybreak. All except Chris Collins. He was putting in overtime to make up for a couple of days taken off to see a gun show. He busied himself tidying the site, picking up beer bottles, tools, and trash. Chris was sixty. He sported a steel plate on the left parietal region of his bald head. He was a smiling happy man, the kind of person who could walk in on a vicious stabbing and miss the whole thing. However, if you offered him a few drinks he spawned the nature of a Weekend Philosopher, imparting stale and badly informed half-truths on the universe mixed with stories about World War II and his days as a salvage man. Nobody wanted to listen. Chris didn't care. More than anything, it was a way of jogging memories loose. Chris had been tipping the bottle a few times during the day and that damned annoying itch to talk was driving him nuts. He needed some company. John was a drinker and Chris in his blind way thought he was an OK Joe, so Chris hooked his bottle up and marched himself over to John's trailer.

Three hard pounds with a fist brought John to the door. The gun he pointed at Chris's head was definitely a sign that the man needed a drink. John blinked a couple times, and exhaled. He put his finger on the hammer and let it down slow. 'You get away from me. I got trouble.' John was talking low and standing in the shadows behind the doorframe.

'Shit, John, c'mon out. Have a drink and you can shoot somebody later.'

'Yeah, OK. I need a drink. I can shoot'm later.'

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David pulled on his overcoat and closed the door behind him. Down the hall a baby was screaming, a man screaming back: 'Shut up! Shut the fuck up!' David went out the back door and down the alley. He never walked the streets willingly. Besides, the graffiti was best in the alleys, everything from lowly tags to major works of art. He thought of the marks as the silent screaming of the crowd. Two blocks from his apartment David passed a geezer picking cans out of a dumpster. The trashpicker halted his search as David passed: 'You put a big hurt on that pig!' The power jumped inside his coat. David tried to control it and pull it back. A security light exploded high on the wall of an apartment building. A steel pipe ripped itself from the brick wall and smashed hard on the asphalt.

'David felt something warm on his neck, then the sharp sting of a slicing knife'

A right turn and straight down the next alley he came up behind the old man silently. 'Ready?'

The old man jumped. 'Shit!'

David smiled. 'I said, are you ready?'

'He's still in there.' The old man's face split in a mirthless grin.

John Petrakos sat on the doorframe and tilted his head back, rejoicing in his burning throat and the mind numbness the bottle dispensed. 'Don't fucking give a shit. Just don't fucking give a shit. Fucking asswipes can watch all night! I'll blow their asses out their noses!'

Chris was two drinks up on John and he was really in touch with the wisdom of the ages now. 'Did you ever see those guys? Never been on a site with so much dying. Like the walls were out to squash 'em. Life's a bitch and then you get pulped like a fly. Actually, I don't think it was them. Looked like it was you it wanted to kill.'

'Bullshit,' John growled.

'Gotta say, John, you're the fastest motherfucker on two legs!'

John and Chris were too drunk to notice the wire in a pile of debris poke a steely tip above the crumbled cement, then just as quickly duck down. Hours were passing quickly and Chris seemed capable of producing an endless supply of alcohol from a thousand secret stashes on the site. The shadows fused into night and night slowly cleared the streets of people.

Chris was rapping his knuckles on the steel plate in his head. 'Got this working a salvage job. Big old B-17 out in the South Pacific. The 'Shoo Shoo Baby.' Whole damned fuselage dropped on me. It was just one big hunk of Bad Metal out to get me. That's what got those poor shits last week, I bet. You ask any guy who works with metal, they'll tell ya. Some metal cuts and bends. Other metal cuts and bends you. It's like those fucking Jap bastards and their Samurai swords. They take months to make just one and then they call it the soul of the Samurai. We hopped islands all over the Pacific after the war. Picked up thousands of these damned swords. Sold some to junk dealers. Sold the rest to be melted down. You couldn't handle one of those bastards without cutting yourself. They were dangerous. Accidents happened around them all the time. They're still around, only they ain't swords no more, they're buildings and cards and kids' toys. Maybe power tools or nuclear missiles... '

Chris paused and took the last swallow from the latest bottle. John was in a stupor, not listening, just watching the shadows move around as an ever-dwindling number of car headlights passed. The wire crawled under the dirt in a broad loop, five feet in front of the trailer.

'I'm not saying it's just the Jap swords. What about all those guns and knives and God knows what else that cops melt down? How 'bout cars that kill people on the road? It's all fucking Bad Metal. Go ahead, ask people, ask any Joe who works with the stuff, they'll tell ya.'

John pulled back the hammer on his gun. 'Get outta here, Chris.'

Chris inclined his head. 'Just talking, John.'

'Get the fuck outta here, asshole!'

'I can get another bottle. Let's just... '

John levelled the gun at Chris's head. 'Get the fuck out of here!' Chris stood up and backed down the steps. He backpedalled about eight feet before the ground around him exploded. The loop of wire tightened around Chris's ankles. The ends took off in opposite directions. The wire pulled itself taut with swift and bloody force. Chris fell forward on his face. His feet, still in his shoes, lay severed

behind him. Thirty seconds of silence, then Chris began to scream. Blood jetted from his ankles and was soaked up in thirsty dust. John stared wide-eyed. All the will toward action he could muster was a breathless 'Jesus Christ'.

The wire wrapped around a steel girder. The other end looped twice around each of Chris's wrists then climbed the side of John's trailer and anchored itself in the vent grate of an air duct. Slowly this time, the wire pulled taut. Chris was lifted from the ground screaming and jerking. His hands quickly turned blue. 'Jesus! Help me, John, help me!' Another wire whipped into the air around his neck and up to a telephone pole, securing itself to the cross bar. There was a dramatic pause flawed slightly by a choking 'It hurts... ' All three wires yanked themselves into straight lines. Chris hit the ground in a series of wet thumps, internal organs dumped from open cavities in hot waves. Blood splashed John's face. The shock of it got his body moving backwards into the trailer. He slammed the door.

David stood outside the trailer in the field of meat that was once a man. The power streamed from him. The only sensation he could compare it to was taking a leak — one of God's little pleasures of relief, uplifted to the point of ecstasy. David was more Bad Metal than human now. Its lusts were David's, and David himself sat somewhere behind the eyes joyfully masturbating in the image of himself as a god. The fraternity brothers were moving out of the shadows and onto the site to carry away the carnage in shipping carts lined with plastic. The old man stood next to David. 'Jesus, David, we could've waited until he left.'

David turned on him. 'This is my fucking show! I couldn't wait, and that's good enough for you!'

'We just don't want a big deal.'

'It is a big deal. A big ugly motherfucker of a deal!' David's face twisted into a grinning Jack O'Lantern. 'You made me a nightmare! OK, I'm a nightmare. What the hell do you expect? Don't get in my way again or I'll take your piss-covered dick next time!' The power was straining against the flesh. 'Leave me alone!'

John Petrakos could see the two men outside the trailer and street people picking up the carrion. But the hand that held the gun wouldn't stop shaking. With a mental will taxed beyond his limits he managed to squeeze the trigger. The flash from the weapon blinded him. He didn't see the back of the Indian's head explode all over the old man's trenchcoat. The others scattered like roaches, leaving the shopping carts behind. He also didn't see David ducking to the left and laying his hands on the trailer.

John's ears were ringing from the gun's report, masking the deep groan from the trailer's shell. But he clearly felt the vibration on his feet. He reacted by instinct. Slamming his shoulder into the door, he broke through and hit the dirt. John's mind was in panic, wondering why his body was taking him where he least wanted to go — outside. The trailer imploding looked like a beer can crushed by an invisible hand. Compressed air blew out all the windows, and a wave of glass flew at John. He tucked his head under his arm and rolled away. When he removed his arm and opened his eyes he was nose to nose with Chris's head. It moved. A sick sound of bone splitting and skin tearing filled John's ears. There was a wet-sounding pop, and the plate in the head lifted itself on end, grey matter on the underside and skin around the edges. John screamed for the first time since birth. In answer, the three inch square of metal tore free and cut the air past John's cheek. John whipped sideways, but his ear was already sheared off.

John couldn't stop screaming now, and blood poured between his fingers from the wound. He pulled himself up enough to sit crosslegged in the dirt. He patted the dirt all around him looking for the ear. He was oblivious to the figure standing behind him, holding his gun.

'Too easy,' David thought, 'This is art. Let's give the peanut gallery something to cheer about'. David backed away from the shrieking man on the ground.

Section by section, the safety fence began to unravel. Wire sprang from everywhere on the site, even from cars on the street. The wires twisted and wrapped around steel girders that tore themselves from the foundation. The wire bound each girder to the next, forming joints and tendons. Steel wailed to make ribs and a spinal column. Steel drums split at their seams, spilling oil on the ground. The drums fused to the spine, a primitive cranium. The wire wove around to make a muzzle and eye sockets. Smaller pieces of metal with sharp edges became teeth, and muscle by muscle the makeshift Golem pulled together.

John was very far down the path to insanity, just one step away from Catatonia. The nightmare growing was at his back. All he could see was the deserted street. All he could hear was a desperate voice in his skull yelling: 'Run, you stupid motherfucker!' He turned around in a sluggish, viscous motion.

The vision that dwarfed him was impossible, a joke or a spoof. The mind bent at the absurdity. David was an artist and as art, it was very realistic. John did run. He ran faster than he'd ever run in his life.

Slowly the steel junkyard dog took its first step. Each stride took the giant, moaning animal half a block. The paws chewed up the sidewalk. The tail weighed a ton and a half and it playfully swatted a storefront into dust, leaving a gaping hole between businesses. John tried to make a right turn into an alley but he was running too fast. He smashed face first into a cinderblock wall. His nose broke. His head was drowning in a bright red light yet his body wasn't ready to die. John righted himself and ran down the alley. Praying for escape, all he found was the wall of another building in his way.

'Chris fell forward on his face. His feet, still in his shoes, lay severed behind him'

The junkyard dog stopped at the alley entrance. It sat on its haunches, turning its head from side to side, the entrance too narrow for its immense shoulders. The steel dog fixed John with reflective gray eyes.

John tucked his head under his arm again, and slid down the wall in a fetal crouch. He cried. The junkyard dog began to shake, and its wire skin unravelled from its foreleg, slithering on the asphalt toward the huddled form.

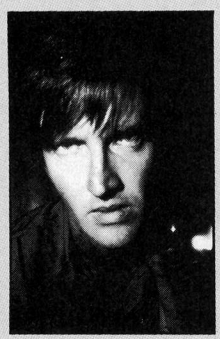
John was in darkness. His mind retreated to a place of safety,

colours erupting on his eyelids. A sting like a pin prick fired an urgent plea for attention to John's clouded brain. Something had stabbed his left heel. He felt the agony of a tendon ripping. Then another prick in his right heel. The pain was coaxing him back to the physical world and he regretfully opened his eyes. Wires had pierced his socks at the back of each leg, and more wires moved toward him.

'Oh my God, they're inside!' The steel hit him in an unstoppable wave. The wires went for any exposed skin, violated every orifice. They pierced his neck and his eyes, his hands, all moving toward the center like tiny catheter tubes. John's skin was a mass of moving metal flesh. John's last thought before the wire raped his brain was: 'They're gonna crawl up your ass and eat your heart!' No final scream. His mouth was stuffed with wire.

David stepped from between the legs of the dog and walked toward John's bloated carcass. The wire still writhed inside, making the skin ripple and the limbs twitch. The last of the Bad Metal's power slipped from David. John's body stopped moving and the monster at his back collapsed into a heap. David felt weak. His entire body shook with the strain of standing. After a moment, the sound of squeaky wheels echoed down the alleyway. The brothers with their plastic-lined shopping carts were coming to clear up the mess. They would dismantle the dog and they would dismantle John as well, disposing of the evidence in a thousand trash dumpsters all over the city.

David bent down and kissed John's mangled cheek, marvelling at the two hundred pounds of metal he'd managed to stuff inside the corpse. Then he put his lips close to John's ear and whispered: 'Thank you, lover'. He stood up with a satisfied smile on his face, lit a cigarette, and walked away.



BRIAN COOPER is an artist and author based in Denver, Colorado. His short story, *Bad Metal* signals his return to writing after having spent several years producing black and white and colour artwork. He now splits his time between writing and illustrating.

FICTION FILE 10
SAMANTHA LEE

Health guru, childrens' fiction writer and author of the recently published adult fantasy Childe Rolande, Samantha Lee tells FEAR's John Gilbert how she succeeds in appealing to a variety of audiences.

Kids know her for her work on ITV's *Rainbow and The Wotsit From Wizbang*, but the vivacious Samantha Lee is also a journalist, keep fit instructor, singer, author of childrens' books such as *The Lightbringer Trilogy* and radio plays such as Capital Radio's *Moment Of Terror* series.

Her considerable abilities within and outside the fantasy genre make her sensitive to the effects her work might have on different audiences. *Child Rolande*, for instance, though not a particularly salacious book, concerns the hermaphroditic savour of a fantasy civilisation and, as a childrens' writer she can see that fantasy for an adult audience might not suit young people. 'The thing I'm worried about is, because its called *Childe Rolande*, and because I've written for children before, children might think it's a childrens' book. I hope not because, in fact, I would not let my father read it.'

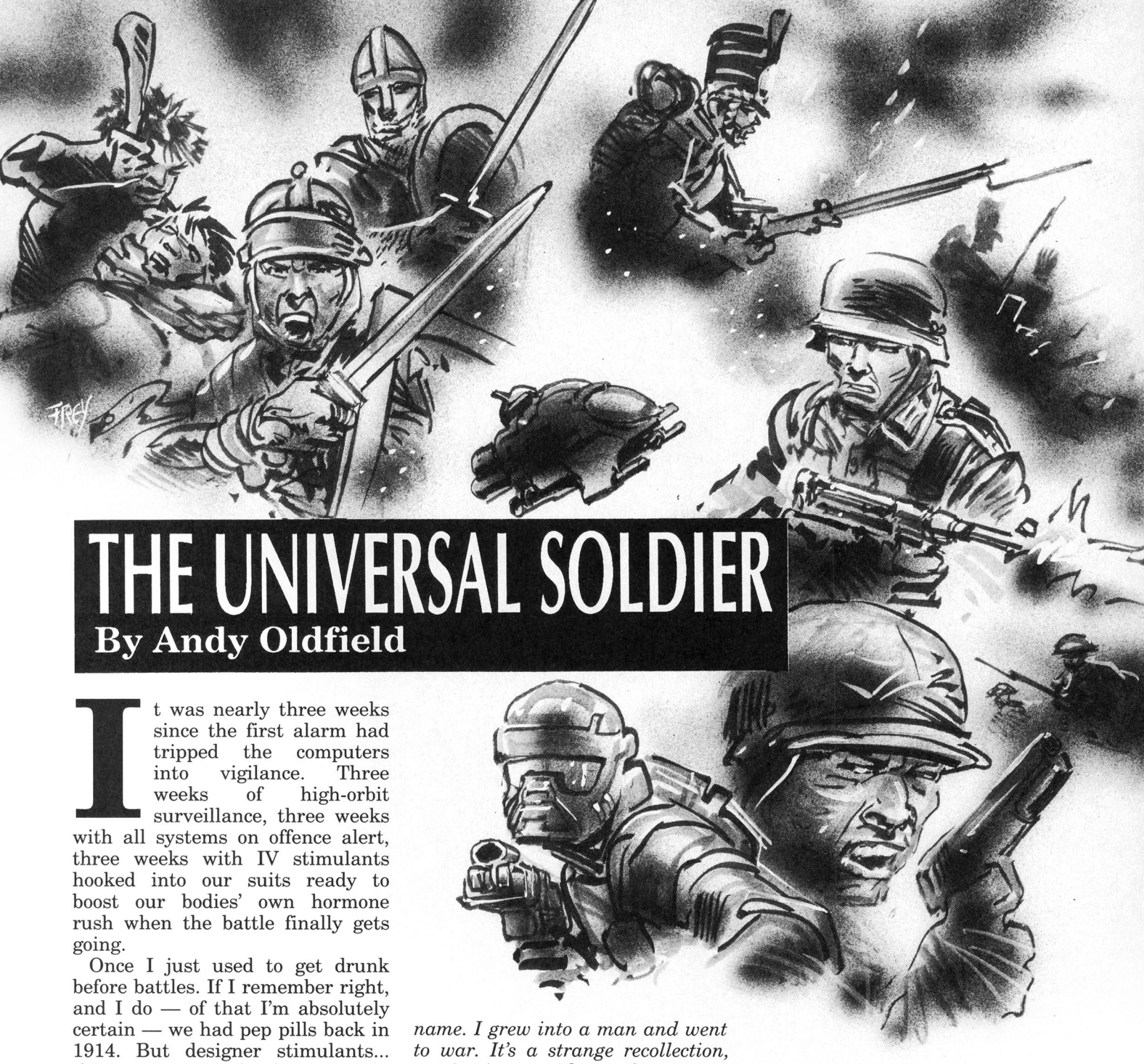
Childe Rolande contains several layers of meaning, and discusses the relationships between the sexes, what happens if one dominates the other, and how that is reflected in society on a grand scale. On occasions, as Lee freely admits, such symbolism can go beyond a writer's intentions and readers often pick up on things that the author didn't know were there. 'I don't know whether, if you didn't think of it you should refute it or, as it's just a legend, whether you should just expand that legend.

'A lot of people have made a lot of money out of interpreting The Beatles' song lyrics, and half the time I'm sure it's complete farce. But John Lennon was the kind of guy who was so sarcastic and funny, and he would have found it funny to let people think there's something in there.

'I think a book is as individual as its reader. You create the story, but everybody reads a book a different way, and if they wish to interpret it that way, I think that's valid.'

Samantha has several new projects in the pipeline but, as has happened to several other well-known writers of my acquaintance, the time schedules for publication have gone awry. 'I'd finished *Rolande*, and Macdonald/Futura wanted the second one, the sequel, and I had a good idea for a childrens' book called *Ghosts In The Machine* which would have gone in their childrens' section. They've still got that idea.'

And the sequel to *Rolande*? 'Until they see what the sales are like on *Rolande* One they won't guarantee *Rolande* Two. *Rolande* Two is all blocked out — so is *Ghosts In The Machine*. I had predicted that this year I would have had *Rolande* Two finished by March, *Ghosts In The Machine* finished by August. By then I should have two extra books. As with all writers, I've been overruled by the powers that be and those two books are sitting there festering. I haven't been able to get them out of my system and move on to something else.'



THE UNIVERSAL SOLDIER

By Andy Oldfield

It was nearly three weeks since the first alarm had tripped the computers into vigilance. Three weeks of high-orbit surveillance, three weeks with all systems on offence alert, three weeks with IV stimulants hooked into our suits ready to boost our bodies' own hormone rush when the battle finally gets going.

Once I just used to get drunk before battles. If I remember right, and I do — of that I'm absolutely certain — we had pep pills back in 1914. But designer stimulants... things are certainly changing. Hi-bio-tech, heigh-ho.

The observation hatch was cold against my forehead. The cabin lights were muted, low. A plume of condensation streaked out from my nostrils, partially obscuring the swirling blue, green, turquoise and white globe of the Earth hanging outside in the blackness like a brilliant psychedelic beach-ball against a sable backcloth.

It was the lull before the storm, we all knew that. And at such times, there's not much to do except think, talk and remember.

Most people have an earliest memory, one that even predates their idea of themselves as a person. I'm unlucky. I've got loads of them.

I was born and learned I had no name. I grew into a man and went to war. It's a strange recollection, moving in an arid sort of way.

Across the windswept African wastes, I crept with my fellows. We walked the spirit paths so that we would be strong and unafraid. We cradled our clubs and axes made of wood and stone and bone. Murder was in our hearts. Our limbs and bowels trembled with excitement. We sweated with anticipation. We were doing a sacred thing and knew we were invincible.

The moon shone down on the resting place of our enemies. In the shadows we circled their camp, remained unseen until the last moment, then with piercing blood-lust screams we rushed in, caving skulls, dismembering and killing.

It was a good feeling — raw, elemental, uncomplicated — it was as natural as any other feeling. As natural as sex, or eating, or drinking. It was a memory that I was to relive many times for a very long time.

The post-battle booty was meagre, but it hardly mattered. All that mattered was the battle.

That particular memory's still strong. But not totally overpowering, there are too many more of them for any one to be pre-eminent.

The reminiscence evaporated like my breath on the hatch. And I was in the present again, engrossed by the spectacle of the planet. Even after all our training and all the flight-time we clock-up on duty, the sight of that planet is something else. I prefer seeing it in low-orbit, hanging massively beneath me.

But high-orbit's okay too, there's still a sense of majesty.

Of course, I'm supposed to be on watch, but from here there's nothing I can see that the ship's instruments can't pick up quicker and better. Eyes aren't really that good; so I don't feel too guilty about indulging in a bit of Earth-gazing.

As I was getting maudlin and home-sick, the lights came on unannounced and quickly. An after-image of Earth burned inside my watering eyes. I blinked and cursed; it's just the sort of trick Pete likes springing. Heroic entrances are his forte. Whilst my eyes were still smarting, he attempted to sing the dramatic bit from the old 2001 film. It was awful, a cacophony, but he thought it was great.

'Shut up,' I rubbed my eyes. 'And that's an order.'

Sometimes I think he forgets that I'm the commander of this cosy little three-man shuttle of ours.

'Sorry,' he said. He's all right at heart — a good soldier who knows his place, knows how to take orders. He should do, he's been doing it throughout history. Pete was one of my band from way back. Of course, he couldn't remember tribal killings under the African sun of millennia past.

'Where's the hippie? He's due soon.' I reasserted my authority.

'Just finishing the last of his resin.' Pete rolled his eyes. He can't see the point of that sort of drug and it's not just that it's illegal — he's even suspicious of our standard ration of betablockers, too contemplative, he prefers the nerve-searing rush of a combat speed cocktail, he's happy with the primal surge, he gets off on pure and simple enhanced violence. If he could remember all that he's seen and been through, things might be different. But he can't, so he sticks to the same old things. It's quite impressive really, in a blind sort of way.

A half-vision visited me — of people endlessly populating and repopulating the centuries. I was the only one with a sense of perspective, and as far as I could see there was no meaningful perspective. Just continual, trivial living. Everyone making the same ignorant cock-ups time after time, except for me. I made the same cock-ups each time all right... it's just that I knew I was doing it.

The hippie came in, his eyes dilated and his shaggy hair and beard sticking out every which way, looking for all the world like some Old Testament prophet. I don't know if he had been an Old Testament prophet, but I remember him well as a mystic wanderer from the East. Even back then he kept hinting that he might know a little about what was going on. Always talking about designs and plans. Wheels of existence, stopping the wheel, the struggle for release. Nowadays it was leylines and stuff. He hit the dimmer switch and sat down beside me. Pete left.

'Hiya, hippie.'

'Hi, man,' he said. I can never tell when he's just taking the piss and stringing me along.

'Dull?' he said.

'Dull.'

He didn't say anything after that, he just sat and stared out into space. I would've gone there and then, but Pete's not much in the way of company. Good soldier, lousy companion.

The hippie's almost always entertaining — apart from the odd morose silences. I was on the point of quitting and going back to the sleep quarters to get drunk, when the hippie started up.

'It's crap, all of it,' he said.

It was the sort of remark that usually launched one of his outbursts.

'What's crap?'

'All this,' he gestured around the flight deck. 'Lights, keypads, screens. It's a come down for an old soldier.'

'I know what you mean,' I said, wondering whether he knew what he meant.

A few weeks after I first died — the original man with no name — I joined in an attack on another band. This tribe was better prepared, they fought back violently — it heightened the excitement. When my brains were dashed out, my body almost had an orgasm. I died quite slowly on the battlefield.

I was born again and the same thing happened.

It wasn't until about the sixth or seventh rebirth that I began to suspect something was wrong.

'The whole cosmos is realigning itself,' the hippie said. 'We should be grasping the wisdom of the ancients. Instead, all we do is play with the techno-toys. We ought to be in touch with the natural forces. We'd be better off slugging it out planet side with spells and sorcery.'

I'd done too much planet side slugging. When I had a name, Cromm, I could still remember the first time I'd gone, nameless, into battle. But things changed. I carried metal weapons instead of crude bone and wood. I wore garments made from spun material and tooled leather.

The wet marshlands I tramped as a warrior were very different to the sandblown plains where I first tasted and shed blood. But the biggest change was that the battles were more carefully planned. Deliberation replaced mere stealth.

'In the shadows we circled their camp, remained unseen until the last moment, then with piercing bloodlust screams we rushed in, caving skulls, dismembering and killing'

I didn't mind, the rapture was pretty much the same. And the men were very much the same. I recognised most of them. Sometimes they were my enemies, sometimes my comrades. Their faces changed slightly with each new body, but not that much, not enough to disguise them. I was quite surprised that no one else seemed to remember their previous incarnations.

After several beatings I learned not to talk about it.

I still lived for the battle. But it was as Cromm that I died away from the battlefield for the first time. I died naked in the bed of a woman. I died at the hands of a man who had once been my brother. I appreciated the irony before I died. I'd stopped seeing things as sacred by then, irony seemed to be the only law that made any sort of sense in life and death.

When I was reborn as Oengus, the same woman was only sixteen years older then me. I grew up and killed the man who had slain Cromm. After that I took the woman as my wife. I learned to enjoy irony.

Oengus was a successful warrior, I soon became a chieftain. When I

had power, I killed my wife and took a number of younger women to my bed instead. I knew it didn't matter, everyone I killed or hurt came back as someone else sooner or later. Death and sorrow were of no great account — I could see that.

And so the pattern continued. And I lost count of precisely how many times I'd been born and killed.

Wistfully, I gazed across the ship's interior and all its technological trinkets. 'I was into sorcery and romance, once... long time ago.'

'Romance doesn't enter into it,' spat the hippie. 'I'm talking about something real and awful, something fundamental and far reaching, something that is happening right here, something that is happening out there, something that shapes and bends and uses us. I'm talking about history.'

'And stone circles?' I taunted.

'And stone circles and earthworks and leylines,' he said. 'They're history too.'

'Like me and you?'

'Like us.'

I knew a bit about leylines — first-hand. I'd fought in ancient Britain on battlefields especially chosen to straddle sacred lines of power. I'd died on them too.

'It must be nice to believe in certainties,' I goaded him. He didn't rise to the challenge, he was too busy staring at the ship screens.

'I'm waiting for a certainty,' he said. 'Death.'

I suppose that even old mystics lose their touch. Certainties indeed; death!

Perhaps I'm being too harsh, I suspect that everyone needs certainties sometimes.

Once, when I was a Viking, I began to wonder if there was more to life. It was then that I met the wanderer from the East. He told strange tales of tragedy and cycles of existence. I knew that what he said described the truth. But what he said didn't help much. For two incarnations I was unsure of myself and died young and miserable.

'We're all waiting for death,' I told him. 'It may not come. There's more to life than death.'

'Bollocks.'

As a crusader and an infidel I regained my zest for life and death. At last I got used to the idea of a cause, and war became more than a personal and group thing. I became a soldier and was happy for centuries.

'Don't try and underplay death,' he said. "Cos that's whose service you're in. That's what keeps you sane. You're a soldier,' he paused briefly, and then said: 'Do what you do.'

An echo from my own past. The happiness which comes from thoughtless acceptance. To be fair, it was an attitude which worked for a while. But it didn't last. Causes never do, not in the abstract, and especially not in the particular.

I was born in Australia and sent to fight in Gallipoli and on the Somme. Miraculously, I survived, rediscovered religion, and for the first time died of old age.

'Doing what I do is the whole fucking problem,' I said. 'I wish I could do something else.'

'I didn't know you were a crypto-pacifist,' he chuckled.

'I'm not. I wish I was, it would make things that much easier. I might get some release from it all. Inner peace is all I want.'

He was still chuckling, his eyes were bloodshot. 'Oh yeah, peace man. Heavy.'

Inner peace! Not so long ago, I was born and felt old straight away. I was an American and watched anti-war films. Gallipoli was a waste of time. When my registration cards came I remembered the Alamo and almost burnt my draft. But I couldn't. I really didn't know what the alternative was.

"We should be grasping the wisdom of the ancients. Instead, all we do is play with the techno-toys"

I'd tried distancing myself from violence before. It just made me depressed. So did being a perpetual soldier. Still, I went to Vietnam, listened to rock music, painted my face, took a lot of drugs and committed suicide with a fragmentation grenade — another first.

Death would be the answer... if it worked.

'What are we doing up here?' he sighed. 'It's a magical time. We should be somewhere important.'

It didn't seem a magical time to me.

After Vietnam, I was born again, immediately. Tired and cynical, I was still a soldier — still trapped by fate and immortality. So I joined the space corps. And that's why I'm where I am now, in orbit.

It's a typical life story, I suppose... religion, certainty, despair. It's just that not many people realise the scale of it all.

I forced a smile and put on my best earnest liberal voice. 'Anyplace you happen to be can be important if you let it.' I didn't believe a word of it.

Neither did the hippie. 'Bull... ' He didn't have time to finish the sentence before the alarms started going off.

The ship accelerated into low orbit and we unleashed our primary load of bombs. They vanished earthward on pre-ordained paths. We banked and headed for the nearest enemy space station, it was in geo-stationary orbit over the north pole. We set a swarm of computer controlled nuclear missiles loose. That was our contribution out of the way. All that was left was to hang around and deal with anything that materialised. I could hear Pete whooping over the intercom as the dog-fighting guns were switched into the circuitry and fully activated.

'Not much of a way to fight a war,' sighed the hippie. He almost sounded immune to the IV stimulants which were pumping through us.

The screens were alive with the traces of countless missiles. The sky burned and the blackness of space shone like a magnesium flare. The hippie and I looked down at the earth. Flashes of light erupted all over the surface like a giant network of fiery lines joining up monstrous balls of flame.

'Hey, I was right. The leylines are being redrawn, see.' The hippie smiled. 'This is the start of something new, something worthwhile. I told you, man.'

He meant it too, I could tell by the look in his eyes.

'I'll try and keep an open mind about it,' I shouted over the noise of the explosions and the turbulence which was rocking us.

'What?' he mouthed.

Those were the last words I heard him say. Before I could reply, a missile exploded close by and knocked us to hell. When I came round the hippie was lying back in his seat, very still, blood dribbling out of his ears and his mouth.

I could hear Pete whimpering on the other side of the door. I opened up the door for him, but he was out of it. It only took half a glance to see that he had been blinded. There was a large hole burned through one side of his head. His body gave up after less than quarter of an hour. That just left me and the ship.

The planet wasn't looking too healthy. In low orbit I could see a swirling mass of thick black clouds enveloping the globe. I reckon that the planet would have been invisible if you were looking from beyond the moon.

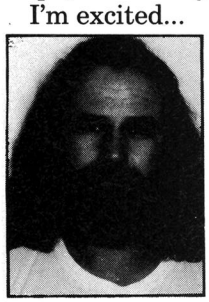
I tried all the scanners and the radio, they were working fine. It's just that there was nothing for them to pick up. My home below was going through nuclear winter. I don't think anything could hibernate through it.

I managed to make contact with some surviving ships like mine. It was when I learned that there weren't any women on board a single one that I switched this recorder on. I mean, the hippie was right — it was the start of something new. It didn't register straight away. But when it did.., Jesus, I laughed loud and long.

No women, no future human race. This is it... I've got it made. A real first coming up. My first final death. No more babies to be born. No more new little bodies for me to grow up in all over again. Suddenly, I'm not a soldier. Suddenly, I'm not a fucking prisoner. For the first time in my lives, I'm going to die. For the first time in my lives I'm free, happy — carefree.

Heading this ship towards the edge of the solar system, I feel like God. I've seen humanity come and now I've seen it go. It wasn't such a big deal. Tiresome, irritating perhaps, but mostly insignificant.

I'm excited...



ANDY OLDFIELD was born an arrow's flight away from Sherwood Forest but now lives in Essex with his wife, children and various animals. When not reviewing books, writing comic strips or subediting for assorted newspapers he escapes by writing fiction. Any commissioning editors reading this please note that he is currently working on a comic fantasy novel.

FICTION FILE 11

FREDA WARRINGTON

Formulaic fantasy is anathema to Freda Warrington, author of The Rainbow Gate and the Blackbird series of fantasy novels. Her new project is a brush with horror and, as she impressed upon John Gilbert in this recent interview, originality is all the more important here.

The characters in Freda Warrington's novel, *The Rainbow Gate*, point to the philosophy behind her fantasy. She is tired of the stereotypical Grecian and Roman fixations of some writers, and often prefers to cast around her own environment in the North of England for characters and concepts.

Take, for instance, the guardian of the Rainbow Gate between this world and a parallel dimension beyond death. 'She was a wind hag called Black Annis, who lived in a cave on the edge of Loughborough. She had her equivalent in all the mythologies. In every mythology there's a wind hag, she was Leicestershire's wind hag, and she was supposed to be married to the god of the sky.

'There were different stories connected with what she actually was, which was possibly a nun who used to look after a leper colony. And there was another story of somebody else she might have been, but the main legend was that she was a hag who used to sit in a tree and eat passing children.

'It actually drives me mad to look after fantasy after fantasy and find King Arthur, Celtic mythology, done again and again. I thought: 'There must be something new.'

Black Annis has supernatural powers, but she is also very human and has her off days — especially when she decides that she's grown weary of looking after the Rainbow Gate and wants to stay home for a while. 'That's also partly a reaction against traditional supernatural things and fantasy. I'm talking about my own fantasy as well as other peoples' which tends to be very mannered.'

Warrington's first four books, The Blackbird sequence, were set in an imaginary world, and even *The Rainbow Gate* contains sequences in a parallel universe which comes staight from the author's imagination — no reference, no research, just imagination.

What could be simpler than that? 'The strange thing is, I found the contemporary scenes a lot easier to write. I was having more trouble with fantasy people, and I thought, 'why am I writing fantasy?'.

Most fantasy writers do get their weirdest ideas from contemporary sources. 'It's a mixture of everything. I wish I had more interesting dreams; it's happened a couple of times to me, but very rarely. I get inspiration from all sorts of other places, like walking. That's why I used the park in *The Rainbow Gate*, because that's where I walked. It's got an atmosphere, and I wanted to capture that atmosphere.'

Her ease within the field of contemporary fantasy has led Freda Warrington to the horror genre. The next book, which she is writing off her own bat rather than to a commission, follows a trend which is again becoming popular, at least within the film world. 'What I'm writing about now is a book about vampires. I've always liked the old Hammer films. I used to go to the cinema and see them when I was 14, stories like *Camilla*. What struck me is that the vampire is always the villain, he has no personality and he's always got to be killed.

'I discovered *Interview With A Vampire* when it first came out and I was spellbound by it. I thought, for the first time someone has done with vampires what I'd always envisioned. There was still a frustration in a way, because it didn't do everything I wanted it to do, and this is why I've always written. I'd love a story, but it wouldn't quite be what I wanted. So the only way to get total satisfaction out of something is to do it yourself.'

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Mask Of Murder
Never Cry Devil
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The Vanishing

CINEMA

DARK ANGEL

Starring Dolph Lundgren, Brian Benben, Betsy Brantley
Director Craig Baxley
Distributor Entertainment Film Distributors
Cert 18

A quirky sci-fi/detective outing, moulding the trappings of a standard odd-couple, buddy cop movie around an outlandish plot dealing with interplanetary drugs trafficking. When Houston cop Jack Caine's undercover partner is stiffed whilst infiltrating drug-king Victor Manning's operations, Caine (Lundgren) is forced to team up with diminutive FBI-linked dipstick Laurence Smith (Benben). Dismissing good old 'instinctive' police work, and brazenly throwing around big words like 'parameters', Smith immediately starts to piss Caine off, and vice versa.

Tensions are heightened when a series of mutilated corpses lead the mismatched pair to the trail of a shadowy, brain-sucking villain, whom Caine suspects is not of this earth: 'I think we're dealing with aliens here,' he declares straight-facedly, 'and *not* from New Mexico.' Convinced at first that his new partner is one sandwich short of a picnic, Smith eventually comes to realise that not only are the bad-guys indeed bug-eyes, but that the interstellar Interpol are already on the case.

Sporting a snappy script, an adequate cast, and some effectively frenetic action sequences, *Dark Angel* is an unpretentiously direct affair, which fires off in a number of directions, but manages to remain surprisingly coherent throughout. Director Craig Baxley (who cut his teeth with the exploitation cult hit *Action Jackson*) wisely keeps the nonsensical proceedings moving along at a brisk pace, and despite Dolph Lundgren's claims that the role of Caine allowed him to branch out somewhat, there's still plenty of the numbskull square jawed grittiness for which he is known and loved. Accolades also go to the special effects department (under the supervision of Bruno Van Zeebroeck) for providing some neat (if repetitive) mainline mechanics, and realising the lethal potential of CDs... now that's what I call the cutting edge.

Mark Kermode

DICK TRACY

Starring Warren Beatty, Madonna, Al Pacino, Dustin Hoffman, Glenne Headly, Charles Durning, Mandy Patinkin, Dick Van Dyke
Director Warren Beatty
Distributor Touchstone/Warner Bros
Cert 15

The negative publicity and cruel jokes about Beatty's Dick are enough to make a guy toss away those normally prized preview tickets and go and do something more constructive with his Sunday morning — like mow the grass.

But go I did, and after two hours of colourful sets and comicbook chases, came out vowing never to prejudge a movie again. Make no mistake, *Dick Tracy* isn't the greatest story ever told, but it is full of gentle humour, weird make-up, interesting characters and bags of pathos.

Beatty certainly took a gamble in employing big names such as Al Pacino and deforming them with make-up so that they become quite unrecognisable. Pacino plays Big Boy, a hump-backed mobster who decides to kill his rival, take over his territory and try to unite all the other crime bosses in Tracy's city.

■ Jack Caine (Dolph Lundgren) in Dark Angel

He does this, at first, with subtle pressure, but those bosses who defy him end up cast in concrete, bullet-ridden, or blown away.

Not a nice man to know, and that ageing defender of the law, Dick Tracy decides to 'get him off the streets'. He brings in Big Boy's gangsters and grills them under tungsten. The most ingenious idea here is Dustin Hoffman playing Mumbles and doing a rather sick take off of his role in *Rain Man*. The gag is that Mumbles apparently speaks so disjointedly and quietly that you can't understand a word he says. He does confess that Big Boy is responsible for all the killings in town, but it is not until Tracy confronts Mumbles and slows down the tape of his confession that we hear what the nervy gangster is actually saying: 'Big Boy did it'.

Big Boy — through whom Pacino takes the mick out of his *Godfather* role — decides to take out Tracy, and from there on doublecross follows doublecross and the plot draws to a somewhat predictable conclusion in the engine room of a drawbridge.

The two pivotal characters who are not in make-up are, of course, Dick Tracy and Breathless Mahoney (Madonna). It goes without saying that the lady has a wonderful voice and, as the scheming nightclub singer after Tracy's body and more, she acts

■ Al Pacino and Madonna as Big Boy and Breathless in Dick Tracy

surprisingly well. That is not, however, difficult when set against Beatty's wooden performance as the creaky old 'tec' of the title.

Beatty directs better than he acts, and that really is praise — not admonishment. He is not particularly inventive, but his ability in one moment to create controlled mayhem and in another present a touchingly emotional scene is what makes this movie such a surprise. It is unlikely to win any awards, but as sheer entertainment, it will give *Gremlins 2* a run for its money in this summer's popularity stakes.

John Gilbert

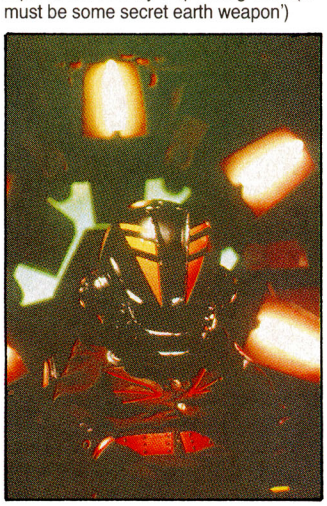
SPACED INVADERS

Starring Royal Dano, Douglas Barr, Ariana Richards
Director Patrick Johnson
Distributor Medusa
Cert U

Screwball sci-fi comedy aimed squarely at the schools summer holiday market, and no doubt benefiting from the current *Mutant Turtles* buzz.

Out in the depths of space a Martian warship under the command of halfwitted alien Captain Bipto is receiving a strenuous hiding from a neighbouring Arcturian battle-fleet. Separated both from their comrades and their commonsense, the pint sized crew mistakenly intercept a Halloween-night, 50th anniversary broadcast of H G Wells' radio classic *The War Of The Worlds*, and swiftly proceed to earth to link up with the (non existent) invading Martian armies and kick some earthling ass.

Down on the home planet however, things don't work out too well as Captain Bipto is run over by a speeding truck ('It must be some secret earth weapon')



■ Spaced Invaders

whilst his assembled company are simply dismissed by the earthlings as kids in Halloween masks, despite their repeated and enthusiastic chant of 'Prepare to die, earth scum!'. 'Do you think they know we're Martians?' asks one bemused pod-head after failing to strike terror into the haert of yet another humanoid. 'We're little green men with antennae!' replies his brother in arms, 'How can they *not* know we're Martians?'

Shamelessly plagiarising everything from *Critters* to *ET* to *Short Circuit*, this child-orientated spoof was a surprise hit in the States, despite its small budget and obviously moderate ambitions. Whilst the 'funny-litte-invading-aliens' gag wears somewhat thin after the first twenty minutes, occasional interludes of comic relief are provided throughout courtesy of the human stars, most notably Fred Applegate, who turns in a sterling performance as Deputy Sheriff and aspiring TV celebrity Russell Pillsbury: 'Nobody does 3,000 miles per hour in a 50 miles per hour zone and gets away with it,' intones our hero, deftly deadpan in a moment of uncharacteristic understatement. A moderate but occasionally lively romp with few pretentions and no surprises.

Mark Kermode

HIGH VOLTAGE ACTION

TOTAL RECALL

Starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, Rachel Ticotin, Sharon Stone, Ronny Cox, Michael Ironside
Director Paul Verhoeven
Distributor Guild
Cert 18

The movie might have little to do with the Philip K Dick's elegant short SF story, *We Can Remember It For You Wholesale,* but who cares? I, for one, could do with regular jolts of Verhoeven's kind of action.

After an indolent escapade with Danny Devito in *Twins*, Schwarzenegger's back to what he does best — non-stop action and brutal, blood spurting violence. These, coupled with out-of-this-world weaponry and expensive special effects, make *Total Recall* one of the most exciting movies of the year.

The big, forty something, muscleman would at first have us believe that he's Doug Quaid, a simple Earthling with a wife (Stone) and rock-breaking job. But Quaid has horrific dreams, set on the red landscape of Mars where he's an undercover agent who has fallen in love with a beautiful brunette. These dreams always end violently, nevertheless Quaid determines to relive them with the help of a high tech company called Recall Incorporated.

He's attached to a machine which should give him harmless memories of a life he's never had. Mars, of course, is the destination and he chooses to take the role of a secret agent, protecting the planet's valuable mining commodities from a band of terrorist mutants. But something goes wrong with the process and Quaid realises that he's more of a special agent than he at first thought, and that maybe the governing regime on Mars is not as innocent as it appears.

Pursued by a group of deadly assassins lead by Richter (Ironside) and employed by Mars mining boss Cohaagan (Cox), Quaid determines to go to the red planet, recover his real identity and do right by everyone.

***Total Recall* is one long chase; a noisy blood-bath interspersed with humorous one-liners and set pieces. Some attempts at characterisation are occasionally made by Schwarzenegger and his love interest, played by Rachel Ticotin, but this is a Verhoeven action movie and too much depth would look out of place.**

My one disappointment concerns the Mars mutant make-up which is not of Rob Bottin's usual high standard. The optical effects are, however, well up to scratch and provide a realistic backdrop to an SF film which, for a change, does have a logical, and remarkable, finale after which you're not left wondering, 'Where has all the budget gone?'.

John Gilbert

THE VANISHING

Starring Bernard-Pierre Donnadieu, Gene Bervoets, Johanna Ter Steege, Gwene Eckhaus, Bernadette Le Sache
Director George Sluizer
Distributor Metro Pictures
Cert 12

The controversy provoked by the BBFC's '12' certificate for this terrifying psychological thriller is misguided but enlightening. What the censors have grasped is that the film's insidious terror is not physical but conceptual. As such, it will disturb and haunt well-adjusted adults, while children — lacking their intellectual and psychological complexity — will remain blind to its devastating implicatons.

A young Dutch couple on holiday in France, Saskia (Steege) and Rex (Bervoets), stop at a service station: Saskia goes to buy cold drinks and does not return. It is as if she has vanished into thin air... Raymond Lemorne (Donnadieu) is a respectable married man, with a wife and two daughters. One day, after saving one of his young daughters from drowning, his family's unquestioning adulation prompts him to speculate on moral actions at the other end of the spectrum: in short, his capacity for evil. As he remarks later: 'Watch out for heroes, they're capable of excess'. Saskia's abduction was one

such moment of excess.

Three years after Saskia's disappearance, Rex remains obsessed, preferring to die knowing what happened to her than to live without that knowledge. Sensing this, Lemorne contacts him and, with exquisite cruelty, draws his willing victim into a sadistically controlled game of cat and mouse.

Intricately constructed and perfectly paced, Sluizer's riveting narrative matches the fascination and delicious torture of Lemorne's master plan. Just as Lemorne maps out his every move, timing each action with a stop-watch, so Sluizer controls the flow of information, divulging just enough to keep one hooked, but never enough to guess the next move. A chess-like study of the perverse subtleties of evil, with an unforgettable ending.

Nigel Floyd

TUNNELS

Starring Catherine Bach, Charlene Dallas, Nicholas Guest
Director Mark Byers
Distributor Vestron Video
Cert 15, 90 mins

In a bid to file a piece of hot news, the dynamic female duo of newspaper reporter Pam Weiss (Bach) and photographer Sharon Fields (Dallas) are drawn into the ugly gangland activities of the city's underworld. They discover a series of clues to an unsolved murder in the 'tunnels', a network of underground passages which feed into the metropolitan sewer system. As the girls dig deeper (both literally and metaphorically) into the crime, the finger of guilt seems to point at a powerful property speculator, who has a final solution for shifting the down and outs off the city sites he wants to develop.

A shamefully sloppy piece of work from director Mark Byers, *Tunnels* manages to insult the intelligence of its audience by leaving so many loose ends you could make a rug with them. Although evidently an attempt to cash in on the lively potential of inter-female relations à la *Cagney And Lacy*, the sparring bouts between the two protagonists smack more of infantile bickering than verbal cut and thrust. A dismal, desultory stab at a comedy/thriller which, with dire performances all round, manages to be neither funny nor frightening.

Patience Coster

DEADLY DREAMS

Starring Mitchell Anderson, Juliette Cummins, Xander Berkeley, Thom Babbes
Director Kristine Peterson
Distributor Cineplex
Cert 18

The good thing about a film which revolves around the central character's nightmares is that he can die a thousand deaths in sleep sequences and yet still survive to the end of the movie. Saves on shreddies...

■ Mitchell Anderson targeted in Deadly Dreams

That's just what happens here in *Deadly Dreams*. Alex Tormes (Anderson) is haunted by the brutal shooting of his parents by Perkins, a business man who was ruined by Alex's father. Now Alex reckons Perkins is after his blood and dreams of him endlessly, seeing him dressed in wolf-mask and hunting clothes. But, after killing Alex's parents, Perkins turned his rifle on himself. So he died, *didn't he*?

There are eight apparitions of Perkins throughout the film — some real nightmares, some daylight sightings. Is Alex going mad? What he needs at a time like this is a good, morale boosting set of friends around him to help him get a grip on life. Enter Danny, his high school chum, brother Jack and recently acquired girlfriend Maggie. Danny tries to help but is always playing games, and Alex has never trusted him since finding a wolf-mask in his bedroom. And Maggie and Jack? Their support is never entirely convincing. So the story sets off, plunging us in and out of dream sequences.

Deadly Dreams is watchable with a storyline that's simple enough to follow, if occasionally a little slow and obvious, though the end presents a superb duo of twists. None of the dream deaths are particularly gut-wrenching; and apart from the occasional screams of *Fuck you, asshole!* and the two rumpo scenes, *Deadly Dreams* wouldn't be out of place on TV at 10pm. That about sums it up — wait for the TV showing but don't stay up late especially.

Richard Eddy

MANHUNTER

Starring William Peterson, Kim Greist, Dennis Farine, Joan Allen, Brian Cox, Tom Noonan
Director Michael Mann
Distributor CBS/Fox
Cert. 18, 90 mins

This tough, scrupulously well-made thriller has taken too long to reach the budget shelves. Despite excellent critical reports, the short theatrical release and almost invisible rental promotion drew little interest from audiences. Hopefully, events in the offing — namely the making of a movie called *Silence Of The Lambs* — may focus attention once again on the scene of this crime.

Both stories were originally written as novels by the brilliant psychological thriller writer Thomas Harris, *Manhunter* (or the novel *Red Dragon*) being the prequel. The plot introduces an interesting new detective, played by William Peterson, who can reconstruct serial murders by looking at the scenes of crime and operating on the same mental wavelength as the killer.

His talent sometimes gets him into trouble. Indeed, his latest catch, a psychopathic psychiatrist called Lector (Cox), almost kills him. It is to Lector that he returns when a new breed of killer, Red Dragon (Noonan), starts murdering and mutilating his victims. The good doctor gives him some clues as to whom the murderer might be but also sets his family, colleagues, and a particularly obnoxious news hack up as the next victims.

Michael Mann's movie does not take in the subtler or more gruesome turns of Harris's plot, but such strict story-following is not required. Casting is not

TRAPPED!

HIGH DESERT KILL

Starring Chuck Connors, Marc Singer, Anthony Geary, Micah Grant
Director Harry Falk
Distributor CIC Video
Cert 15, 88 mins

Three sportsmen take off for their annual hunting trip into the badlands of New Mexico. Things are a little different from usual. Paul couldn't make it — he died in a high voltage accident a year ago — so his nephew has stepped in. The men encounter a veteran professional hunter (Chuck Connors) at the camp site, but there's not a living animal to be seen. The place is spooked, and some malevolent spirit is beginning to control their thoughts. They start to behave oddly and it isn't long before they realise that they are trapped.

Although reminiscent of the *Predator* scenario, *High Desert Kill* is a far more subtle movie. It generates ever increasing suspense and tension by feeding more and more unnatural behaviour into a normal group, a normal situation, highlighting friction points within the group and finally culminating in the revelation that things are definitely wrong, that they are definitely trapped and under the control of an outside being and part of an experiment. Only by setting aside their differences and facing their opponent will they be able to escape their ordeal. Make sure you don't escape yours. Watch and be experimented with. It's high voltage stuff.

Franco Frey

ideal — Cox would not have been my first choice as Lector — but Mann has certainly created an intelligent and softly stylish movie which should set standards for those directors struggling to make the thriller art.
John Gilbert

SORRY, WRONG NUMBER

Starring Loni Anderson, Hal Holbrook, Patrick MacNee, Carl Weintraub, Diane D'Aquila
Director Tony Wharmby
Distributor CIC Video
Cert 15, 85 mins

Based on the screenplay from the radio play by Lucille Fletcher, this is a remake of the 1948 version which originally starred Barbara Stanwyck and Burt Lancaster.

It is New Year's Eve and a bedridden neurotic heiress accidentally overhears on the phone the planning of a murder. With the evening advancing, she comes to realise that she is to be the murder victim. The race is on to prevent the murder. All attempts to contact her husband fail and the police are unable to respond due to the festive peak demand...

What could have been staged as a chilling and nail-biting suspense thriller has ended up as a TV mini-series lookalike with oozes of luxury penthouse surrounds, suspense-repellent soft flashbacks and cardboard-engineered characterisations. A flat performance by Loni Anderson as the neurotic heiress accentuates the major flaw in the weak screenplay, which can only build up tension and suspense on the basis of strong like or dislike and therefore concern for the victim. This does not happen, and interest ultimately focuses on the interior design... *Sorry, Wrong Number* does not connect as a suspense thriller, please dial again.
Franco Frey

AFTERSHOCK

Starring Elizabeth Kaitan, James Lew, John Saxon
Director Frank Harris
Distributor Medusa Home Video
Cert 15, 88 mins

Aftershock is one of those rare movies that manages to comprehensively fail on virtually every level. Lighting, direction, script, acting... you name it, *Aftershock* is a model of how not to do it. But let's start with the script, distinguished by the novel idea that everything in its post-apocalypse, SF near-future is identified by barcodes. Since the movie's budget would be stretched to afford a second-hand PC, it's a bit odd that everything's designed to be read by nonexistent machines. Nevertheless, the barcodes serve as the swastikas for Security Control, the name of a local tyrant's private army which boasts the worst uniforms since *Blake's 7*.

Needless to say, there are rebels, including Willy (John Saxon) a non-talkative loner who uses the memorable chat-up line, 'All revolution and no play, huh?'. Accompanying this block of wood is black actor James Lew, struggling with lines which are intended to inject some humour via ghetto-speak. The key phrase 'Wheels', spoken with a broad grin and both hands up, index fingers extended, is somehow unlikely to catch on. This leaves us with the alien, who is played by Elizabeth Kaitan and looks as extraterrestrial as Daryl Hannah's *Splash* mermaid without the tail. Her blank incomprehension of her surroundings and tendency to repeat the other character's lines are singularly unendearing.

She's arrived on Earth to find out the secret of the perfect society apparently described on one of Earth's space probes. But she only has a few hours to do this before her means of transportation, a bit of dry ice, departs leaving her to die. So after all three characters are captured at the start, they meet up, escape (prolonged chase) then try and get the alien back to her exit point (another prolonged chase).

It's not much of a plot, and the banal acting and TV-style direction does it no favours. But is it bad enough to be a classic of its kind? Well, there's the odd switch in lighting — with a corridor turning from blue to yellow in different camera shots. The sudden ability of Willy to become invisible and ignore bullets in the last quarter hour of the film, and a gloriously kitsch final scene where the alien is given the secret of the ideal society which existed before the apocalypse — inevitably, the US Constitution. But with such uncommunicative characters there just aren't enough lines like these about the alien: 'She's either a half-wit or a mute.' 'Or very clever!' Indeed, be smart, and give this a very wide berth.
Stuart Wynne

■ Manhunter

■ Aftershock

BEVERLY HILLS VAMP

Starring Britt Ekland, Jay Richardson, Eddie Deezen, Tim Conway Jnr, Pat McCormick
Director Fred Olen Ray
Distributor New World
Cert 18

Described by a Rocky Horror-esque narrator as an excuse to show 'blood, stupid kids, and girls with huge melons', this latest tacky montage from director Fred Olen Ray is a good few notches below par, but still manages to raise the occasional chuckle with its indiscriminate brand of outre right-offness.

Arriving in Tinsel Town with fantastical dreams of film making, nitwit nerd Kyle (Deezen) and his two masturbatorily obsessed sidekicks are soon brought down to earth by the indifference of movie mogulette Aaron Pendleton (Richardson). Airily dismissing the boys' proposal for *What Now My Love* ('Great title, I remember it already...') Pendleton waxes lynical about his own current masterpiece *Motorcycle Sluts In Heat* and advises the threesome to get real forthwith.

Disillusioned by the lack of response, the hapless lads book themselves into the nearest house of ill repute for some relaxational fleshy–fun, whereupon they learn that love does indeed bite. Presided over by the beautiful Madame Cassandra (Ekland) and her caricaturedly camp butler, the Beverly Hills brothel turns out to be a vampire lair, just crying out to be exorcised.

Following in the wake of superior (if much berated) *Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers* (see the chainsaw feature this issue for details), *Beverly Hills Vamp* finds Jay Richardson once again doing his amiable genre–spoof routine, but floundering amidst interludes of pedestrian padding and boringly repetitive 'big garbonanza' gags. Quite what an actres of Britt Ekland's stature is doing here is anybody's guess, but with the occasional snappy one–liner ('I wasn't reborn yesterday'), plenty of *boingy* three stooges sound affects, and a few knowingly self–referential in–jokes to its name, this'll probably keep the average completist amused for an hour or so.
Mark Kermode

■ Big garbonzas: Beverly Hills Vamps

SHOTGUN DIPLOMACY

AFTER MIDNIGHT

Starring Julian McWhirter, Ramy Zada, Pamela Segal
Directors Jim and Ken Wheat
Distributor MGM/UA
Cert 18, 90 mins

Everyone has at one time or another felt fear, that most undesirable of human emotions. We all like to be scared nonetheless, and *After Midnight* tells the story of a college student called Alison who, along with a bunch of her friends, enrols in a course entitled 'The Psychology Of Fear'. The tutor is a sinister professor called Derek who does not believe that text books teach us to feel fear; only by practical means can we learn. He demonstrates this by taking a pistol from his briefcase and holding it against the head of one of the male students.

For this Derek is disciplined by the college Dean, so he comes up with the offer to teach the students about fear at his own home. The students duly arrive one dark and thundery night (of course), and are instructed to tell one another scary stories. Meanwhile Derek has made an enemy of his 'hostage' of the afternoon who is out for revenge.

Directed by Ken and Jim Wheat, co-writers of such box office hits as *The Fly 2* and the fourth *A Nightmare On Elm Street* movie, *After Midnight* isn't a gory affair, rather it goes for shocks. I recommend you to watch this with the curtains pulled and the lights turned off.

The situations are genuinely scary, not for the blood-spattered special effects, but because they could happen in day to day life. The actors all bring the film to life, especially the psychotic Professor Derek. And watch out for the ending, all I'll say on that matter is — sweet dreams. *After Midnight* is a film I'd recommend you to hire, but don't watch it alone.

Mark Caswell

■ 'Now blow out the goddammed candles, bub...

CHANCES ARE

Starring Cybill Shepherd, Robert Downey Jr, Ryan O'Neal, Stuart Masterson
Director Emile Ardolino
Cert PG

Heaven, eh? The pearly gates, Saint Peter, angels, harps — it's what you'd imagine heaven's all about. Not in *Chances Are*. More like a American hotel foyer. Oh yeah, lots of fluffy white clouds — but check-in desks? Administration staff? How amusing. This is the heaven which greets Louie Jeffries III on his unexpected arrival after a car accident.

Louie isn't too happy about his current location — back home in the 1960s he's a successful lawyer, he's completely in love with his wife Corrine (Cybill Shepherd — swoon!), he's about to become a father and besides — it's his anniversary! He's just got to get back!

Pushing to the front of the queue at the reincarnation desk, Louie selects to be reborn as Alex Finch. But (but!) the reincarnation clerk forgets to give Louie/Alex an inoculation jab — what if he remembers?

Present day, and Alex has graduated school and blags his way into *The Washington Post* offices to find work as a reporter. Though he doesn't get a job he is taken under the wing of Phillip Train (Ryan O'Neal), who was his best friend when he was Louie. Alex is then is whisked off to his old house for dinner. Confronted with his wife and his daughter Miranda, who is now the same age as him, he slowly regains his memory. Cue a stream of 'hilarious consequences'.

How does Alex persuade Corrine, who thinks he's bonkers, that he's Louie? How can he avoid his daughter who wants to leap into bed with him at every opportunity? And how does he stop himself going round the bend?! It's all here in *Chances Are*.

Somewhere between a *Carry On* film and *thirty something*, *Chances Are* is fast and chaotic with quite a few laughs and plenty of heart-wrenching *lurve* elements, though you may find yourself shouting at the screen as the plot tends to go round in circles.

Verging on the fantasy side, but essentially a romantic comedy, *Chances Are* is a neat film, very watchable, but one that should not be marked with **FEAR** skulls, but with fluffy bunnies. Aw.

Richard Eddy

PAINT IT BLACK

Starring Rick Rossovich, Sally Kirkland, Doug Savant, Julie Carmen, Martin Landau, Jason Bernard, Monique Van De Ven
Director Tim Hunter
Distributor Vestron Video
Cert 18, 97 mins

In the real world, where works of art are coveted solely for their investment value, serious collectors bury their acquisitions in bank vaults. In the fictional world this is not the case, and it is almost heartening to find a psychopathic killer with the artistic sensitivity to murder those philistines who treat art collection as big business.

When brilliant but unknown sculptor Jonathan Dunbar (Rossovich) begins to suspect that his glamorous agent Marion Easton (Kirkland) with whom he is having an affair is also robbing him blind, he resolves to end their relationship. On his way home from a launch party at which he has had a blazing row with Marion, he stumbles across Eric (Savant), an agitated young man who claims that he has just been mugged. Coincidentally, the time of Eric's 'attack' coincides with that of an art theft at a private house, where the intruder was stabbed by the owner as he tried to escape. It soon becomes apparent that Eric is interested in more than art appreciation when his efforts to repay Jonathan's kindness drive both artist and art fan into a murderous alliance.

■ Art in a state: Paint It Black

After *River's Edge*, his inventive art house/underground success, Tim Hunter joins the mainstream with *Paint It Black*, a movie which, though not without its flaws, goes to prove that he is definitely a director to watch. As a thriller, *Paint It Black* owes more than just its Herrmannesque soundtrack (an eminently sensitive piece of scoring by

Jurgen Knieper) to the late, great master of the genre, Alfred Hitchcock. The climactic final scenes are, in fact, a total rip-off of the Mount Rushmore sequence in *North By North West*, and the Jonathan/Eric one-sided murder pact is strongly reminiscent of the central relationship between Bruno and Guy in *Strangers On A Train*.

Despite a sometimes ponderous screenplay, Hunter succeeds in creating an atmosphere of brooding menace, together with some pretty mean action scenes. Elegant tracking shots and lingering pans show that Hunter and cinematographer Mark Irwin are not afraid to move the camera away from the boring old midshot — a skill all too rare in movies these days. All in all, a carefully crafted, often surprising piece of work.

Patience Coster

LOVE AT STAKE

Starring Patrick Cassidy, Kelly Preston, Bud Cort, David Graf, Stuart Pankin, Anne Ramsey
Director John Moffitt
Distributor 20.20 Vision
Cert 15, 83 mins

The bullseye would have to be house-sized for this comedy clanger to hit the mark. Set in puritan 'Salem, where the mayor and a visiting judge plan to burn home owners and seize their property for financial gain, it expounds the virtues of being almost innocent.

Childhood sweethearts Miles (Cassidy) and Sara (Preston) begin to get worried as their neighbours go up in smoke and plans for a heavenly shopping mall come to fruition. At the height of their troubles a real witch flies into town, showing that her sort are not so easily dealt with as the daffy, duped peasants.

This supposedly bawdy comedy contains some excellent one line gags between the decidedly wicked judge and mayor. Other set pieces are not so uproarious. If I see the sequence in which two lovers run into each others' arms and miss each other again I will puke. Even that delightful, though now deceased, character actress Anne Ramsey cannot pull this attempted naughty feast up by its knicker elastic.

John Gilbert

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

Starring Maximilian Schell, Jane Seymour, Michael York, Diana Quick
Director Robert Markowitz
Distributor Braveworld
Cert 18, 75 mins

In a tame contemporary television adaptation of Gaston Leroux's nineteenth century novel, Maximilian Schell takes the central role of the Phantom, cutting a very different, though no more valid character than Robert Englund's goremeister.

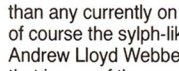
Schell stars as Sandor Korvin, a Hungarian voice teacher who is horribly scarred while avenging the death of his wife. Driven underground by his disfigurement (created by FX maestro and *Vengeance The Demon* director Stan Winston) he spies Maria Gianelli (Seymour), a beautiful understudy at the Royal Opera, and immediately becomes her mysterious mentor.

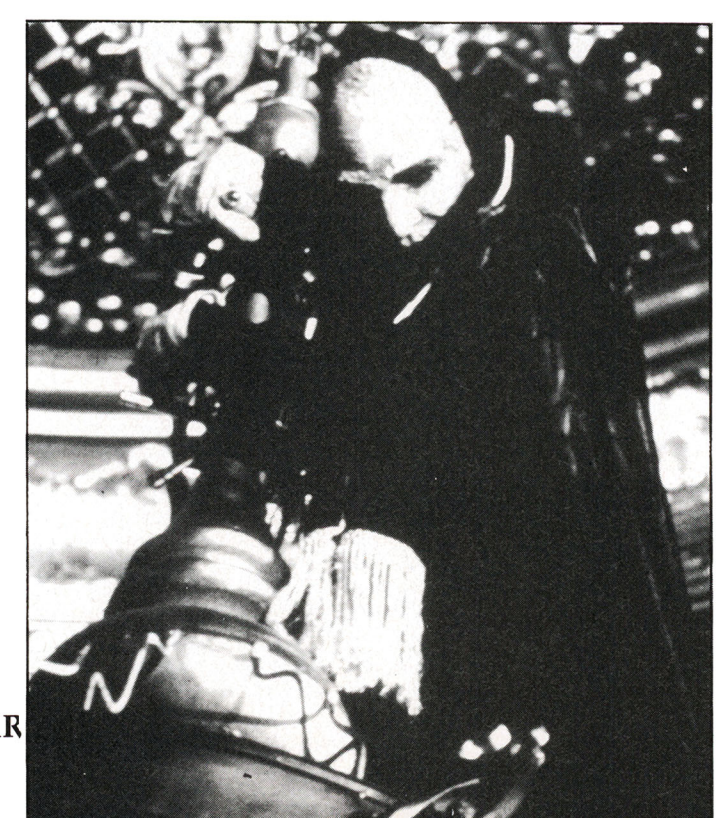
Korvin's lust and his desire to turn Maria into a great diva, soon turn to madness as he learns that she has another love (Michael York). The teacher eventually demands total obedience, and when he doesn't get it, swears revenge on those who have crossed him.

This *Phantom* is more sympathetic than any currently on the market (except of course the sylph-like spector of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical) and that is one of the reasons why it is easier to see the main character's motivation to murder. He is a lonely genius who is now not only denied the personal fame of his music, but also companionship of the girl he loves.

Markowitz's very human opera ghost could never supplant Lloyd Webber's masterpiece, but in a sub-genre which has suddenly come alive, it stands surprisingly tall amongst the rest. It pays homage to the original novel and goes as far as is gorily possible considering the restrictions of television in the late Eighties.

John Gilbert

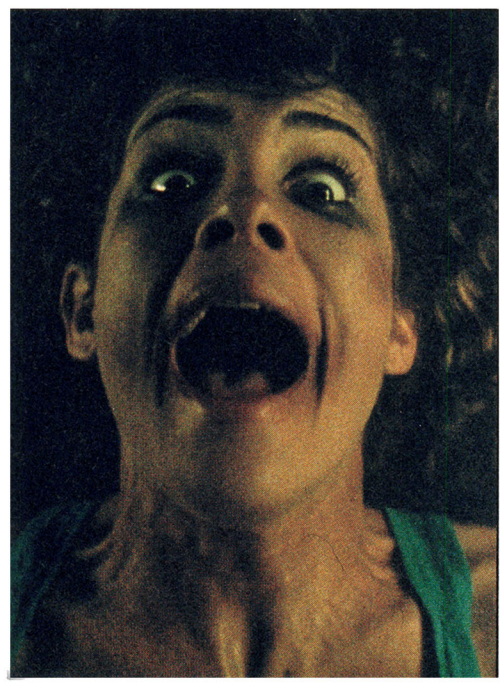




HUMAN SACRIFICE

NEVER CRY DEVIL

Starring Derek Rydall, Michael J Pollard, Elliott Gould, Richard Roundtree
Director Rupert Hitzig
Distributor Medusa Pictures
Cert 18, 88 mins



Director Rupert Hitzig manipulates the audience with ease in this chameleonesque film, which initially takes off as just another college kid teen romance, gradually eases into a darker Hitchcockian *Rear Window* plot and bursts unexpectedly into a full-blooded Satanic ritual killing thriller.

Billy Colton (Derek Rydall) plays the likeable but not very trustworthy college student, who must suffer the consequences of constantly telling tall stories at home and college. No wonder nobody believes him when he witnesses the sacrificial killing of his new and beautiful call-girl neighbour (Shannon Tweed) by none other than his unpleasant, yet to the rest of the world harmless looking history teacher. Denouncing him to the police chief (Richard Roundtree), who is desperate to solve the wave of local prostitute kidnappings and killings, has the expected effect and with no one other than his college girlfriend on his side after a tight escape from an attempt at their life, they enlist the help of an old family friend and burned-out former policeman Devereaux to nail the warped school teacher.

Michael J Pollard is outstanding as the school teacher's retarded brother Stanley, who puts a human touch to the clichéd ritualistic human sacrifices and ceremonies in their mansion's secret hide-ou,t and breathes life into what could otherwise just be another regular Black Magic romp. The film doesn't necessarily deliver everything it promises and also lacks any build-up of suspense (thanks to the sudden demise of most victims and the early denouement of the demon worshipper), but enthralls nonetheless by the early unexpected events and the varied and entertaining characterisations. Definitely a demonically quirky teenage satanic murder mystery... if ever you've seen one.

Franco Frey

■ John Doe has come to visit: Shadowzone

UTTERLY PERVERTED

SOCIETY

Starring: Billy Warlock, Devin Devasquez, Evan Richards, Ben Meyerson
Director Brian Yuzna
Distributor Medusa
Cert 18, 90 mins

Bill's back, this time on video, but thankfully with no noticeable cuts to the utterly perverted finale. If you don't know the storyline yet, well shame on you.

Billy Warlock takes the lead as the apparently maladjusted member of a very rich American family. He begins to believe that he's adopted, especially when a nerdish friend plays a tape on which Bill's sister and parents take part in a little sex and murder. Bill investigates and, eventually, finds that he could be the next victim, not a member of Society.

There's little I can say to add to my review of *Society* in our April issue, other than to thank Mammon that it's arrived on video so quickly. I proclaimed it to be The Movie Of The Year on its theatrical release, and I've seen nothing yet that changes my mind (although *Total Recall* gives it a run for its money for very different reasons). Don't just rent it! Rush out and buy a copy right now.
John Gilbert

■ What a swell party this is: Society

SHADOWZONE

Starring David Beecroft, James Hong, Shawn Weatherly, Miguel Nunez, Louise Fletcher •
Director J S Cardone
Distributor Entertainment In Video
Cert 18, 83 mins

Nasser representative Captain Hickock (Beecroft) is sent to investigate the death of a man who has apparently suffered a stroke when undergoing tests at a newly revitalised laboratory sited deep beneath the Nevada desert. On his arrival, the Captain receives a suspiciously guarded welcome from the small team of research scientists — led by the distinctly odd Dr Van Fleet (Hong).

That night Hickock has a dream in which he secretly witnesses the team undertaking a ghoulish autopsy of the dead man — for purposes seemingly cannibalistic rather than scientific. The following day, his suspicions fully aroused, he demands that the test that killed the man be run on another subject, but he lives to regret his decision when the sleeper taps into another dimension in time and space and unleashes a horrible life force of unlimited evil, that can take on the appearance of anything it wants.

An object lesson in how to remake *Alien* for under a tenner, *Shadowzone* is as cute as a barrowload of lab monkeys, and a hundred times more entertaining. Scripted and directed by J S Cardone for the cut price Band Company, the movie fairly rattles along, combining philosophical debates about transdimensional travel with horror effects that start out predictably tacky, but pull the rug from under the viewer's feet by becoming more gross as the action gains momentum.

Like *Alien, Shadowzone* is a film about incarceration, but here the protagonists are trapped, not in a state of the art spaceship, but in an underground relic of the Sixties. Here the joke is that none of the facilities work — lifts break down, clapped-out junction boxes fuse — as if cunningly to underline the meagreness of the movie's budget.

With a good script, solid performances — especially from Louise Fletcher as the repressed, lip-chewing lab assistant — and tight direction, this movie is a terrific example of how little budgets can make a big impact if placed in the right hands.
Patience Coster

THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH

Starring Frank Stallone, Brenda Vaccaro, Herbert Lom, Christine Lunde, Michelle Hoey, Simon Poland
Director Alan Birkinshaw
Distributor Castle Home Video
Cert 18, 92 mins

If you're expecting a suave and sophisticated remake of Roger Corman's subtle supernatural movie, avert your eyes. Here we have a stalk-and-slash which, albeit slightly above the likes of the *Friday The 13th* and *Halloween* remakes, nevertheless bows in their direction.

The movie has three things going for it: Herbert Lom, some very occasional ambitious photographic direction, and a rock band from the early Seventies whose loutish lead singer thankfully gets

murdered by the mysterious killer in red before the denouement.

Lom is full of wonderful ham as the wealthy socialite party-thrower who invites his fawning acolytes to his luscious Bavarian castle in the middle of nowhere. This bash is to be his last, though whether that is because he's out to murder all those people he's helped in life remains to be seen in the final reel.

You always get one gatecrasher, this time in the form of Elaina, (Hoey) a scandal photographer who forges an invite and then wishes she hadn't. She meets her old flame, Max (Poland), who is now in thrall to a vindictive cradle-snatcher (Vaccaro) and the fun starts there.

A waiter is the first to die, messily, but he's soon followed by Elaina, Dr Karen, the Duke (I wondered why Frank Stallone was in this film — not for his wit surely) and, sadly, Max. The svelte phantom in the red cloak and mask certainly has grand designs for this hapless cast. One is decapitated by the pendulum of a clock (a little in-joke there), one takes up weaving in a manner befitting Robert Englund's Phantom Of The Opera, and another is almost crushed in a wine vat (another little in-joke). You may even be surprised by the finale; suffice it to say that it goes against most genre norms, but is fairly predictable once Max bites the theatrical blood.

One of a series of 21st Century/Birkenshaw Poe productions, *Masque* ranks higher than the blustering *House Of Usher* (starring Oliver Reed), but well below Robert Englund's effective *Phantom Of The Opera*. It will probably disappoint most gore fans, although the loom death is reasonably spectacular, and will put off the fans of subtlety because of its stalk-and-slash mentality. Its total deviation from the Poe or even the Corman concepts makes it more likely to sink, coupled with my incomprehension as to why we need such senseless overworked storylines in this modern age.

John Gilbert

THE WOMAN IN BLACK

Starring Adrian Rawlins, Bernard Hepton, David Daker, Pauline Moran
Director Herbert Wise
Distributor Futuristic
Cert 18, 72 mins

A valiant, though failed, attempt to televise Susan Hill's icy, atmospheric ghost story comes to budget video.

The spectre of the title is a banshee who inhabits an island connected to the mainland by a slender causeway.

Solicitor Arthur Kidd (Rawlins) is sent there by his employer to catalogue the property of the recently deceased inhabitant of a house on the island. Strange things begin to happen as soon as he nears the property in his horsedrawn carriage. He hears a ghostly coach crash into the sea from the causeway and discovers from a local landowner, played by Bernard Hepton, that a young woman and her illegitimate child died years before in a similar accident.

Kidd eventually sees the mysterious woman in black and is driven from the house by her haunting presence. Back in the civilised company of his wife, he believes that he is beyond the ghastly influence of the dead woman's curse, but soon learns that he should have heeded the now dead landowner's advice to have nothing to do with the house on the island.

Susan Hill's supernatural masterpiece no doubt works well on the stage, where it has been for the last few years, but is somewhat strangled on film. There are only a few really tense moments in this drama — the appearance of the woman in the island's graveyard and Kidd's encounter with the woman in his own bedroom being two — but the director's obvious attempts at brooding intensity are nothing more than long sideways glances at a foggy landscape and ponderous characterisation.

Perhaps another director should try a reinterpretation of this marvellous story. This one falls at the first hurdle.

John Gilbert

■ The Woman In Black

SHOCKER

Starring Michael Murphy, Peter Berg, Cami Cooper, Mitch Pileggi
Director Wes Craven
Distributor Guild Home Video
Cert 18, 92 mins

An innovative movie that lost out, according to Craven, because others got their inferior products on the market first.

Mass murderer and television repairman Horace Pinker is caught, tried and fried. But before he dies Pinker sells his soul to the devil and becomes resistant to electrical current. His spirit takes flight first through America's mains system and then with the aid of network television.

The only one able to stand up to Pinker's high tech terror tactics is Jonathan Parker, son of the cop who captured the killer. He has precognitions of Pinker's crimes, but is never quick enough to track him down. The finale is a fiery feast, with Parker following Pinker through various television landscapes and using an old fashioned remote control to slow down the villain.

A shocker this movie may be, but this sub-genre was played out before Craven's film hit the big screen. It's fast-moving, and contains some novel video effects, but doesn't quite fulfil as a horror movie.

John Gilbert

■ Shocker

BUY VIDEO

MASK OF MURDER

Starring Rod Taylor, Valerie Perrin, Christopher Lee
Director Anne Matson
Distributor Braveworld
Cert 18, 90 mins £9.99

More serial killings grace this easily forgettable thriller. For an actor trying to forget his horror past, the undoubtedly talented Christopher Lee slums it as a chief of police trying to catch the white-masked murderer of women in a small Canadian town.

He apparently tracks down and kills his man, but the murders continue and this time the psycho seems to know every step the police are about to take in the hunt. Soon it becomes obvious that this copycat criminal is hiding behind a police badge and Lee must cope with suspicions about his own force.

Mundane at its best, *Mask Of Murder* nevertheless has an air of reality about it. The downbeat direction of photography, the Canadian backwoods feel and the behaviour of the cast all go to convince that this story could be real. Unfortunately, that vital spark of director's imagination is not there and you come away feeling that, yes, murder is messy, but real life is boring — as are the lengthy conversation pieces in this mausoleum of a film.

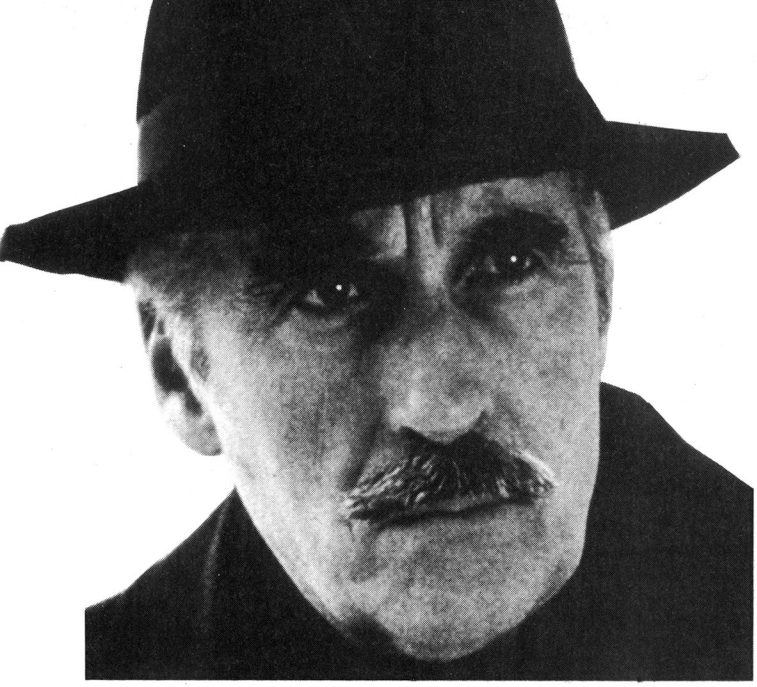
John Gilbert

DOCTOR WHO

THE FIVE DOCTORS

BBC Home Video have released two more adventures from the classic science fiction series, priced £9.99 each. *The Five Doctors* takes us back to the Peter Davison era and beyond, he and the previous Doctor incarnations (the late William Hartnell replaced by Richard Hurndall) are taken out of space and time and dumped in Galifrey's Death Zone. He's been deposited in this dangerous section of his home world for an unknown purpose by an unknown Time Lord, but the answer is sure to be found in the nearby tomb of an ancient Lord, Rassilon's Tower.

This 'class reunion' was something of a disappointment for me when it was broadcast in 1983, because it lacked my



■ Police chief Christopher Lee in Mask Of Murder

favourite Doctor, Tom Baker. He chose not to take part in the celebratory programme and therefore spends most of it in a space/time vortex, his scant scenes taken from an untransmitted story never completed due to a technicians' dispute.

However, even with just *four* Doctors, it's the usual enjoyable yarn, brief appearances made by a Yeti and a Dalek but the leading bad guys being Cybermen and that most evil of Time Lords, the Master, who was actually sent to *rescue* the Doctor! Performances aren't that special but aren't bad, the best being Patrick Troughton's Doctor, an amusing and endearingly stubborn man. As it features four-and-a-bit Doctors, *The Five Doctors* is a good choice if you want to buy just one Time Lord video but don't know which.

Warren Lapworth

DOCTOR WHO

THE BRAIN OF MORBIUS

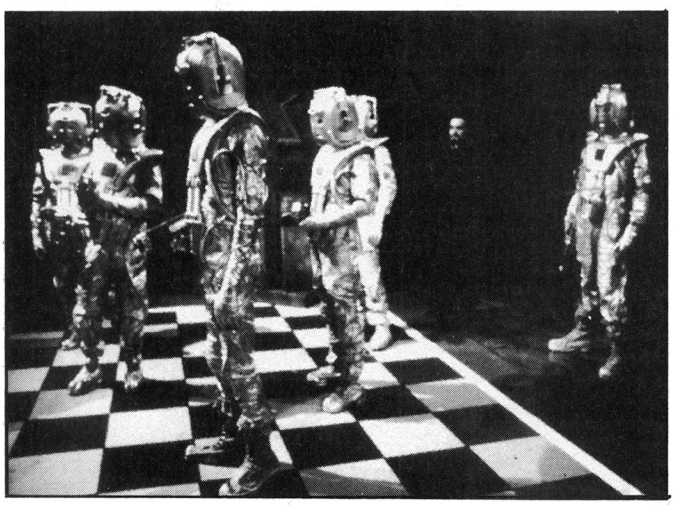
Field disturbances in space force Tom Baker's Doctor to land on Karn in *The Brain of Morbius*, an event he's none too pleased about. It being such a barren and stormy planet, you can hardly blame him. But scientist Solon, aided by Condo, is very pleased at his arrival. He's constructing a body to house the brain of Morbius, a Time Lord so evil he was executed, but he lacks the all-important head. The Doctor's cranium proves perfect but he's rather attached to it, and his evasion of Solon isn't helped by an ancient sisterhood, who believe he wants to steal their life elixir, and his vulnerable, squealing assistant, Sarah Jane Smith.

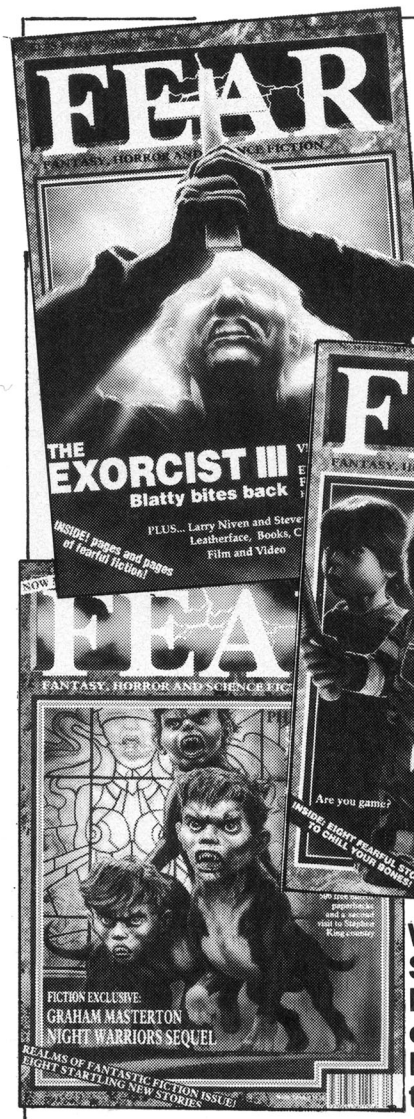
This 1975 adventure is a departure from the Doctor's usual style, being more gothic, even Shelleyan, than scientific or futuristic. Indeed, it's a Doctor Who Frankenstein story, Solon making his prize creation, his monster, aided but mostly abetted by his stupid Igor-like assistant, Condo. The sisterhood adds an occult flavour but slows down the story; the Doctor's shuttled back and forth between their temple and Solon's castle so the main scenes of the story arrive at varying intervals rather than concurrently.

Pace isn't helped by inclusion of the start and end titles of each episode. This lets you know where each episode ended, yes, but visual-searching through the titles then watching the last scene you saw for a second time is no fun. However, if you have a little patience, it will be rewarded with *The Brain of Morbius*; it stands as one of the better and most unconventional Doctor Who stories made and certainly one of the best available on video.

Warren Lapworth

■ The Five Doctors — looks a bit like six cybermen to me!





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ALL TIME GREATS

CBS/Fox have released four family fantasy/sci-fi films under their All-Time Greats banner, each priced £9.99. Made in the Fifties and Sixties, they're familiar, friendly productions that show the roots of the fantastical genre movie. Warren Lapworth casts a nostalgic eye over the foursome.

JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH

First up (or rather down) is *Journey To The Center Of The Earth*, 1959's cinematic translation of Jules Verne's classic adventure. Edinburgh, 1880, Lindenbrook (James Mason), a geology professor, is celebrating his knighthood. His star pupil, McKewan presents him with a piece of rock expelled from an Italian volcano. Inside is a plumb-bob hewn from Icelandic stone. This inspires Lindenbrook to follow in the footsteps of Sarknerson, an explorer who attempted a journey to the center of the Earth. He teams up with McKewan, the widow of a rival, a hunky Icelander and a duck called Gertrude (sic), but has an enemy in the form of the ruthless Count, a distant relative of Sarknerson.

As ever, Mason is instantly endearing and carries the story along, despite the frequent disappearance of his Scottish accent. The best character is the highly cute and amusing duck, while the worst is probably McKewan (Pat Boone), an impetuous student who gets separated from the rest of the group and wanders aimlessly. It's only during this time that the film drags — surprising as its running time is a masssive 129 minutes.

The main problem with *Journey To The Center Of The Earth* is that getting there is more than half the fun. Commendable rocky sets back the amusing downward journey but there's just an encounter with a few dinosaurs (lizards treated with make-up) and a monster with a trombone roar before the hurried trip back to the surface. Ultimately, an unfulfilling experience.

VOYAGE TO THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA

An aquatic trip for *Voyage To The Bottom Of The Sea*, which begins with the successful testing of Seaview, a giant atomic-powered submarine. The brainchild of an Admiral Nelson, its final trials are held beneath the ice of the North Pole. When it resurfaces, the sky is golden red.

The Van Allen radiation belt surrounding the Earth has been set alight and is burning uncontrollably. It's gradually heating the planet to a fatal temperature. But if a nuclear missile is launched from a certain location at a certain time, the radiation it releases should force the belt out into space. Only the Seaview can reach that location in time.

...Which is all well and good (if improbable) but this potentially exciting race against time fails to promote any feelings of urgency whatsoever. The first major scene is a dreary tour of the sub (perhaps an interesting insight in 1961, its year of release) and from there the pace doesn't pick up.

The Admiral (Walter Pidgeon) raises an eyebrow or two when he becomes obsessed with the launch of the missile, and a grim religious fanatic the crew rescue makes a welcome addition to the cast. The bottom of the sea has no significance for any of them, an unavoidable fact which indicates this movie's misguided, unadventurous direction.

■ Pat Boone has a nasty en-count-er in Journey To The Center Of The Earth

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL

Does the phrase *Klaatu barrada nikto* mean anything to you? They're the intriguing alien words from the climax of *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, a moralistic tale that's firmly sci-fi. A UFO lands in Washington, its humanoid occupant, Klaatu, and his huge robot guardian, Gort, coming in peace. His message is one of warning: do not spread your aggressive ways to other worlds or the Earth will be destroyed. However, the humans are so violent that he's shot before he can even begin his speech.

In hospital, attempts to arrange a meeting with the world's leaders fail. Klaatu escapes from enforced confines and, under the name of Carpenter, lodges with the Bensons. Young Billy becomes his companion and they contact a leading scientist to find some other way of spreading the word. Meanwhile, all Washington is on the alien's trail.

Watching this brought back fond memories of its TV showings; it's my favourite genre film of the Fifties. From the opening scene it gets straight into the story and barely lulls, Michael Rennie as Klaatu is a remarkably human but likeable, caring alien that grabs your attention. Although his mission is to prevent war elsewhere, the real message behind *The Day The Earth Stood Still* is that people should avoid aggressive acts against their fellow man and put the energy to positive use.

At nine feet in height, sleek silver Gort obviously has the greatest screen presence and is one of the greatest robots in the history of cinema, up there with Robbie the Robot and R2-D2.

ARYAN ALLURE

LADYHAWKE

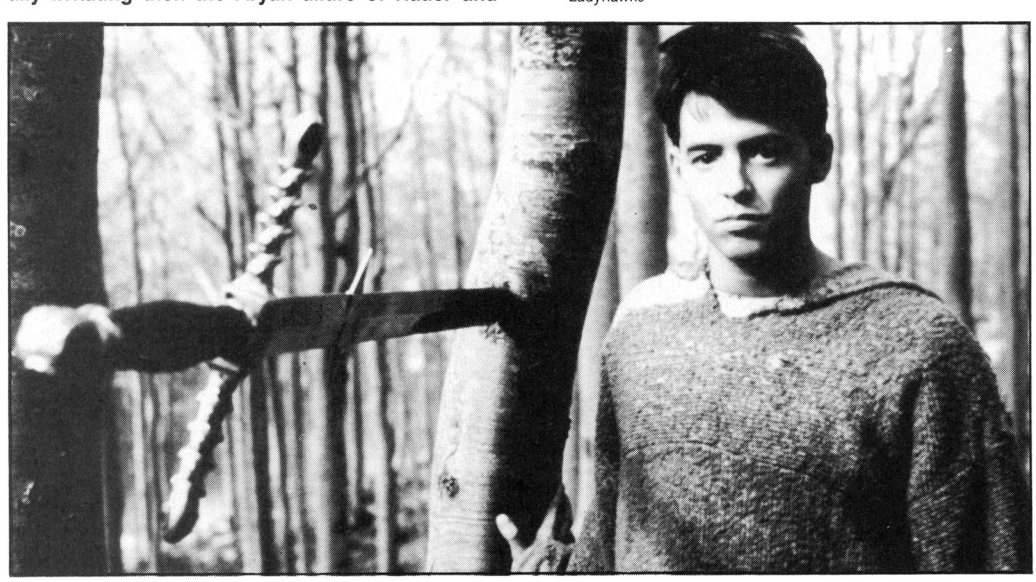
Starring Matthew Broderick, Rutger Hauer, Michelle Pfeiffer, Leo McKern
Director Richard Donner
Distributor CBS/Fox
Cert PG, 117 mins

With its marvellously romantic central theme of eternal love battling against extreme adversity, *Ladyhawke* is as much a lush epic as a sword and sorcery fable.

The presence of Matthew Broderick as the pick-pocket 'Mouse' and the main point of audience identification is a clear indication of the film's attempt at youth market appeal; but if older viewers find his 'mischievous' performance occasionally irritating then the Aryan allure of Hauer and Pfeiffer is the stuff of which grown-up fantasies are made, and they play the star-crossed lovers with total conviction.

Aided most notably by Vittorio Storaro's fabulous, sweeping camerawork, Richard Donner directs with a generally light touch (save perhaps for the schmaltzy finale) a film that is both compelling and moving (though how the producers talked him into a Status Quo meets the Vienna Philharmonic soundtrack, God alone knows). Minor quibbles aside, however, this is a riveting yarn, elegantly told.

Patience Coster



■ Matthew Broderick gives teen appeal to Ladyhawke

■ 'Don't know about you Cap'n, but I can't hear a damned word': The Day The Earth Stood Still

Played by a local cinema commissionaire, he's threatening even when standing still, in contrast to the often irritatingly aimable Bobby.

Of the four videos, it's *The Day The Earth Stood Still* that deserves the 'All Time Great' tag. Its sets and effects are great for its time — 1951 — and it deals with aliens intelligently and sensitively. Well worth a tenner.

FANTASTIC VOYAGE

Yet more travelling in *Fantastic Voyage*, which features another submarine. This one, however, is small and is made very much smaller still so that it can be injected into the bloodstream of a scientist. He's the holder of some very important information that's vital to national safety, but has dangerous blood clots in his brain.

The sub's five-man crew have only one hour before they and the sub begin to grow back to normal size but the journey to the brain appears to be an easy one. That's before a current drags them into the jugular vein and away from the head, just the first of many biological difficulties they have to deal with.

Putting aside the ludicrous and scientifically impossible idea of shrinking a mini-sub to the size of a pin head, the prospect of floating through a person's body is an amusing one. In practice, there's simply not enough story to fill the 96 minutes running time. After a moody, voiceless but boring introduction and the drawn-out shrinking and injection of the sub, 35 minutes have passed. The rest of the movie is regularly punctuated by repetitive views of drifting blood cells and walls of tissue.

Effects are pretty naff and would have seemed weak when *Fantastic Voyage* was released in 1966. The frequently seen blood cells are brightly coloured oil bubbles, while other parts of the body are made of sheet plastic and various types of cloth.

The cast, which includes Donald Pleasance, Edmund O'Brien and a pre-op Raquel Welch, is a strong and well-known one, and good performances are put in all round, Pleasance as his usual paranoid, restrained madman. Unfortunately, they're not enough to drag this drifting stretched adventure above the average.

STAR TREK

The Original TV Series, Episodes 49 and 50: A Piece Of The Action, By Any Other Name
Starring William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, DeForrest Kelley
Directors James Komack, Marc Daniels
Distributor CIC Video
Cert U, 98 mins, £9.99

Nice to see that the series that first spawned the Trekkie phenomenon in books, films and rejuvenated TV life continues its course on sell through video. To have all episodes to date you'd spend around £250, a sum no doubt well worth investing for any follower of superior pulp science fiction. No other TV — or for that matter, cinema — product has achieved such a high consistency of sensible, non-violent, intriguing and above all humane and inspiring entertainment.

The sets may be cheap, but like the outdated look of *Dan Dare* they cannot detract from the good spirit and inventiveness that imbues every story with an innate liking and admiration for ordinary humanity which motivates both creations: in a way, Kirk could be Dare.

No point in reviewing these particular episodes, but to say they reflect the humorous and the idealistic missionary human facets of the protagonists and are both very entertaining. Fleeting, lightweight stories they may often be, but the sum total of all the parts is a saga that Hollywood TV, and Gene Roddenberry for initiating it, can be justly proud of, and will be remembered by despite changing fashions — a classic achievement.

Oliver Frey

■ If you don't know who these guys are, where *have* you been? Gosh, and don't they look young... ?

DARK STAR

Starring Brian Narelle, Cal Kuniholm, Dre Pahich, Dan O'Bannon
Director John Carpenter
Distributor Castle Hendring
Cert PG, 85 minutes, £9.99

There's no accounting for taste, and *Dark Star* is one of those weird cult movies that's never going to have a broad appeal. It started off as a college movie project, much like George Lucas' *THX 1138*, and was originally a 16mm, 45 minute student short. When it was decided to release the film theatrically, it was transferred to 35mm with an extra 38 minutes of footage. Direction is by John Carpenter, who of course went on to direct *Halloween* and *The Thing* among many others, and he co-wrote the script with Dan O'Bannon. The latter also supervised the surprisingly good special FX (considering the budget) and turned in some a unsurprisingly awful acting as Pinhead. In fact, the acting throughout is dull, with the alien (a beachball with hands) coming out on top by some way.

The plot concerns the spaceship *Dark Star* travelling through the galaxy, making solar systems safe for colonisation by blowing apart any unstable planets. The bombs used are the most intelligent members of the crew, and one of the best jokes concerns a particularly independent-minded bomb getting involved in an existential argument with the crew. Unfortunately the ship's captain is virtually dead, all but killed in an accident, and his deep frozen body provides a genuinely startling image. The only other major character is the ship's computer which has a coolly unemotive woman's voice, much like that in *Alien*. In fact, probably the most interesting parts of *Dark Star* are all the ideas which were done so much better in Ridley Scott's SF classic — also scripted by Dan O'Bannon. The blue collar crew and beaten up living quarters are much the same, right down to the page three type decor! The computer room is almost identical to that in *Alien* and there's even a hunt through the airshafts, although a beachball isn't quite as menacing as Giger's creation.

This is hardly enough to make for compulsive entertainment, and after watching it in bits before, I must say finally watching the complete movie was extraordinarily dull. Even John Carpenter's customary soundtrack is banal. There are some interesting ideas, but scenes go on far too long — particularly Pinhead's pursuit of the beachball alien. Possibly the original 45 min short was better, but as it is *Dark Star* might be worth watching once — there aren't that many satirical SF films — but only ardent fans will want to buy it.

Stuart Wynne

ET, The Extra-Terrestrial

Starring Henry Thomas, Drew Barrymore, Dee Wallace, Peter Coyote
Director Steven Spielberg
Distributor CIC Video
Cert U, 110 mins, £9.99

'On video to buy at last!' exult the converted. 'Groan!' sigh the cold hearted.

Spielberg's tale of the lost alien adopted and helped home by human kids has been his only unremittingly cute movie. Since this he's contented himself with producing excellent to good derivatives directed by talented disciples while he's crafted his way into other areas.

Simplistically joyous this film may be, but like fairy tales of old it grabs the heart and reminds one of the innocent likes and dislikes, dramas and longings of childhood where adult life has not yet tainted us with the reality of failure, despondency and cynicism. Wouldn't you like ET to appear in your backyard? If you scoff, the chances are you daren't admit it to the world or have forgotten how to feel sudden and spontaneous joy with no strings attached.

Never saccharine, often on the edge, Spielberg's quest into and evocation of young dreams come true is as spellbinding as his own bubbling creativity: both should and hopefully will retain their childlike vibrancy.

Oliver Frey

■ And here's your favourite cuddly toy...

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BOOKS

THE FIFTH PROFESSION

David Morrell
Publisher Headline
Format HB £12.95

We all know what the oldest profession in the world is — but did you know that executive protection is the fifth? It's a highly skilled job in which the operative, trained in the use of weapons, martial arts and surveillance, acts as bodyguard to the world's glitterati. Like the Comitatus and Samurai, they are willing to die in order to satisfy or avenge their employer's honour.

Savage and Akira — the former American, the latter Japanese — both abide by this strict code of martial ethics. Meeting for the first time to protect a mysterious oriental called Kamichi, they soon discover that their pasts are figments of their own imaginations, perhaps programmed by the unknown enemy.

Trouble begins with the Kamichi assignment. Savage is beaten by unknown Japanese assailants and, as consciousness leaves him, he sees Kamichi sliced in two by sword and Akira beheaded. Several painful months later the protector is rescuing a ex-movie star's sister from the hands of her violent, but powerful, husband when he again confronts Akira.

Both think the other dead, and both are surprised when their murdered employer Kamichi turns up in a news bulletin as a ruthless Japanese politician. Savage and Akira team up to crack the mystery, but just as they come close to solving the mystery important witnesses die and new mysteries open.

The executive protectors go to Japan to discover why their last mission went so disastrously wrong and, more importantly, to find out just who they are. Savage may believe that he is the ultimate physical specimen, but even mind may not be strong enough to withstand the truth.

David Morrell, whose successful novels *First Blood, Brotherhood Of The Rose* and *Fraternity Of The Stone* have set the standard for contemporary thriller writers, and combines mental and physical horrors with tough action thrills to produce a book which will entice genre and mainstream readers alike. Do yourself a favour and add him to your favourite authors list.

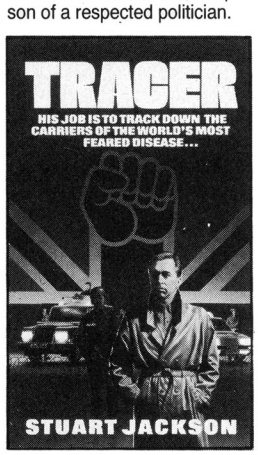
John Gilbert

TRACER

Stuart Jackson
Publisher Sphere
Format PB £3.50

By the end of the 20th century, AIDS has become the epidemic we all knew it would be. Worse still, the neo-fascist National Democratic Party is in power and its policy is to crush all high risk groups and round up anyone who has the HIV strain.

The Tracers of the title are agents charged with the apprehension, and possible elimination, of HIV suspects. Nick Gorman is a particular member of their organisation, until he is put on the trail of Jonathan Harris, the probably gay son of a respected politician.



As his manhunt progresses, he realises that perhaps he is wrong, and that the government is using the HIV crisis to destroy its enemies and keep control of the population. Gorman's own computer records are eventually doctored, indicating that he too has the deadly virus. He must go on the run and prove his innocence. But how to do that with a powerful military dictatorship on your back?

It is hard to believe that *Tracer* is Jackson's first novel. The plot is tightly constructed, terrifyingly logical and ably researched. Correspondingly, the characterisation is adept and not stereotyped.

Somehow I think that this type of fiction will provide a controversial, but stable future for science fiction. New craftsmen like Jackson are still rare, but once word of this novel gets around, I'm sure we'll see more talent tempted into the field — as well as the obvious imitators.

John Gilbert

BLOOD AND GRIT

Simon Clark
Publisher BBR Books
Format PB £3.99

In the Clive Barker/Ramsey Campbell tradition of 'realistic' rather than 'escapist' horror, Simon Clark is the promising author of two stories in **FEAR** and another in DAW's *The Year's Best Horror 14*.

Clark is from Yorkshire, and it shows. As the title suggests, the six stories in *Blood and Grit* set visceral horror against a background of Northern grime. Highlights are the Barkeresque 'Skinner Lane' and the symbolist 'Revelling In Brick'; all of the stories resonate and confront, while the dialogue and descriptions ring true.

The only flaw lies in the presentation: this small press paperback is slim and overpriced, with inappropriately cartoon-like illustrations and blank pages between some of the stories. Other design faults include the garish cover, bad typographical errors, and the strange skipping of a line between paragraphs.

However, despite the packaging, Clark is worth seeking out. Mail order only, cheques payable to Chris Reed, from 16 Somersall Lane, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S40 3LA.

Graham Evans

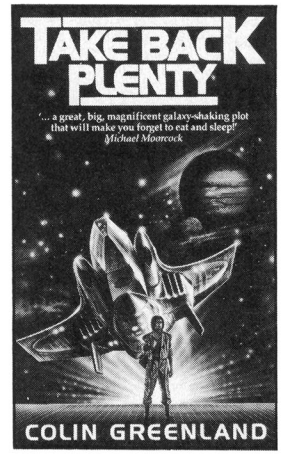
TAKE BACK PLENTY

Colin Greenland
Publisher Unwin
Format PB £6.99

Most publishers like to make money on easily understood trends. They certainly don't go against the market and publish something that is out of vogue. Having said that, there appears to have been little that Unwin could do when Colin Greenland presented them with *Take Back Plenty* but to publish.

Yes, this book is most definitely a space opera, and they went out of fashion when *Star Wars* was history and the last *Dune* novel saw publication. But this book might just single-handedly reverse that negative trend.

Tabitha Jute has only one real friend, her ship called the Alice Liddell. She's a space trucker who happily takes on passengers, but when a peculiar bunch of cabaret artists ask for a lift off a derelict alien habitat called Plenty, she almost refuses. Her subconscious reasons become clear as she's chased around the galaxy by aliens, pirates and intergalactic police, with only her shipboard computer as a friend. The final straw breaks when she's shipwrecked on Venus.



Unusual for several reasons, most notably the SF heroine and her female computer, *Take Back Plenty* also offers the reader a look into space without the necessity of constant technobabble. The author is also very visual in his approach, as if the book was written with the movies in mind, and I suspect that this fact plus the easily digestible style will draw more than the usual SF crowd to its pages.

John Gilbert

SPOCK'S WORLD

Diane Duane
Publisher Pan
Format PB, £3.99

For 180 years the Federation and Vulcan have maintained an uneasy alliance. But due to anti-Terran feelings a meeting has been called by Vulcan's ruling council to decide the fate of this pact. In this latest *Star Trek* novel Captain Kirk, Dr McCoy and Spock are called to give evidence in favour of the Federation. Also present is Sarek (Spock's father) who as Ambassador to Earth stands to lose everything if the vote goes the wrong way. But against them is Spock's old flame T'Pring (fans of the TV series will remember that she was at one time destined to be Spock's mate, though this match was prevented at the last minute by Kirk engaging Spock in combat). T'Pring's anti-Terran feelings are echoed by other Vulcans; the task will not be an easy one.

This is different to the usual Enterprise adventure mainly because, apart from a brief appearance by the rest of the crew at the start, the story revolves around the struggles of the Enterprise's three senior officers. Interspersed with the main story is a history of the native Vulcans, from the primitive people who 'spoke' to one another by thought to the logical, emotion-suppressing modern day beings. I personally love the *Star Trek* genre, but sadly I found it difficult to get to grips with this novel, probably because the story jumps from chapter to chapter between the council meeting of the present and the Vulcan history lesson. By the time I'd finished reading one part of the story I'd completely forgotten what had happened in the last chapter. However, if you are willing to persevere *Spock's World* is an interesting insight into the lives of the Vulcan people.

Mark Caswell

Not To Be Missed

Recommended

Fair

Poor

Diabolical

HORROR

Adventureland
Black Milk
Blood Circle
Blood and Grit
Encyclopedia Of Forbidden Knowledge
Hardcore Horror No.2
The Unseen

SCIENCE FICTION

Beyond Lies The Wub
Federation World
Hyperion
Spock's World
Take Back Plenty
Tracer

FANTASY

Back To The Future
Beauty And The Beast
Moonheart
Princes Of Sandastre

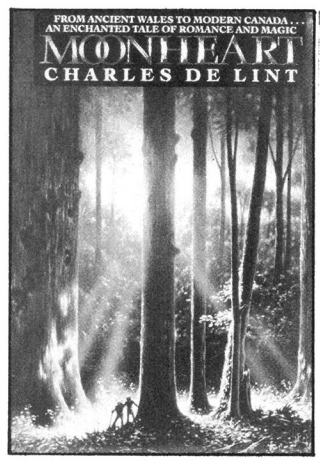
THRILLER

The Fifth Profession

FANTASTICAL FORCES

MOONHEART

Charles De Lint
Publisher Pan
Format HB £13.95



A young woman walks into a quaint little antiques shop and discovers clues to an Otherworld very different to the bustling streets of Ottowa, Canada, where she lives.

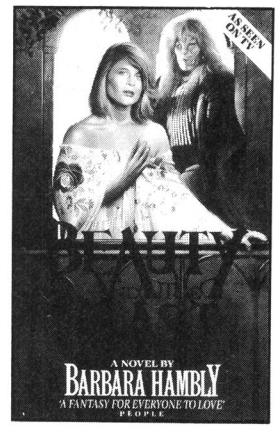
The magical realm is reminiscent of some of the best Welsh landscapes, rather than the arid Canadian outback, and provides a counterpoint through which De Lint's literary magic can work. At first, you believe that the plot is about to dive into twee faeriedom but, although this Otherworld looks physically wonderful, an evil formless presence is working to gather its forces and wreak a terrible revenge on the people of both worlds.

This force might sound like the Dark Lord Sauron in Tolkien's *Lord Of The Rings* or, to some extent, even Morgana in Mallory's *Morte D'Arthur*, but De Lint's fantasy characters have the advantage of being well drawn and comtemporary. Rather than going for orcs and elves favoured even now by some contemporary authors, this writer takes a stereotype and mixes a generous helping of reality — as evidenced by the portrayal of Kieran the mystical folk musician who you believe might know more about this particular plot than he's saying, and the bloodhound Canadian Mountie.

On the fantastical side, characters such as the intriguing Tom Henwr, whose motives are for the most part hidden, seem to have been drawn from legendary archetype. There is enough to identify particular favourite character types, but the author has expertly drawn a cloak over the inner workings of his creations.

***Moonheart* is a deeply drawn book in which the fantastical forces of warmth and cold meet and fight, rather like opposing elements or tides. De Lint's poetic prose focuses on more than the simplistic battle between good and evil. It investigates the emotional nature of evil and shows how it can suborn the most powerful of creatures.**

De Lint is the Cat Stevens of fantasy. His work reaches to the very heart of humanity, a task which is, I believe, best explored in the archetypal terms of the genre. *Moonheart* is powerful stuff, and an important read for any fan and an important British debut for this talented writer.
John Gilbert



nurses her back to health.

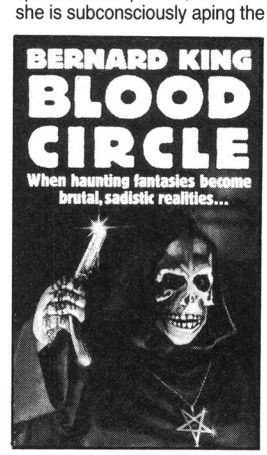
One thing that novelisations can often achieve better than television series is a lingering sense of character. *Beauty And The Beast* is a very emotive series and yet Barbara Hambly seems to trawl the nooks and crannies of the two central characters and create a somewhat different portrayal of both plot and theme. Also, the book is immediately apparent as fantasy, but mainstream readers who were drawn into the original series — including my mum! — should pick it up and read.
John Gilbert

BLOOD CIRCLE

Bernard King
Publisher Sphere
Format PB £3.50

I am constantly being told that black magic and the occult are literary trappings of the past as far as the horror genre is concerned, but then I keep coming up against books such as *Blood Circle*.

The novel begins with a superstitious and somewhat naive 15 year old girl called Andrea searching a graveyard for herbs. She disturbs a couple performing some sort of perverted sex rite amongst the tombstones and, as the man's seed spurts into his partner, Andrea finds that she is subconsciously aping the act.

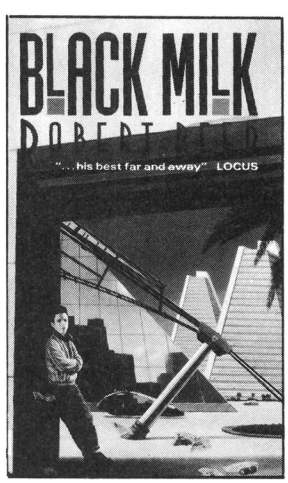


She is drawn to sensuality, but it is not until she's married and returns to the area of Ringley Abbey that her sexuality spills over and demands the satisfaction of satanic copulatory rites performed within a ritual chamber beneath the Abbey. As the possession takes hold, she betrays her husband Josh and becomes involved with other lovers, and in the types of devilish ritual she witnessed as a child.

Bernard King has written a lively and, more importantly, a contemporary black magic story which shows that ritualistic

BLACK MILK

Robert Reed
Publisher Orbit
Format PB £6.99



The author of *The Hormone Jungle* presents yet another look at a future governed by genetic manipulation. At first, Reed appears to protest at the current trend of thought, proclaiming that genetics can create a perfect society, freeing humanity of its worst nightmares while providing special groups within society with incredible powers.

Ryder is the young leader of one of those groups. His particular mutant abilities provide him with a photographic memory and hypersensitive senses, all given to him by the Frankenstein of this new order, Dr Florida.

The doctor is a nice enough guy — kind, generous, you know the type — but his experiments begin to threaten humanity. It all starts with the creation of drone creatures called sparkhounds. Florida intends to use them as indestructible workers on planets which are currently inhospitable to humans. However, give a dog consciousness, and it pees in the most awkward of places. The sparkhounds decided they want to take over Earth, enslaving the race that created them. Ryder and Florida are charged with getting rid of them.

Reed's exotic new novel shows a society which is too perfect, whose governing minds think they can now do no wrong. It's a loquacious first person mix of good intentions and their not always so admirable results. Reed describes an Earth which, at first, appears seductive, but by the end of the of the book you feel satisfied with where you are, in a world with all its Thatcherite imperfections.
John Gilbert

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Author Barbara Hambly
Publisher Unwin
Format PB £3.99

Novelisations don't as a rule endear themselves to my sense of what's right and what's wrong on the literary scene, but Barbara Hambly's elegant handling of this television series has to be read to be believed. Everyone should know the story, but if you don't then here goes.

Catherine is a successful lawyer, capable of prosecuting the most odious criminals, but when she's mugged on the street she can do little but give in and be viciously beaten to a pulp. Enter Vincent, part man, part beast, who

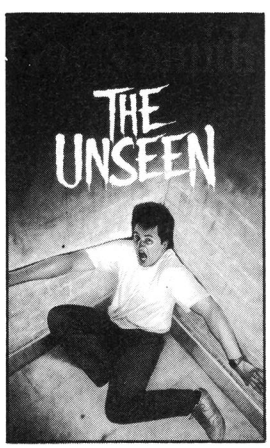
symbols and litanies can be espoused within horror without losing the thriller edge. It is also the second time he has attempted and pulled off such a feat. Eagle-eyed readers may have caught his previous novel *Witchbeast*, which despite its fantasy-oriented title, is a fully fledged horror novel. I only hope he continues to write with such skill and clarity in this increasingly popular vein.
John Gilbert

THE UNSEEN

Guy N Smith
Publisher Sphere
Format PB £3.50

Probably the most abused film plot of the past two years, Guy N Smith's latest shocker proves that subject matter can be done beyond death.

Ed Cain undergoes a terrifying metamorphosis as he regains consciousness after what should have been a fatal accident. An unseen force has entered his body and intends to take over, destroying everything and everyone within its reach.



When will the author get off this terrible, prolific hobbyhorse? It's not as if he cannot write — *Fiend* and *Mania* certainly prove that point. Perhaps he should stick with that old saying, 'less is more', and turn out one quality book a year rather than three meagre and easily forgettable efforts.
Mark Westerby

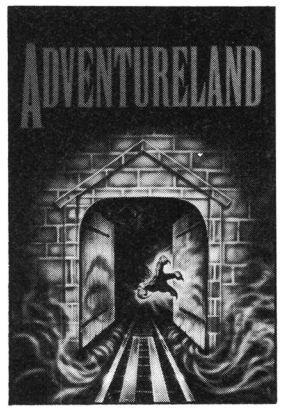
ADVENTURELAND

Stephen Harris
Publisher Headline
Format PB £12.95

First time horror novelists have a tendency to choose the obvious, and lay themselves open for critical attack. It usually requires a skilled writer to take a cliché, such as the vampires of *'Salem's Lot*, and turn in a masterpiece.

Adventureland is not a work of genius, but Steve Harris has proved that there is, surprisingly, a little life left in the ghost train stereotype, and that he's the one that's found it.

Teenager Dave Carter and his girlfriend Sally Harrison stand by helplessly as friends and neighbours from their town start to disappear. The focal point of these disappearances appears to be a funfair and, in particular, the ghost train on which the first victim



originally did not want to ride.

Fantasy clashes with reality as more people disappear and Dave is attacked by supernatural creatures for apparently no reason. Eventually, we are led onto the ghost train and realise that, most unoriginally, it takes the rider straight to hell. The book, however, is grippingly — though sometimes over — written and Harris has a feel for plot structure and an ability to convey character through dialogue which is usually missing in beginner writers.

You'll also find that many of the book's locations could be in your own back yard — Harris's restaurant, for instance, and even the funfair which could have settled not too far from my home. Harris is a writer to watch. He admirably straddles the field between gross-out and subtlety, and can even integrate humour with his horror. It's bold stuff, that grows on you.
John Gilbert

BEYOND LIES THE WUB
VOLUME 1 OF THE COLLECTED STORIES OF PHILIP K DICK

Philip K Dick
Publisher Grafton
Format PB £5.99

In 1982, Philip K Dick made the ultimate showbiz career move — by dying. This virtually infallible tactic, combined with the impact on the entire SF genre of *Blade Runner*, assured him massive sales and plenty of critical acclaim. His old books, often seen in junk shops for 25p, only needed the slogan 'By the author of *Blade Runner*' over a new, glossy Foss cover to give them a whole new shelf life in WH Smiths. The imminent release of another hugely expensive movie loosely based on a Dick story — Paul Verhoeven's *Total Recall* — has given Grafton reason enough to milk the back catalogue again. So here we have the first of five mammoth compilations of Dick's short stories, presented in chronological order. The 25 stories collected in volume one were written when Dick was 'making his first impact as a writer' (nobody had heard of him) and 'serve as an ideal introduction to his work' (he's written better).

Dick's greatest failure as a writer was his frequent inability to create real people to inhabit his hallucinogenically-inspired worlds. He could flesh out murky characters, suggest personalities, but all too often there was a hollowness to his works, caused by Dick's intellectual obsession with bizarre alternate worlds. The characters he

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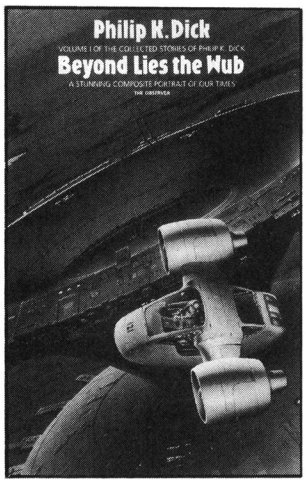
Eastern Daily Press

DAVID GEMMELL

LEGEND

uses to explore these worlds can seem to be nothing more than laboratory rats, who we care nothing for, but they are there to illustrate Dick's ideas in a typically self-destructive fashion. They wander about their respective realities, looking for God, emotional attachment, proof of self-existence, which they inevitably never find (probably because Dick himself never did). But we are never asked to feel sympathy, we are just spectators observing the experiment. It was only in Dick's larger, more complex books that he created 'real people'. Rick Deckard's obsessive need for the status symbol of an animal was real, we couldn't help but empathise with him. 'Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep', 'Flow My Tears' and a few other novels were great books — not just intellectually interesting SF.



This compilation is just an artist's sketchbook, doodles betraying his constant preoccupations — God, perceptions of reality, the disorder of society and the psychopaths it creates — populated by cardboard cutout characters, the Kafkaesque paranoid, the invisible, isolated 'non-person'. (How shrewd for Schwarzenegger to be cast as Dick's stereotypical nobody in *Total Recall* — pure genius!)

There are three or four knock-down-dead parables here (*Beyond Lies The Wub*, *The Preserving Machine*, *Meddler*) which though suffering from all the above listed faults, scrape by into brilliance through sheer wit and imagination. Of course these have already appeared in older, more discerning compilations. The remaining stories alternate between mildly interesting 'what if?' tales and downright silly SF pulp, always designed to conclude with that patented Philip K Dick mind-fuck, but usually not quite making it.

The lack of editorial control over this new Dick material, and the mediocre introduction, can only be explained by the dubious privilege publishers grant the deceased — anything goes!

Mark Wynne

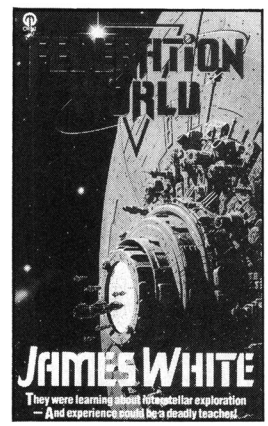
FEDERATION WORLD

James White
Publisher Orbit
Format PB £3.50

Most SF heroes acquit themselves admirably when faced with dangers in the far future, but Earth-humans Martin and Beth, the protagonists in James White's new novel *Federation World* are not equipped to deal with the high-tech society in which they find themselves.

They could have been invited to live on Federation World, an idyllic place where the favoured few of civilisations discovered by The Federation Of Galactic Sentients can live in peace, but they weren't. Rather, they were teamed up to train as agents dedicated to First Contact with other races.

At first they feel confident of their task, but soon they are left to fend for themselves, with a huge, state of the art ship, and absolutely no idea exactly what's out there, in their path in space. Any errors in this most sensitive of



assignments could have appalling consequences and lead to intergalactic catastrophe. But Martin and Beth are not prepared for an assignment which brings them into conflict with a society they know very well — the citizens of Earth.

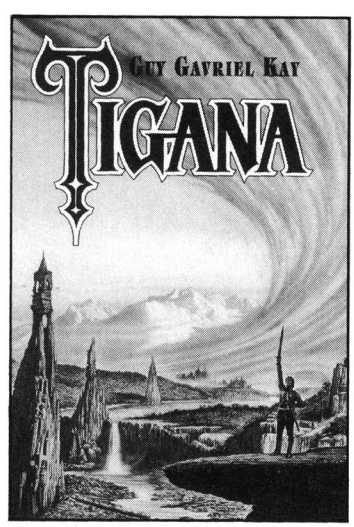
White's quirky and humorous novel takes the fascinating proposition of First Alien Contact and runs further with it than Spielberg's *Close Encounters* or Howard's *Cocoon*. Here we have two human beings whisked away to an alien society and then ordered back to their own world to judge its actions. All of which is mucho interesting, unusual, entertaining and amusing.

John Gilbert

THE PALM IN THEIR HANDS

TIGANA

Author Guy Gavriel Kay
Publisher Penguin Books
Format PB £7.99



Tigana was a place, a principality with a long and honourable history; its people clever, industrious, perhaps too prideful in their assumed superiority over the other eight city-states of the great peninsula known, because of its geographical shape, as The Palm. But 'Tigana' is a name no-one can hear any longer since Brandin of Ygrath cauterised their country for ever.

Tigana **— the book — is a pleasure, a refreshing head-on tackle at a literary form that has, with a few notable exceptions, become a trifle tired of late, from an author (is that his *real* name?) who knows how to weave a rattling good yarn with sensibly constructed politics and generally very real characters. Guy Gavriel Kay won awards for his trilogy *The Finavar Tapestry*, and the applause echoes on in this fat 688-page book.**

Centuries of internecine warfare between the peoples of the nine states that make up The Palm come to an end when two opposing super-powers —Ygrath and Barbadior — land their forces and rapidly subdue the sub-continent, dividing it uneasily between them. The last independent state to fall is Tigana, whose prince slays Brandin of Ygrath's only son in the first battle. In revenge — for both invading tyrants are powerful sorcerers — Brandin uses magic to make the world forget the name of Tigana and be unable to hear it at all: physical and mental genocide. But the surviving Tiganans' worst punishment is that they alone *can* remember — to their dying days.

The story follows the adventures of a hybrid group of revolutionaries led by Alessan, who turns out to be the son of the prince who slew Brandin's son, as they roam the Italianate countryside preparing to fight for their freedom and rescue The Palm from its double-tyranny and Tigana from obscurity.

What makes *Tigana* so very different from most other medieval-set fantasy novels is that the conquering tyrants are described in enormous detail, so much so that they — especially Brandin — cease to be mere cyphers for evil, and become complex, appreciable men in their own right, which makes for a surprisingly less than simple read and plenty of genuine tension.

Don't miss it.

Roger Kean

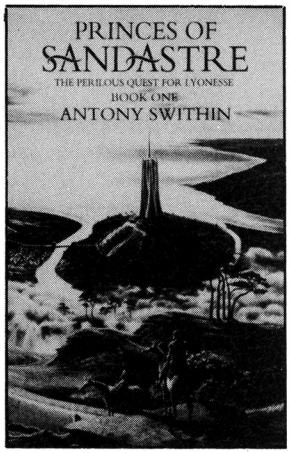
PRINCES OF SANDASTRE THE PERILOUS QUEST FOR LYONESSE: BOOK 1

Anthony Swithin
Publisher Fontana
Format PB £5.99

Lyonesse is a land as legendary as Atlantis, and recently described by SF author Jack Vance in his tales of the great mythical kingdom. The first part of Anthony Swithin's *Quest For Lyonesse* series takes a different tack, linking it with real world England in the year 1403 when that land was shaken under civil wars — most notably the battle of Shrewsbury.

Simon Branthwaite, a young man full of idealism even if his name conjures images of Sheffield, sets sail on a brave though somewhat foolish adventure to find the land of Lyonesse. In the first stage of his quest, he finds the land of Rockall, where numerous clans govern separate countries. His destination, however, is a place called Sandastre, the capital of which is Sandarro.

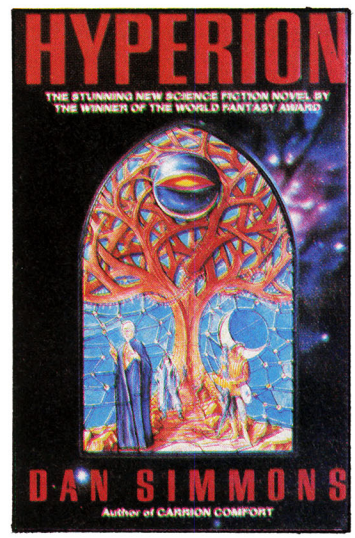
Here starts the transition between the roughness of war-torn Britain and the marvellous fantastic landscape which



PILGRIMS' PROGRESS

HYPERION

Dan Simmons
Publisher Headline
Format HB £12.95



Rarely can a successful writer of what is perceived as horror fiction mix oil and water genres and write award-level science fiction.

The superbly crafted *Hyperion* was already a staggering US success before it sold to a British publisher. Headline are very lucky to have a book which is written by an author with a mind for the classics — ie Keats' famous poem of the same name and the story structure of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* — and who also, on present form, will outperform even the Golden Age masters — and that's saying something.

It is difficult to sum up adequately the plot of *Hyperion* without afterwards having to mop up the hyperbole; it would also give away many games which I suspect readers would want to experience for themselves. Suffice it to say, a group of pilgrims congregate to travel to the mysterious planet Hyperion, hoping to encounter a mysterious creature called the Shrike, or Lord Of Pain.

Until recently, the Shrike has been regarded as mythical but the monster and its offspring have apparently been involved in mass murder on Hyperion. As the journey towards the planet continues, the pilgrims, who include a poet, a priest, a detective, a soldier and a scholar, each introduce themselves and tell a tale of their lives. As the book progresses, these tales reveal their personal reasons for returning to Hyperion. Some want revenge, some to solve a mystery, and some to find a cure. Whatever they want, however, is eventually overridden by their pilgrimage and the chaos that they find when they arrive.

At last the Golden Age greats of science fiction and techno fantasy, from Verne and Wells to Bradbury and Ellison, have a contemporary equal — and Dan Simmons is the name.

John Gilbert

Swithin has prepared with great adeptness. This author obviously knows about the psychology of fantasy, as there is no culture shock. The landfall initially found by Branthwaite could be any lace at the extremes of Cornwall or the Hebrides, and as you move into Sandastren territory, you realise that, apart from the oddly shaped beast or building, the peoples have similar concerns to those in Britain at that time.

That familiarity is the huge attraction of this book. So many contemporary fantasy novels try to wring every drop of strangeness out of a page. So many writers have forgotten that simple infra-structures, with realistic characters, are sometimes best. Swithin has not.

John Gilbert

DAVID BRITTON'S LORD HORROR HARDCORE HORROR NO.2

Publisher Savoy Books
Format PB £1.25

Savoy's Lord Horror is a particularly shocking creation, who made his debut as the lead singer of the Hitler Youth Band on a 12-inch single. An eponymous novel followed, and now he's featured in a five part mini-series 'comic'. 'Churchill's Tick Tock Men' is the second in the series, and while inadaquate to judge the entire gruesome phenomena, gives a useful insight into the unqiue approach of writer David Britton.

'Tick Tock' is divided into two parts, the comic proper and seven pages of pure prose describing a separate Lord Horror escapade. The latter usefully describes Horror as possessing a sperm lacquered two-foot shoot of ginger hair on an otherwise bald head, a body held together by zip-like surgical stitches and a backside distinguished by an ironjaw implanted in it. His philosophy includes the belief that Christ should be thanked for such notables as child killers 'who can break the stultifying monotony... The British always aspire to make every day Sunday'. With no Sunday trading either, he might have added.

Certainly he has a point, however sick, but whether Britton himself has any aim other than simply to shock and disgust is hard to tell in just one episode. The comic's setting is pre-World War II, where Lord Horror is adored by such real high society celebrities as Unity Mitford who also admire Hitler. Churchill is portrayed as ape-like, and obsessed with murdering Lord Horror, however many innocents need be caught in the crossfire ('It can only reduce the dole queues'). The eponymous Tick Tock Men are his latest weapon, bizarre mechanical men with phallic chimneys protruding from the tops of their heads.

In fact, the imaginative black and white artwork is good. Drawn by several artists, they minimise the number of panels, seeking to turn each page into a single overwhelming image. The dialogue matches the surreal and grotesque drawings to make a genuinely adult product. Unlike the sensationalistic American adult comics — the bloody *Faust* and sexually explicit *Black Kiss* — this isn't merely a conventional storyline pepped up with a few adult images and ideas, such as a confused superhero or Thirties-style detective thriller: it's all weird! A surreal, Nazi obsessed gore-fest might be one description. Neverthless the writing is surprisingly good and has enough narrative flow to make this episode compulsive reading. Whether such a bizarre and unattractive concept can sustain a proper storyline through to the end is another matter. The reader's understanding of characters and events is already tenuous and could easily break down, but it's certainly worth investigating. If we get the rest of the series there might be an overall review then, in the meantime it rates as definitely interesting, and worth a look from those fascinated by things bizarre and intellectually challenging.

Stuart Wynne

BACK TO THE FUTURE

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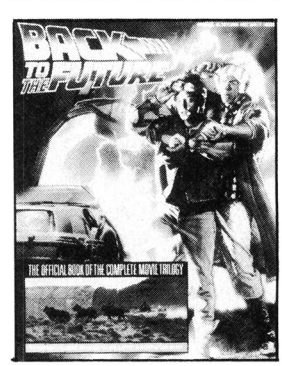


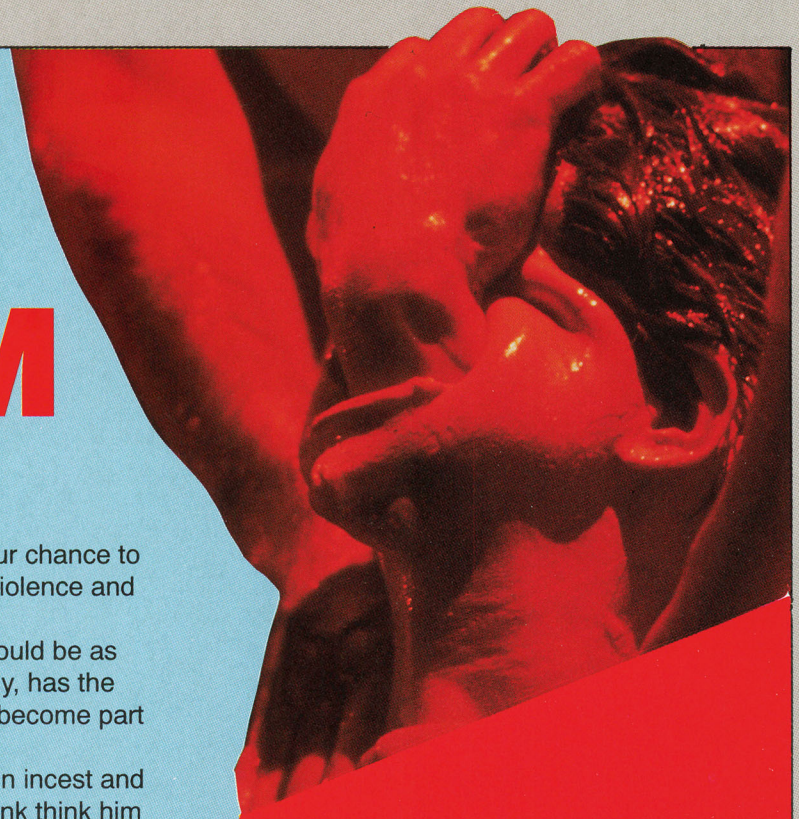
Back To The Future 3 is upon us, and for all fans of the trilogy this large format paperback stuffed full of colour screenshots should be a worthwhile buy.

The authors, of course, are totally uncritical, but just about manage to keep the fawning in check as they interview director Zemeckis, producers, stars et al, and give a low-down on all that went into the production. Even Marty and Doc's convoluted odysseys in time are catalogued in a graphic chart to unfuddle the befuddled! With part three taking us into the Wild West, it all sounds quite promising: but it might be worth watching the trilogy as a whole to get the full scope of the witty cleverness of the saga's plot.

All in all this is a worthwhile, well presented souvenir full of little known details about the protagonists and the special effects — now I know how hoverboards work!

Oliver Frey

A SUMMER NIGHT'S SCREAM



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Answers, please, on the back of a postcard or sealed envelope together with your name, address and daytime telephone number, to: INTO ORBIT COMPETITION, FEAR, NEWSFIELD, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1JW. All entries to be with us by August 3. No employees of Newsfield, FEAR, Orbit — or their relatives for that matter — are eligible for this competition.

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Ten shiny vids are on offer to FEAR readers thanks to Channel 5 Video. Just tell us three films in which Jack Palance stars.

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Wanted: Uncut Fulci, Savini and Umberto Lenzi films, especially Eaten Alive, Cannibal Ferox, The Burning, The Prowler, The Beyond and House By The Cemetary. Phone Chris 0732 850894 any time after 5pm.

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Lots of VHS horror to swap. Many rare. Send me your list. All letters answered. Bjorn Vilhralmsson, Gljufrasel 15, 109 Reykjavik, Iceland

PEN PALS

Write to Dean, 126 Marling Way, Gravesend, Kent DA12 4RE if you are a Clint Eastwood fan or a John Carpenter fan. Also are there any female Tears For Fears fans out there?

Avid FEAR fan into horror films/books, art work, occult, and varied alternative music would like to hear from you! Write to Sonya Hastilow, 26 The Quadrant, Sedgley, Dudley, West Midlands DY3 1PP. If you dare!

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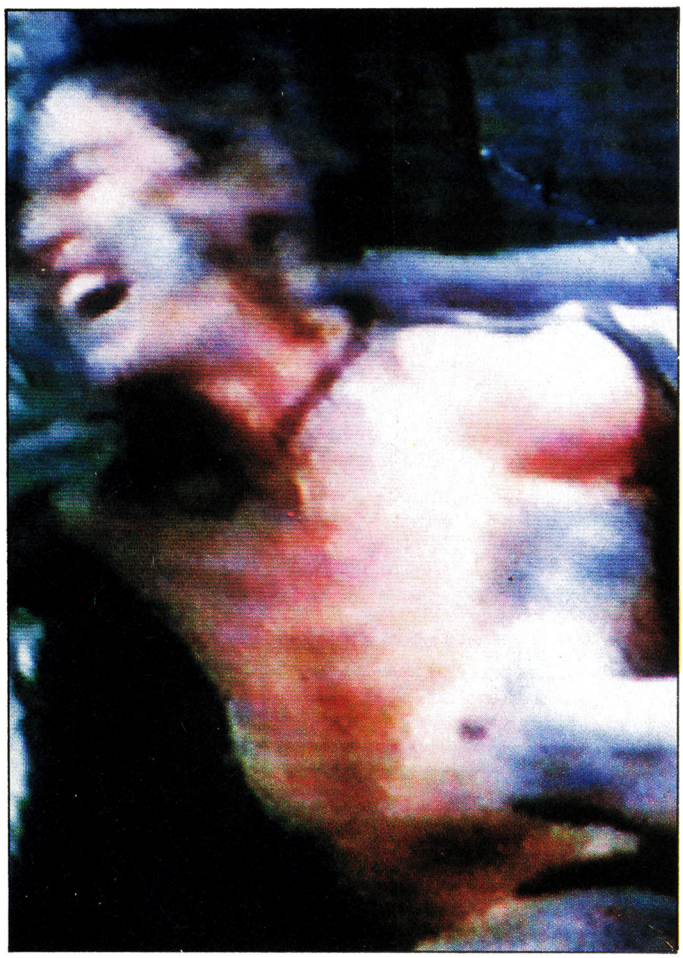

■ Cannibal Holocaust

This month, FEAR scribes come in for a load of flak from all you genre completists out there. You obviously haven't anything better to do, so keep sending those gruesome groans (and the compliments, if you can chuck-up any) to: FEAR FORUM, NEWSFIELD, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1JW.

EXORCISED

Dear **FEAR**
Did I misread your interview with William Peter Blatty or was he suggesting that the character of Columbo was 'inspired ' by *The Exorcist*'s Lieutenant Kinderman?

I thought the manuscript of *The Exorcist* was completed in 1970. But Peter Falk first played Lieutenant Columbo in a 1967 TV movie called *Prescription: Murder*. It was based on a stage play by Richard Levinson and William Link, and established both Columbo's deceptive persona, and the 'perfect murder' format. In 1971, Universal revived *Columbo* as part of the NBC Mystery Movie series.

Perhaps *The Exorcist* was really written in 1965 and took longer to sell than Blatty admits.
Graeme Bassett, Grimsby, Humberside

PICKY, AIN'TCHA?

Dear **FEAR**
In the 'Eaten Alive' article (Issue 15) Julian Petley makes the same mistake that first cropped up in a similar article in *Deep Red* magazine. Perhaps that's where his information came from. Anyway, when writing of the film *Cannibal Holocaust*, Petley states, '...two GIs (one of whom is called Charles Bukowski, alias Charles Bronson!')

Well, Charles Bronson's real name is Charles Buchinski or Buchinsky, *not* Bukowski. Charles Bukowski, of course, is an author, and the basis of the Mickey Rourke character in the film *Barfly*, and the Ben Gazzara character in the film *Tales Of Ordinary Madness*. When I wrote to Charles Balun about this, I heard nothing back from him. I hope you'll straighten this out for the readers.

Re: Issue 16 — the 'Paranoia' article, page 9. Brian Yuzna had produced, directed, and co-written another film, *well* before *Society*, date 1980, called *Self-Portrait Of Brains*, date 1980. The film was reviewed in *Variety*, so I can only assume it does indeed exist. This is the only reference I have seen in print regarding this film. Perhaps Yuzna prefers not to talk about it?
Tim Murphy, El Monte, California

You are, no doubt talking about Cannibal Apocalypse, not Holocaust? But still, full marks, you are indeed right. As for Yuzna's early efforts, he probably feels the same way about them as many critics feel about Re-Animator 2...

AMAZING...

Dear **FEAR**
Having missed *The Abyss* at the cinema, I waited patiently for its video release, somewhat apprehensively after reading Matthew Costello's hatchet job on the film (**FEAR** 10). I expected a disaster. What I actually saw was the underwater epic of all time. I harbour an intense disagreement with the piece. It's almost as if Mr Costello had his mind on other things at the time. I didn't have a problem with the ending, we were due some nice aliens. It seems a natural progression for James Cameron to make — from nasty aliens to nice ones.

The Abyss is not a 'terrible disappointment', quite the contrary. It is wonderful. Mr Costello looks and sees *Close*

DOES YOUR life lack surprise and excitement?

DO YOU look over your shoulder and see nothing but your own shadow?

ARE YOUR dreams peaceful and uninterrupted?

IS THE tedium driving you crazy?

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Encounters and 'dumb dialogue'. You have to look with better eyes than that. But then what do I know, I'm not an expert.
C Nichols, Stretford, Lancashire

Unfortunately, you're in the minority. Most reviewers who saw The Abyss had the same feelings as us. It is heavily and unnecessarily cut, has a weak onscreen storyline, and some glaring examples of appalling dialogue. The special effects are good, but not good enough to sustain this flawed picture.

...OR ABYSSMAL

Dear **FEAR**
I've just sat through *The Abyss*, very enjoyable too. But why is it that in this and films like *The Thing*, *Alien*, *Aliens* and seemingly endless others, the crew of the space ship/research station/oil rig/deep sea module all consist of the biggest bunch of unlikely psychos and misfits (and their pets!), who seem to spend the whole film chomping cigars and threatening to do each other in? Dramatic effect is one thing, but when it becomes a cliché, it only needs someone to spoof things (as *Airplane* did with the disaster movies), and we'll never be able to take these films seriously again.
William H Smith, Edgware, Middlesex

PS: Keep up the good work. It's refreshing to find a mag that is critical, yet manages to be so gorgeously lurid as well!

GREAT RELIEF

Dear **FEAR**
I'm sorry but I just don't see Miss Coutts' point of view (Issue 18, Letters).

The point about censorship is — what gives YOU or any of my peers (such as the BBFC) the right to tell ME what I should or should not see? You 'claim the right not to be exposed to such films'. Fair enough, you are given a free choice of whether to watch them or not. I, however, claim the right TO be exposed, after all that is my prerogative by the same freedom of choice.

Why can't we in this way both get what we want? Surely to prevent me from seeing a film just because you don't want to see it would be a crime? After all, I don't want to see *Out Of Africa*, but who am I to stop you seeing it if you want to?

I have no wish to be represented by your morals either, which I consider to be outdated, so kindly keep them to yourself. I also desire no representation by so-called 'moral' bodies whose aims I do not agree with and whose aid I do not require. After all, I am perfectly capable of running my own life without their self-seeking interference.

I also fail to see what is wrong with sex whether it be soft or hardcore. If I can perform similar acts legally in my own home I don't see what is wrong in seeing others doing the same thing. Such porn need not be damaging, these are times where acts formerly seen as perverted (especially in a religious context) are gaining wide recognition as 'tension relievers' and harmless. Why shouldn't watching other people making love have a similarly therapeutic effect?
Daniel Brill, Canterbury, Kent

Well, yes, you're quite within your rights to say what you think. There, and now everyone else knows.

DESTRUCTIVE DEFINITIONS

Dear **FEAR**
In Issue 13, your 'Top 60 Horror Films' chart included *Alien* and *Aliens*, positioned 8th and 55th respectively. I live in Greece and information about the subjects you cover is *hard* to find. It is excruciatingly difficult to obtain related background material, so I may be wrong, but shouldn't these two films have been classified as science fiction? Surely there are horror elements in the form of tense atmosphere and the hideous alien creatures, but I think that such elements are more than equalled by the science fiction parts and overall feeling of the films. I may be moaning about nothing, but I've found that the term 'horror', as often referred to by you and other people in the magazine, tends to swallow up all the other genres. There are distinctive characteristics, aren't there?

Classics like *Blade Runner*, the socially conscious *Brazil*, *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* and the *Star Wars* trilogy haven't met any worthy successors in recent years. James Cameron has consistently produced exquisite action since *Terminator*. *The Abyss* proved that point to be a barrier to his ability to raise the atmosphere factor any more than he did in *Terminator*. On the other hand, Ridley Scott defined the term 'atmosphere' by teaching lessons in *Alien* and especially *Blade Runner*. And now what? He's making films like *Someone To Watch Over Me* and *Black Rain*. Not bad at all, but not what he excels at.

Science fiction and fantasy filming, in its present state, looks like it will eventually give up the ghost of any startling creativity. On that subject I would be grateful if I had your opinion.
Costas Contos, Piraeus, Greece

We did allow our Horror Top 60 contributors a little leeway, but the movies listed did all contain horror elements. You might question the definition of horror, but we would class it as anything that evokes unease... and possibly a great deal of retching by the audience. Science fiction and fantasy are as strong as ever and, with movies such as Total Recall and Terminator 2 coming to cinema screens, it looks as if those genres are about to undergo a revitalisation.

YOU'RE HIRED

Dear **FEAR**
Profound congratulations!!!!! Layout is reader friendly; the skulls out of five rating scale is helpful; newslines are spot on up to date; short stories are improving in content; illustrations brilliant; NO PRICE INCREASE.
At last, a truly professional approach to the macabre.
Andy Gray, Selston, Notts

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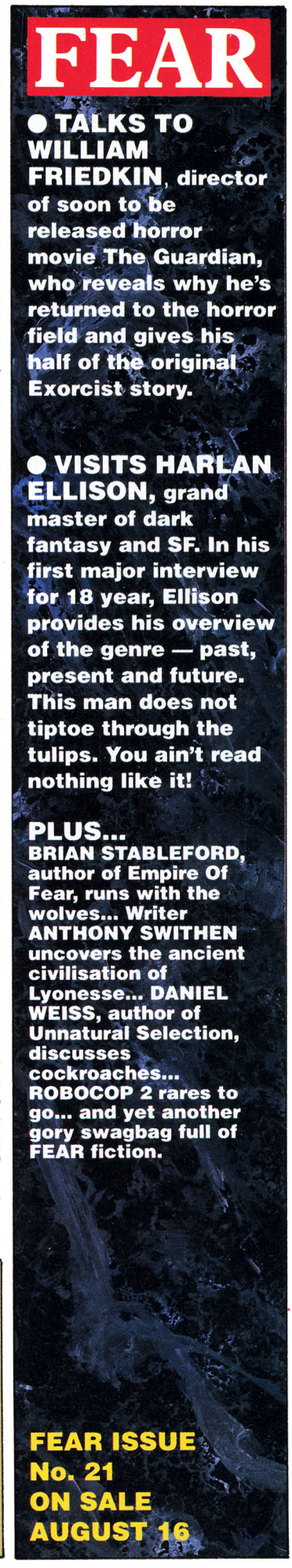

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